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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Beaufort County, North Charleston Join Spending Transparency Movement

Columbia, S.C. – Beaufort County and the City of North Charleston have joined the spending transparency movement, becoming two of the latest local governments in South Carolina to make their check registers and credit card transactions available for public viewing online.

Beaufort County is at least the 12th county in the state to embrace online spending transparency.

North Charleston increases the number of municipalities in South Carolina that have done so to at least 16.

David Starkey, chief financial officer for Beaufort County, says the county proactively implemented spending transparency after the S.C. General Assembly debated a bill in 2011 that would have required all counties in the state to do so.

"Not knowing whether the bill would pass or not, Beaufort County felt that it was a good idea to provide better transparency to our citizens and other stakeholders," Starkey says. "So, since the beginning of our FY 2011 (July 2010), Beaufort County began to release this information on its website."

Updated monthly, the Beaufort County transparency portal is available at: http://www.bcgov.net/departments/Finance/finance/Vendor-Payments.php.

North Charleston recently received national accolades for its transparency efforts. The city took home a 2013 Sunny Award from Sunshine Review, a national nonprofit that advocates government transparency.

North Charleston was one of only seven entities in South Carolina to receive the award from among more than 1,000 government websites that Sunshine Review evaluated and graded.

"The winners of the Sunny Awards are cities, counties and school districts that proactively share the public information that empowers citizens and keeps government accountable to the people," Michael Barnhart, president of Sunshine Review, says in an introduction announcing the plaudits.

North Charleston Mayor Keith Summey says transparency is important to ensure that the city is carrying out the will of its people.

"We proudly provide public documents and financial information on our website, as well as broadcasting our City Council meetings live on YouTube," Summey says. "Our online efforts, including our social media outreach, give access to the North Charleston municipal government right from our citizens' living rooms."

The North Charleston transparency page is available at: http://www.northcharleston.org/residents/departments/finance.aspx.

S.C. Comptroller General Richard Eckstrom, who pioneered government spending transparency in the Palmetto State, lauds Beaufort County and North Charleston for joining this good-government initiative.

In 2008, Eckstrom created the S.C. Fiscal Transparency Website (http://www.cg.sc.gov/fiscaltransparency/Pages/default.aspx), which was among the first of its kind in the nation.

The site initially featured the details of state spending. Since then it has been expanded to include the state's federal stimulus funds, all school districts in South Carolina, and other information useful to the public such as monthly reports on state purchasing card usage.

Links to the transparency portals of many local governments in the state also are featured on the S.C. Fiscal Transparency Website.

The county links are: Aiken, Anderson, Beaufort, Berkeley, Charleston, Dorchester, Edgefield, Greenville, Horry, Pickens, Richland and Spartanburg.

The municipal links are: Aiken, Cayce, Charleston, Chesnee, Columbia, Georgetown, Greenville, Greenwood, Elgin, Irmo, Myrtle Beach, North Charleston, North Myrtle Beach, Simpsonville, Surfside Beach and Traveler's Rest.

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