

Moultrie News

Columns

East Cooper municipalities should join spending transparency movement

• Tuesday, May 7, 2013

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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. Mount Pleasant is also in on the act, posting past, current and proposed budgets to their administrative services website.

Isle of Palms and Sullivan's Island also post to their respective websites.

What a positive message to send to constituents.

More often than not, citizens do not attend budget review hearings or even weigh in on the day of approval.

But as issues arise throughout the year, questions are raised regarding budgets and spending.

Those questions can now be quickly answered with the click of a mouse.

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, said the county pro-actively 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 said in a press release from S.C. Comptroller General Richard Eckstrom, who pioneered government spending transparency in the Palmetto State.

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.

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

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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