



New software would allow more transparency into city of Hudson's budget

by Laura Freeman | Reporter Published: September 7, 2016 12:05 AM

Hudson — In order to provide a more transparent budget, new software could allow the public to look at the city's checkbook and review budgets from the past and present with monthly updates.

The software, OpenGov, Balancing Act and Taxpayer Receipt, allows the public to see the actual numbers from the city's financial reports. OpenGov dovetails with the Open Checkbook and will be available to the public in the future.

Council member Dennis Hanink wanted to know if it would help the financial department do the budget.

Finance Director Jeff Knoblauch said it had more functionality and could capture financial and non-financial data.

"The goal is to make the job easier for public records requests," Knoblauch said. "They [residents] can do the research online."

The annual budgets can be viewed with different graphs and the numbers listed below.

The features include clicking on a pie slice and viewing the components in the department. Also viewers can hover over a box to view information.

Mayor David Basil said the public would need information about departments, especially enterprise funds.

"They need explanations or the public could be easily confused," Basil said.

Knoblauch said that was the feedback he wanted and would add explanations.

Although the data so far is from 2010 through 2016, Council member Dennis Hanink wanted to go back as far as 2003 before the income tax increase from 1 percent to 2 percent to see the progression.

Council member Dan Williams also said the recession years of 2007 to 2009 should be included to show its impact.

Howington suggested the older years could be in an archive and said the reports would be constantly changing with monthly updates.

The Open Checkbook software would allow residents to search for vendors and other information similar to Ohio's Online Checkbook.

The Balancing Act software allows the public to balance the budget with changes to revenue and expenses with a sliding bar at the top to show whether the balance ends up with a surplus or a deficit.

The public also can add comments or ideas on the budget and submit them for Council's consideration.

"The idea is to get the public involved in the budget," Knoblauch said.

The software educates the public on the complexity of the budget and helps put things in perspective for them, said City Manager Jane Howington.

Hanink said he was afraid the Balancing Act software would evolve into a wish list because the public has no information on road ratings or the connectivity plan.

Howington said it was a one-year contract and they wouldn't renew it if it didn't work.

Council would work with the new software during the 2017 budget process this fall.

Council members wanted to limit the viewing of the software to them to give initial feedback before making it available to the public.

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