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Albany, Ore.: Minding the public purse

City's website lets people track where their taxes go

By [Rutrell Yasin](#) Jan 14, 2011



Where do my taxes go?

Officials in Albany, Ore., take that question seriously. They set up a page on the [city's website](#) to simplify a complex series of revenue streams and accounting requirements. City officials have sorted and combined information to present it in a way that residents can easily understand.

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Although the city points out that the simplification is not exact, it gives taxpayers a view of what types of revenues it receives and which operations benefit from that money. An annual budget document, which users can view or download as a PDF, provides detailed information on revenues and expenditures for all operations.

For a more in-depth look into city finances, site visitors can use a dashboard, which provides information on the latest budget, encumbrances, total money spent and percentages used on each category of expenditure for any given program. The dashboard also provides performance charts for all programs that have measures.

That level of financial transparency has earned the site a perfect score for transparency by the Sunshine Review, a nonprofit wiki that promotes the disclosure of government information online.

Financial transparency is not the site's only appealing feature, though. A clean, well-designed home page gives visitors access to city departments, pertinent business information and residential services.

A "What's New?" section contains information on tracking the city's finances, obtaining necessary permits and paying utility bills online. It also information about a new wetlands engineering project called Talking Water Gardens.

The project, the first public/private engineering project of its kind in the United States, is an integrated wetlands system designed to provide an additional level of natural treatment for a combined municipal and industrial treated wastewater flow. It will be the final step in returning treated water safely to the Willamette River, according to Albany's website.

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