

# Editorial: Transparency needed on Wayne's spending

## *Online check register would restore taxpayer trust to shamed commission*

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The Wayne County Commission is going through a crisis of credibility. County Auditor General Willie Mayo's recent audit revealed a disturbing lack of oversight in the commission's hiring process and over its payroll system. Records are so poorly kept that it's tough to tell whether the county's taxpayers get value for the salaries they pay.

Taxpayers shouldn't be treated so shabbily. One way to regain their trust is to make county spending completely transparent by posting every expenditure online.

Mayo's audit, along with reports that the FBI is looking at Commission Chair Jewel Ware for misusing county resources, should serve as an incentive for the commission to make that change.

Revenues are falling for Wayne County government due to a worsening unemployment rate and a growing number of mortgage foreclosures. Every tax dollar must be spent with efficiency.

But the auditor general reports that the Wayne County Commission lacks the transparency of operations that would discourage the misuse of county resources. Personnel files often failed to include things like resumes, drug test results or background checks, which are standard for government jobs.

Though the commission took a welcome first step by acceding to Commissioner Burton Leland's proposal for the creation of a personnel committee to assist the chair in the hiring and firing of central staff, it stopped short of completely opening the books.

Technology makes it simple to post the commission's check register online. Michigan Attorney General Mike Cox has done so for his department for the past year, and Secretary of State Terry Lynn Land just started posting the checks her office writes.

Wayne County should follow suit, as should every other governmental agency.

While "nothing can stop a bad actor," says Kenneth Braun, policy analyst at the Mackinac Center for Public Policy who has challenged the state's school districts to post spending online, "more eyeballs on the checkbook are a good way to prevent abuses."

Transparency, Braun says, would provide a road map for Freedom of Information Act requests that would give taxpayers ammunition to replace wasteful commissioners at the voting booth.

Several school districts around the state have already gone transparent. One district, Montrose Community Schools, faced a similar crisis of credibility after payroll supervisor Dana Bacon was found guilty of embezzling \$1.2 million in district funds. Understanding the need to show the community that Montrose schools would protect its hard-earned tax dollars, Superintendent Mark Kleinhans began posting the district's check register online. Taxpayers welcomed the open information policy.

Wayne County should follow that example. The hiring scandal has brought the taint of corruption to the commission.

The best way to get rid of the smell is to throw open the windows and let the sun shine on county spending.

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