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## Online check registries gain momentum

*Enquirer staff, wire reports*

Lakeview School District has joined a small list of governmental units that are making their bill payments public by posting check registers online.

Wendy Meyer, Lakeview's communication coordinator, said the district would start posting expenditures alongside board meeting minutes after the district's next meeting on July 27.

"It's a simple step we can take to keep the public informed," Meyer said after trustees affirmed the administration's recommendation in June.

In Battle Creek, Mayor Mark Behnke is encouraging the city to put its register online. City Manager Ken Tsuchiyama said Tuesday he was waiting to hear how other commissioners felt about posting the register, but he believed most of them would support the idea.

Behnke's informal posting of a Battle Creek check register through his Twitter account raised a stir when the register revealed city employees' personal information, including Social Security numbers and wage garnishments. The city is expected to set a policy soon for posting such data, at Behnke's urging.

Although residents of Novi, a Detroit suburb, could see bill payments listed under the City Council's agenda items on the city's Web site, Councilman Andrew Mutch added a link in June to make it easier for residents to view the payments.

The Detroit suburbs of Eastpointe and Northville also post their bill payments online, which also can be found in their City Council agenda packets on each of their Web sites.

And 47 school districts in the Detroit area, including Novi Public Schools, Livonia Public Schools and Chippewa Valley Schools in Clinton Township post records of their bill payments online.

"I thought it would be easier to track down if we put it in one place," Mutch said. "As we get stimulus funds I thought it was a good way for residents to see how those funds are being spent."

There were not many residents requesting the information, Mutch said, but he thought it was important to make it available.

Novi resident Terri Hamilton said she did not know the city listed its bill payments online, "But I think it's a good idea," she said.

The move has drawn the attention of the Midland-based Mackinac Center, whose project, "Show Michigan the Money," looks at school districts throughout the state that promote government transparency.

While the project primarily focuses on getting school districts to post their bill payments online, Director Kenneth Braun said he encourages municipalities to participate.

"We chose to start with school districts because it is the largest single expenditure of state government. The more eyes we have on the public purse the better," Braun said.

Northville, which is divided between Wayne and Oakland counties, began making the bill payments available to the public on its Web site three years ago.

"It's a part of our continuing effort to put things online," said Northville Assistant City Manager and Finance Director Nickie Bateson. "Before that we had people subscribe to a service where they had to pay to have us mail the information."

*The Detroit Free Press and Enquirer reporters Ryan Holland and Barrett Newkirk contributed to this story.*

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