



Town of Greenfield, MA

Transparency Best Practice

Prepared By: The Office of Municipal & School Technology

EOTSS | Executive Office of Technology Services & Security



Image: Greenfield Town Hall

Introduction

The Town of Greenfield adopted the Transparency best practice in September of 2015 as part of a Community Compact agreement signed with the Baker-Polito Administration. Greenfield procured the services of several vendors to improve transparency.

In 2017, The City launched a webpage to put all the Open Government tools in one place. Residents can access the financial transparency portal, Town Charter and Code, Property Cards and GIS, City Budget, and Public Records Requests.

COMMUNITY PROFILE

Greenfield is a Town located in northwestern Massachusetts in Franklin County. It also functions as the seat of Franklin County and is the County's most populous community with 17,456¹ residents and a Median Household Income of \$39,808². The Town is one of fourteen Massachusetts communities which have city forms of government but wish to be known as "The Town Of". Greenfield is home to Greenfield Community College, the Pioneer Valley Symphony Orchestra, and the Franklin County Fair.

¹ United States Census Bureau. American FactFinder.
https://factfinder.census.gov/faces/nav/jsf/pages/community_facts.xhtml#

² Ibid.

Project Process

Transparency is a growing priority for many communities, including Greenfield and its Mayor, William Martin.

The “Open Government” section of the website is also the gateway to several years of the Town’s budget, revenue graphs, and financial statements; the City’s Charter and Code; Property Card and GIS Information; the City Budget; and the Town’s Public Records Request tool:



Financial Transparency

An "Open Checkbook" of Greenfield's financial data including interactive charts and graphs by category, department, government area, fund and vendor



Town Charter

Legal document that defines the organization, powers, functions and essential procedures of Greenfield's city government



Town Code

Ordinances and bylaws for Greenfield



Property Cards and GIS Information

An interactive GIS map and current assessment information for all properties in Greenfield



City Budget

The annual revenue and expenditure plan that serves as a road map for the delivery of services to the residents of Greenfield



Public Records Requests

Request, track, and access public records held by the Town of Greenfield

Financial Transparency

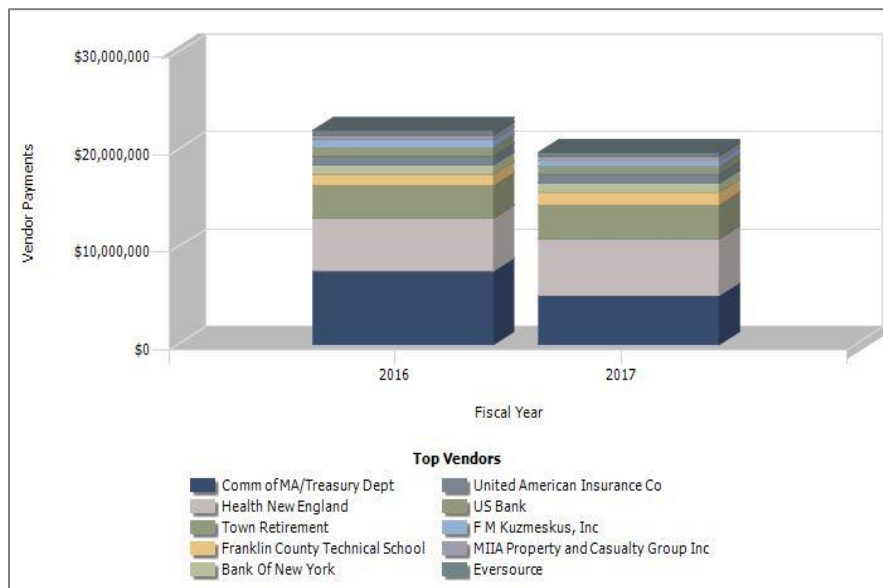
The move to a financial transparency “ledger” - as Mayor Martin described it - is a natural progression as the Town migrates to Tyler Technologies’ Munis platform. According to Elizabeth Braccia, the Town’s

accountant, “It is our goal to provide as much information to our citizens, to promote a transparent government for our citizens. This website allows citizens to access financial information in a comprehensive, yet understandable format.”

Under the Accountant’s direction, the “Citizen Transparency” module went live in 2017 as part of Greenfield’s “Open Government” effort. One benefit of Greenfield’s system is the fact that it links directly with the Town’s accounting software package, allowing data to be updated on a weekly basis. All municipal funds are represented in the tool. It provides a secure but direct way for citizens to see how their tax dollars are being spent.

“It can be hard for the public to understand where their tax dollars go, and this gives a complete picture of every check the town writes,” said Braccia. “For instance, in the vendor section residents can see each and every payment to vendors, similar to a checkbook.” The tool also allows for revenue to be broken down as well, so money flowing both in and out of Greenfield can be accounted for.

Each section is also accompanied by visual graphs and charts which can be “drilled into” for further detail. Comparisons can also be made between the current year of spending and the previous year of spending, allowing citizens to easily view year over year increases versus trying to understand static PDF budgets. Overall, this makes the budgeting and spending process much more transparent.



Screenshot: Vendor spending in FY16 and FY17

City Charter and Code

In 2017, the City Clerk’s Office launched the eCode360 tool to allow users to search and view the up-to-date Town Charter and Code. This system is ADA compliant, which is an improvement over the previous .pdf version available to the public. Users can also sign up to get notified about changes to code sections, creating a better dissemination of new ordinances.

Property Card and GIS Information

Greenfield now updates its Property Card and GIS system (through MainStreetGIS) monthly instead of biannual updates. Allowing citizens to access property card information from the convenience of their own home and decreasing the need to visit the Assessor's Office. DPW engineering office and Planning Department continues to improve layers, providing additional information to the public.

Public Records Requests

The City implemented NextRequest, a request tracking system for all departments. The new system allows users to see the status of their requests and assists municipal employees with maintaining compliance with new laws. The system also allows the City to make those requests public, so that anyone may access the same information.

Greenfield 311

The City provides a portal for residents to report concerns, particularly about maintenance issues in the community. The program, through See-Click-Fix, also provides an app for residents to use on their phone where they can view or report issues and upload photos. This ticketing system makes it easier for the city's employees to respond to complaints, triage, and map these concerns.

Conclusion

Greenfield continues to leverage technology to allow citizens to engage with and see the inner-workings of the city, said Fernando Fleury, Greenfield's Information Technology Director. Having the financial transparency tool in place is helpful as Greenfield moves forward with these changes and other information technology enhancements. These changes provide a window into the Town that did not exist previously and aligns with transparency commitments that the Mayor has made as part of Greenfield's Community Compact.



"Increasing government transparency is a key part of providing residents with the ability to understand the inner workings of local government. We are proud to fulfill the commitment we made in the Town's Community Compact."

Mayor William Martin
Town of Greenfield