



## CITY OF PARK RIDGE

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# NEWS RELEASE

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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

### **Illinois Policy Institute Recognizes Park Ridge for Transparency**

Improving online government transparency should be a goal for every government taxing body. Residents have a right to be educated about their municipality, know how their tax dollars are being spent, and be informed about the actions made by their government. Annually, the Illinois Policy Institute conducts audits of hundreds of Illinois' nearly 7,000 local taxing body websites, working to make Illinois more transparent. This week, it was announced that Park Ridge was one of only 60 taxing bodies in Illinois who met the qualifications to receive the prestigious Sunshine Award from the Illinois Policy Institute.

In the fall of 2013, at the request of Mayor Schmidt, City Manager Shawn Hamilton prioritized the City completing the requirements to qualify to receive this award. Under his leadership, Hamilton was happy to learn that the City, for the first time ever, has received the Sunshine Award. According to Hamilton, "Transparency of government is one of my highest priorities, and I will continue to ensure that any and all documents are publicly available through our website. I am extremely proud that Park Ridge is a recipient of this award."

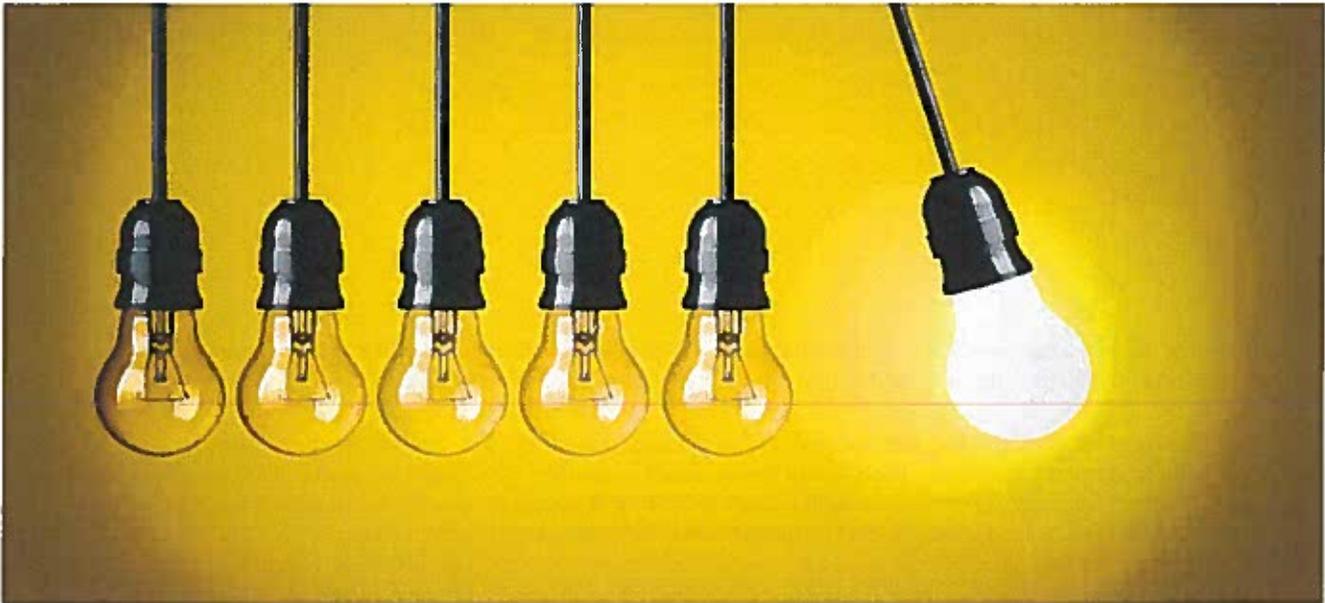
Mayor Schmidt indicated that "Increased transparency has been a goal of mine since I first took office. I am pleased that our efforts over the past few years have finally been recognized. However, our goal should remain achieving the highest possible level of transparency, because the government belongs to the people, and they have every right to know how it is being run."

Further information about the Sunshine Award can be found at [www.illinoispolicy.org](http://www.illinoispolicy.org).

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## ILLINOIS POLICY INSTITUTE



## Partly cloudy: Municipal online transparency scores vary widely

19 Mar 2014 | Brian Costin

Improving government transparency is a year-round effort for the Illinois Policy Institute, but each year during **Sunshine Week**, we place a special focus on the issue.

We celebrate Sunshine Week by releasing the latest round of **Local Transparency Project** audit results, this time measuring the transparency levels of some of Illinois' largest municipalities, in relation to our recommended **10-Point Transparency Checklist** best practices for local governments.

Specifically, we just completed an audit of the websites of the 26<sup>th</sup> through 50<sup>th</sup> largest municipalities in the state. Online transparency levels varied wildly from community to community. Scores ranged from Lombard's perfect 100 percent to Romeoville's dismal 26 percent.

26th - 50th largest Illinois municipalities by population

| Municipality    | Population | Online transparency score | Letter grade |
|-----------------|------------|---------------------------|--------------|
| Wheaton         | 52,854     | 82.3%                     | A            |
| Normal          | 52,497     | 50.2%                     | F            |
| Hoffman Estates | 51,895     | 77.7%                     | C            |
| Oak Park        | 51,078     | 43.9%                     | F            |
| Downers Grove   | 47,533     | 61.9%                     | B            |
| Glenview        | 44,592     | 69.5%                     | B            |
| Belleville      | 44,478     | 64.6%                     | B            |
| Elmhurst        | 44,121     | 66.0%                     | B            |
| De Kalb         | 43,862     | 68.6%                     | B            |
| Moline          | 43,483     | 51.0%                     | F            |
| Lombard         | 43,165     | 100.0%                    | A            |
| Buffalo Grove   | 41,496     | 61.0%                     | B            |
| Urbana          | 41,250     | 26.1%                     | F            |

|                 |        |       |   |
|-----------------|--------|-------|---|
| Bartlett        | 41,204 | 50.0% | A |
| Crystal Lake    | 40,743 | 70.5% | C |
| Quincy          | 40,633 | 51.1% | F |
| Streamwood      | 39,858 | 38.9% | F |
| Carol Stream    | 39,711 | 49.7% | F |
| Romeoville      | 39,680 | 28.0% | F |
| Plainfield      | 39,581 | 80.8% | B |
| Rock Island     | 39,018 | 60.5% | D |
| Hanover Park    | 37,973 | 81.0% | B |
| Carpentersville | 37,691 | 89.9% | B |
| Wheat Ridge     | 37,648 | 62.0% | D |
| Park Ridge      | 37,480 | 86.0% | B |
| Average score   |        | 70.9% | C |

@illinoispolicy

Proactive online transparency is one of the best ways to give Illinois citizens the opportunity to be educated participants in local government, fight corruption and put a stop to wasteful spending.

The wide range of scores in this audit reinforces the need for comprehensive state online transparency standards for local governments. The state of Illinois sends more than \$20 billion per year to local governments, and it needs to hold local governments accountable as to how that money is being spent. Every taxpayer should have equal access to the public information that shows how their money is being used.

Earlier this week, Illinois Policy Action launched the website [openillinois.org](http://openillinois.org) to give citizens the tools to urge state legislators support the [Local Government Transparency Act](#) through the Illinois General Assembly. The Local Government Transparency Act is based heavily on the Illinois Policy Institute's 10-Point Transparency Checklist.



Overall, 13 municipalities earned the [Illinois Policy Institute's Sunshine Award](#) for scoring an 80 percent or better, including six new entities that won the award for the first time. The six new Sunshine Award winners include:

- Bartlett
- Belleville
- Buffalo Grove
- Carpentersville
- Park Ridge
- Plainfield

All of these municipalities worked closely with Illinois Policy Institute staff to upgrade their websites and give citizens better access to public information online.

Unfortunately, eight municipalities failed the online transparency audits, including:

- Normal
- Oak Park
- Moline
- Urbana
- Quincy
- Streamwood
- Carol Stream
- Romeoville

Communities that lack online transparency are vulnerable to waste, fraud and abuse in the spending of taxpayer dollars. Governing behind closed doors disenfranchises citizens by making it harder for them to become educated participants in the local decision-making process.

Will County Auditor Duffy Blackburn has stressed the importance of online transparency by saying: "The perception of being detected is one of the strongest deterrents to fraud, according to fraud experts. This is why adopting a policy of transparency in governments, especially local governments, is so important."

Sunshine Week's message of transparency and accountability is call that Illinois legislators need to hear, especially given that Illinois has the third-highest level of public corruption countrywide. Please take a moment to visit the [openillinois.org](http://openillinois.org) website and ask your state legislators to support the Local Government Transparency Act.



**Brian Costin | Director of Government Reform**

*New dad. Government transparency expert. Watchdog. Bulls, Bears, Blackhawks fan*



## ILLINOIS POLICY INSTITUTE



### Online Transparency Grading Rubric

01 Jan 2013 | Brian Costin

#### Illinois Policy Institute's **Local Transparency Project** grading rubric

##### Eligible for the Sunshine Award

A – 90% and Above

B – between 80% and 89.99%

##### Not eligible for the Sunshine Award

C – between 70% and 79.99%

D – between 60% and 69.99%

F – 59.99% and lower

Out of a possible 100 points.

#### 1. Contact information (10 points)

##### Elected Officials (4 points)

- 1 point for name of elected officials
- 1.5 points for email or web form to contact elected officials
- 1.5 points for individual phone number for each contact elected officials

##### Senior elected official (1 point)

- .25 point for name of elected official
- .375 point for email or web form of elected official

- .375 point for individual phone number of elected official

**Administrators (4 points)**

- 1 point for names of administrators in each department
- 1.5 points for email or web form to contact administrators
- 1.5 points for individual phone number for each administrators

**Senior administrator: (1 point)**

- .25 point for name of senior administrator
- .375 point for email or web form of senior administrator
- .375 point for individual phone number of senior administrator

**2. Public meetings (10 points)**

**Meeting calendar (2.5 points)**

- A calendar disclosing one year's worth of scheduled public meetings (required by state law)

**Meeting agendas (2.5 points)**

- Regularly posted online 72 hours prior to board meetings (required by state law)

**Meeting board packets (2.5 points)**

- .5 point per each of last 5 years online.
- Only 70% credit if documents are not searchable

**Meeting minutes (2.5 points)**

- .5 point per each of last 5 years online (each meeting minute document must stay on website for 60 days after initial posting by state law)
- Only 70% credit if documents are not searchable

**3. Public information (10 Points)**

**Freedom of Information Act (7 points)**

- 1 point for address to submit FOIA (required by state law)
- 1.5 points for phone number
- 1.5 points for email or web form
- 1.5 point for FOIA process response time
- 1.5 points for fee disclosure (required by state law)

**FOIA Officer (3 points)**

- 1 point for name (required by state law)
- 1 point for phone number
- 1 point for email or web form

**4. Budgets (10 Points)**

- 2 points for each year of last 5 years budget (detailed budget-no summary)
- Only 70% credit if document isn't searchable

**5. Audits (10 Points)**

- 2 points for each of the last 5 years of comprehensive financial audit
- Only 70% credit if document isn't searchable

#### **6. Expenditures (10 Points)**

##### **3rd party individual expenditures/check register (5 points)**

- 1 point for each of the last 5 years
- Only 50% credit if document isn't on own page (in board packet).
- Only 70% credit if document isn't searchable

##### **3rd party annual expenditures (5 points)**

- 1 point for each of the last 5 years
- Only 70% credit if document isn't searchable

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#### **7. Compensation (10 Points)**

##### **Individual employee salary (5 points)**

- 1 point for each of the last 5 years (school districts are required to post salary information for administrators by state law)
- Only 50% credit if it only includes ranges or salary bands
- Only 70% credit if document isn't searchable
- No credit if it is a projection, must be information from past years

##### **Individual employee benefit compensation (5 points)**

- 1 point for each of the last 5 years (school districts are required to post compensation information for administrators by state law)
- Only 50% credit if it only includes ranges or salary bands
- Only 70% credit if document isn't searchable
- No credit if it is a projection, must be information from past years

#### **8. Contracts (10 Points)**

##### **Current open bids & requests for proposals, Over \$25,000 (2.5 points)**

- 1.5 points for listing of open bids & request for proposals
- 1 point for instructions on where & how to submit a bid or proposal

##### **Approved vendor contracts, over \$25,000 (2.5 points)**

- .5 points for each of the last 5 years in contracts
- Only 70% credit if document isn't searchable

##### **Employee contracts (5 points)**

- 1 point per each of the last 5 years for all employee or union contracts. If no contracts, then an employee handbook or similar document detailing wages, benefits, vacation, sick, leave policies, etc. is accepted.
- Only 70% credit if document isn't searchable

#### **9. Lobbying (10 Points)**

- Must disclose value and purpose of each contract
- Must disclose any membership organizations they belong to that also engages in lobbying (IML, NACo, IPRA, TOI)

- 2 points for each of the last 5 years

**10. Taxes (10 Points)**

- Must disclose the tax rate for all major revenue sources (property, sales, utility, etc.) on one central page
- Must disclose all revenue sources
- Must disclose all fees (fee schedule)



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