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Henderson County Attorney Launches County Government Financial Database

Henderson County Attorney Steve Gold announced the launch of the Henderson Expense And Revenue Trend (H.E.A.R.T.) Database, an online platform designed as a tool for citizens and policymakers to better understand county finances. Within the online database, citizens can track current spending levels, historical financial trends, and the performance of various funds and departments.

Gold said he first had the idea when he was contacted by the Henderson County Treasurer's Office and the County Judge's Office with an urgent request to look into the county finances this past summer. With the help of Assistant County Attorney Kyle Evans, the County Attorney's Office accepted the task of trying to assist the county's policymakers in determining the financial state of the county.

"One thing that became clear to us was that there was no quick, easy-to-understand way for policymakers or citizens to assess the financial health of the county or to look at long-term financial trends," said Gold. "We immediately saw the need to create such a tool as soon as possible. Good decisions can only come from good information."

Gold and Evans began to gather data from other county departments, including the County Judge-Executive's Office, the Treasurer, Road Department, Parks and Programs Department, and Henderson Recycling, among others.

"We were constantly in contact with other departments and agencies requesting information. Once we explained our dashboard concept, everyone was eager and willing to provide the information. This database would not have been possible to create without their help," said Evans.

Then they began to sift through the various reports and pull them together in a way that lent itself to being presented visually.

"There were a lot of long nights for Steve and me during the development of the dashboards. From determining what types of data a person viewing the dashboard would want to analyze, obtaining that data from various departments, manually entering that data into a new database, and adapting the layout to accommodate all the information, it wasn't a quick or simple process initially developing the database, dashboard or website," said Evans.

"While we believe that this information will be very valuable to county decision makers, I believe it is just as important to make it available to every citizen of the county," Gold added.

Noting that the public will be able to suggest additional topics for the H.E.A.R.T. Dashboard, Evans stated, "We encourage the public's input on this project. There is so much trackable data available that the sky really is the limit on how we can improve and expand on our initial concept."

Evans believes more local governments will be embracing transparency and public information since the technology has become more readily available. "I am glad that Henderson County is taking the initiative to be ahead of the technological wave to publish a database providing our citizens with an up-to-date, transparent view on what services our government is providing and how much those services cost," he said.

"We encourage everyone to check out the site and take the time to double-click on the different charts and data sets to really get a handle on the services provided by your county government and the costs of those services," said Gold. "As the old saying goes, democracy is not a spectator sport."

The website can be accessed at <http://countyattorney.hendersonky.us/heart/>. It is best viewed on a desktop or laptop computer, as mobile devices do not allow you to double-click or "drill-down" for more information on some of the charts and graphs.

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