



City of Muscatine, Iowa Strengthens Public Trust and Bolsters Internal Accountability with OpenGov



AGENCY TYPE
City Government

POPULATION
24,000

ANNUAL BUDGET
\$55 Million

Situated along the Mississippi River, Muscatine is an industrial town with an entrepreneurial spirit. Companies such as HON Furniture, Kent Corporation, Carver Pump, Raymond Industries, and Stanley Consultants, Muscatine is friendly for entrepreneurs who, historically, have thrived and grown their enterprises along the bustling riverfront. Muscatine is situated just south of the Quad Cities and about a half hour from the University of Iowa-Iowa City. The City Administrator and Finance and Communications teams sought a technology solution that would increase financial transparency through visually appealing dashboards while also providing a mechanism to analyze metrics for more effective internal management.

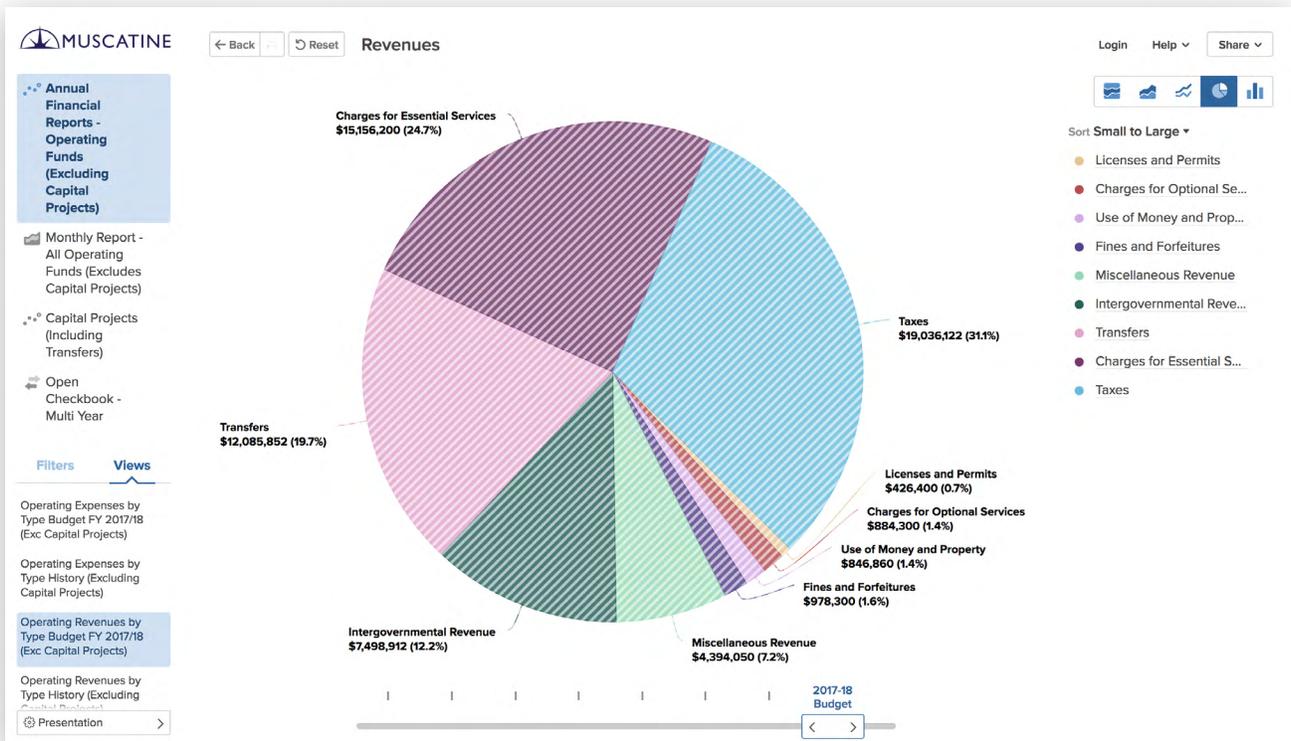
Muscatine Adopts Transparency Tool to Reach All Constituencies

For years, City Administrator Gregg Mandsager had researched data solutions that would not only

distribute the City's information to the public in a visually appealing format, but that could also be used for better internal management and stronger Council communications.

While OpenGov initially stood out, Finance Director Nancy Lueck was skeptical. "I was skeptical especially about how the financial information would go in and if it would be in formats that we were satisfied with," she said. The quick three-month implementation proved easy, however, and Lueck was soon on board. "It was very easy to implement, and will be easy to maintain and keep up to date," Lueck said. In particular, she was impressed by the customization of the platform that allowed her team to choose and show the information that was most important to them. "Nancy went from being not real excited about it to as excited as I've seen Nancy about anything in finance," Mandsager said.

As is common in many municipalities around the country, Muscatine's budget document was complicated, and over four inches thick when



Using OpenGov, Muscatine’s team communicates its budgeted revenue allocation using dynamic visuals.

printed. “There is a lot of great information in there, but nobody outside of a few of us actually used it,” Mandsager said. Budget data was not easily accessible for the public, and the budget was difficult to understand for those without a municipal or financial background.

Muscatine transitioned from a paper budget book to a digital PDF version, then to a searchable online PDF, and finally adopted OpenGov to publish its budget data in an interactive format. “Now we have all of our financial information online – not only the budget and year-to-date expenditures, but an open checkbook and many other features so everyone can see what’s going on,” Mandsager said.

Everyone included the Council members, who benefitted from real-time demonstrations of current and historical spending. When one

Council member, for example, questioned what appeared to be a substantial expense, in real-time, the finance staff was able to show that the expenditure was \$80,000, not \$1 Million. “You could show the actual expense and also how much we had spent on that line historically, so it helped to tell our story,” Lueck said.

Local newspaper reporters also used the platform to research an article on legal expenses and gather accurate information without active assistance from Muscatine’s staff. “Whatever the topic may be, it lets people dig into the information themselves, and they don’t have to rely on us,” Lueck said. “It certainly saves us time, but equally important, that information comes directly from our financial software into the system, so everyone has access to that raw data and can draw their own conclusions or ask better-informed questions.”

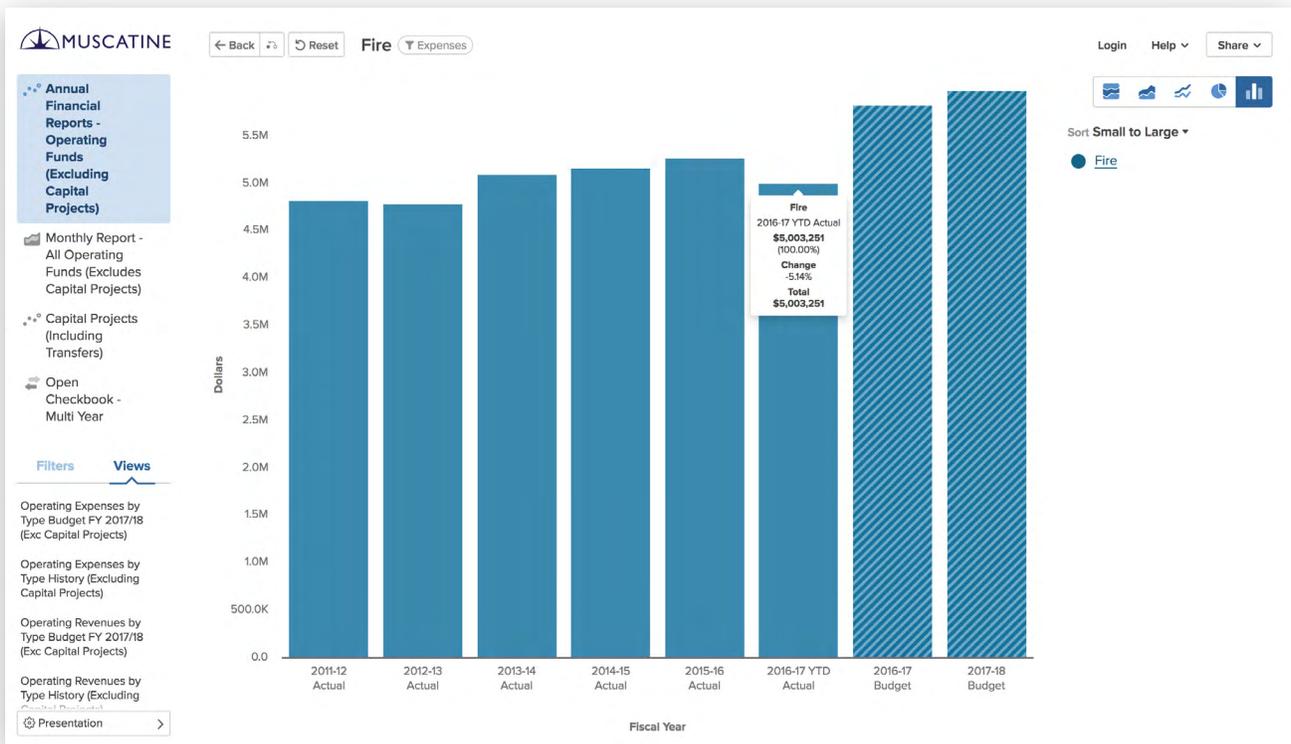
OpenGov Helps Increase Public Trust

Muscatine’s public-facing OpenGov transparency portal garnered significant public interest. Web usage reports show that people are spending 11 to 12 minutes average on the site per session, which shows that they are spending time exploring and digging into the data.

Muscatine’s landing page features an OpenGov User Guide and a tutorial video that introduces people to the platform’s capabilities. In determining what information to feature on the site, staff sought to answer common questions and to proactively position the City’s message

and story. Issues and interests included fire staffing and overtime trends as well as snow and ice removal costs. The open checkbook is also popular with vendors who can now look and see how much business the town is doing with industry competitors and at what pricing.

“For me, the biggest benefit to date is having all of our information out there, straight from the financial software so people can dig into the information and create reports themselves,” Mandsager said. “For people to know that they can see the very same information that Council members and staff have is a really big thing in this town, and one of the easiest sells we have in gaining public trust,” Communications Manager Kevin Jenison added.



Department heads track their expenses more effectively over time using the OpenGov platform.

Department Heads Empowered to Tell Their Stories

In searching for a transparency solution, the City Administrator and department heads hoped for a tool that would help them better tell their stories. Department heads are successfully using OpenGov to track their departments' operations. "The tool itself is extremely easy to use," Mandsager noted. "If you're a numbers person, you can dig down as far as you want. If you're a visual person, you've got four or five different graphic opportunities and can immediately turn numbers into a visual that gives you the picture of what's going on."

Mandsager and Jenison anticipate time savings and increased efficiency when producing annual accomplishment reports due each fall. "OpenGov will help them tell their story with better graphics, and that information can also be

shared with the public," Mandsager said. "The biggest benefit is once the information is input, all they need to do is add their narrative and it will be ready to go," Jenison added. "Ten years' worth of data and metrics will already be there, and the visuals and graphics will help them tell their story without manually wading through a decade of annual reports."

The ability for department heads to view their operating costs on a monthly basis against the budget allows them to make necessary adjustments in a more proactive way. The same holds true for performance measures. "When departments can look at their own metrics, they can see areas that need improvement as well as the areas that should be recognized for success," Jenison said. "It will give them good accountability and also enable them to promote their good work more."

RESULTS

- ✓ **Informed Citizens.** New users visit and spend time on Muscatine's transparency portal, digging into the interactive data finding their own answers with confidence in the data's accuracy.
- ✓ **Strengthened Public Trust.** When citizens have access to the very same information that city staff and Council receives, they do not fear anything is being hidden, and they are empowered to ask more informed questions.
- ✓ **Improved Performance Tracking and Reporting.** OpenGov's easy reporting functionalities and visualizations streamline departmental annual reporting. Access to up-to-date budget and operational information allows for easier adjustments and promotes internal accountability.