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Wagoner County website gets A-minus for transparency

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 Check out Wagoner County's website, lauded for its efforts toward transparency.

An organization that grades governments for online transparency is touting Wagoner County's website as an example of openness.

The Sunshine Review, a nonprofit organization that seeks greater transparency from local and state governments, gave the website an A-minus grade this month, up from a B-minus in 2009.

The review cites the availability of county commissioner agendas and minutes dating to 2010, county budgets and audits, contract bid information, an extensive public meetings calendar and a local tax calculator.

Only the websites of Tulsa and Oklahoma counties have a better grade from the organization, with an A-plus, and all but six of the other 74 counties have an F - most because they do not have websites.

"By enhancing their website and increasing access to information, Wagoner County is proactively championing government openness and transparency," Sunshine Review President Michael Barnhart said in a statement. "We urge all of Oklahoma's city and county governments to put the necessary resources into increasing their transparency like Wagoner County has done."

County Clerk Lori Hendricks said she has worked hard to improve the website since she took office Aug. 1. Many of the features noted by the Sunshine Review have been added since then, she said.

"That was one of my goals coming into the office was to improve the county website and, in particular, improve transparency in government," she said. "We wanted to make sure that anything (Wagoner County residents) could be looking for on the county website, they could find."

She said the website now includes contracts awarded by county commissioners, documentation on projects and other tools for keeping track of commissioners' actions.

It also has audio recordings of County Commission meetings, which was an idea that came about while Hendricks was campaigning. Voters complained that they were unable to attend the meetings at 9 a.m. each Monday, she said.

"It was really my goal to take that one step forward," she said. "Sometimes when you see that a commissioner makes a certain vote, you don't know the reasoning behind that vote."

"By going in and being able to listen to that, (residents) have a better understanding of how their county government works and how well their commissioners are representing them."

Only an incomplete listing of local officials' contact information kept the website from receiving the highest grade, according to the Sunshine Review.