

## **San Mateo County Controller Publishes Open Checkbook**

**REDWOOD CITY, Calif.** – Bob Adler, San Mateo County Controller, is pleased to announce the launch of the County of San Mateo’s Open Checkbook, a free public database detailing checks written by County departments and agencies for the first month of the County’s fiscal year (July 2013).

From now on, each month’s new checks will be added. It’s the public’s window into County spending.

“We are excited to provide this important step in open government to County citizens,” states Controller Adler.

Open Checkbook lists payments of \$5,000 or more issued for goods and services at all County-operated sites, from health clinics in Daly City to social service centers in East Palo Alto.

“These checks represent close to 94 percent of non-payroll spending by the County. Just as important as providing this detail to the public is the requirement to ensure that confidential payments, such as payments to domestic violence victims or to medical/social service providers for patients, are protected,” Controller Adler said.

“Publishing information about checks over \$5,000 ensures that the volume of checks to review for these protections is manageable yet also represents a significant portion of taxpayer dollars spent,” he said.

In addition, employee pay and benefits are summarized by department on Open Checkbook. Detailed information related to County payroll has been published for several years on the State Controller’s website at <http://publicpay.ca.gov/>.

On Open Checkbook, residents can easily find how much the County spends on medical equipment for patients, maintenance costs for parks, telephones for 9-1-1 dispatchers and rent for buildings.

The database is searchable by year, agency, vendor and expenditure type.

“One of the County’s many responsibilities is to help people struggling with mental health disorders and drug and alcohol addiction,” said Supervisor Dave Pine. “With Open Checkbook, people can see in detail how much the County spends on services that address this critical need. Some may think it’s too much. Others will think it’s not enough. We welcome everyone to visit Open Checkbook and tell us what you think.”

While the database is voluminous, there are a few practical and legal limitations to the data.

Open Checkbook will not list disbursements from certain trust funds that are not technically County monies which are “passed-through” to other entities such as distributions of property tax revenues to schools and other entities.

Open Checkbook will not replace the County's Budget Report or Comprehensive Annual Financial Report, a mandatory, audited document that also analyzes County revenues, economic trends and conditions, employment, investments and other big-picture financial data.

"Open Checkbook is for those without an accounting degree or hours on their hands to pore over complex economic data," said Supervisor Warren Slocum. "Open Checkbook offers an easy-to-use search engine that contains reams of raw financial data that residents are welcome to mine, sift, analyze and cross-reference as they wish."

From the home page, a citizen can click on Search By Agency to view a list of expenditures by department, Search by Vendor to view a list of expenditures by vendor, or view a list of expenditures by account. On each web page, a citizen can also drill down to the next level of detail.

Open Checkbook will serve as a companion database to San Mateo's Open Data Portal, <https://data.smcgov.org/>, a trove of County-generated statistical data launched in August.

San Mateo County launched both Open Checkbook and its Open Data Portal in partnership with Socrata Inc., a Seattle-based cloud software company dedicated to democratizing access to government data. Socrata has launched similar services in New York City, Chicago, San Francisco, Oregon and Maryland, as well as for organizations including the World Bank and Medicare.