

Written Testimony To
THE HOUSE POLITICAL SUBDIVISIONS COMMITTEE
January 14, 2021
By Michael Montplaisir, Cass County Finance Director
Cass County Government

REGARDING HOUSE BILL 1108

Mr. Chairman and members of the House Political Subdivisions Committee, I am Michael Montplaisir, Cass County Finance Director. House Bill 1108 removes publishing requirements for bills approved by the County Commission if these items are available on the county's website.

We publish minutes from each County Commission meeting in the legal section of our official newspaper, and we publish our agendas as a display ad before each meeting. Publishing the minutes is required by law, but we also publish the agendas because we want to alert county citizens about items on our agenda. In contrast to other counties, we have two scheduled meetings a month in addition sometimes to special meetings, particularly when discussing county budgets.

Prior to 2019 we did not publish bills in the newspaper. I am not sure why the publishing of bills was stopped but it was over thirty years ago. The minutes contained the approval of the bills in total. In all that time we have never had a question or inquiry of bills paid by the county. When the county created a website, the commission minutes, and detailed bill listing were included on the web site. The listing on the web site also did not generate any questions from the public concerning bills the county pays.

After the 2019 session when this was brought to our attention, we did start publishing the bills with the publication of our commission meeting minutes in the official county newspaper. We also continue to include the commission minutes and listing of bills on the county website. The publication of bills did increase our costs. In 2018 the cost of publishing minutes was \$8,238.19 and in 2020 with bills included the cost was \$18,747.14—a \$10,508.95 dollar increase, to produce the same result...no questions from the public on our bills.

This is not a surprise because with an entity like Cass County, the bill listing is long and trying to read through the bills is a time consuming and difficult task. If you are looking for an individual bill, searching through three columns of a bills list is difficult.

A much easier solution for people is to look for the bills on our website. They are not only easier to read but also contain more information for the public, perhaps causing them to question more than if they only see the vendor and dollar amount in the bill listing. In addition, we upload our financial data to an OpenGov site linked to our website where people can search transactions by name—when searching by name they can see all transactions associated with that name for a period of years going back to 2016.

The county publishes a lot of different items in our official newspaper. Our total publishing costs for 2020 were \$46,365.77. We publish a lot of useful information for our citizens including meeting agendas, election information, financial information—some required and some not under state law. Publishing of the bills in the newspaper does nothing for the residents and taxpayers of Cass County except cost them \$10,000 a year in additional taxes.

I respectfully urge you to support and give a Do Pass recommendation to HB 1108.

Example of information on Cass County Website posted with Minutes of the meeting:

Reduced from landscape mode to fit on this page.

PAYMENTS REGISTER						
Check Numbers 321931-322145		Electronic Payments 9114-9180		Purchase Card Transaction		
ACCOUNT NUMBER	DEPARTMENT	CHECK DATE	CHECK NUMBER	VENDOR NAME	AMOUNT	DESCRIPTION
101-1501-411.10-25	County Administrator	11/06/2020	321973	KELLY SERVICES, INC.	900.00	11/1 MGROSZ
101-1501-411.53-10	County Administrator	11/06/2020	321974	VERIZON WIRELESS	90.08	SVC 9/29-10/28/20 ADMINISTRATOR
101-1501-411.54-02	County Administrator	10/27/2020	9115	VALLEY NEWS LIVE EMPLOYME	598.00	PURCHASE CARD Job Postings
101-1501-411.57-01	County Administrator	10/27/2020	9115	QUALITY INN ND400	172.80	PURCHASE CARD SOLUM P-CARD EXPENSE
101-1501-411.57-02	County Administrator	10/27/2020	9115	FMWF CHAMBER CHAMBERMASTE	20.00	PURCHASE CARD WILSON P-CARD EXPENSE
101-1501-411.74-01	County Administrator	10/27/2020	9115	AMZN MKTP US MK7UY8OS1	72.98	PURCHASE CARD Surface Cases
101-1501-411.74-01	County Administrator	10/27/2020	9115	CDW GOVT #2032683	27.83	PURCHASE CARD DVD Burner
101-1501-411.74-01	County Administrator	10/27/2020	9115	CDW GOVT #2035041	303.02	PURCHASE CARD Surface Accessories
DIVISION TOTAL					3,193.91	

Example of listing of bills in official paper:

PAYMENT REGISTER 8756 POSITIVE CONCEPTS 150.95 8881 ABT DATA TECHNOLOGIES, INC. 1,965.00 8882 ADAMS COUNTY RECORDER 1,952.75 8883 ADAPCO, INC. 2,757.71 8884 AMERICAN WELDING & GAS, INC. 116.04 8885 AMS 2,443.76 8886 AUTO VALUE 63.12 8887 BAUER BUILT 61.41 8888 BILLINGS COUNTY RECORDER 3,714.00 8889 BOB BARKER COMPANY, INC. 184.88 8890 BOTTINEAU COUNTY RECORDER 6,300.75 8891 BOWMAN COUNTY RECORDER 2,377.00 8892 BURLEIGH COUNTY RECORDER 34,233.50 8893 BUSINESS ESSENTIALS 543.90 8894 CHILLER SYSTEMS, INC. 1,295.00 8895 CODE 4 SERVICES 4,798.18 8896 CTS LANGUAGELINK 227.96 8897 CURT'S LOCK & KEY SERVICE, INC. 83.20 8898 DAKOTA REFRIGERATION, INC. 554.25 8899 DAVID-DONEHOWER FUNERAL HOME 2,000.00 8900 DESIGN SPECIALTIES,

Example of Transaction Inquiry on OpenGov: Transactions Listing

Updated On 1 Dec, 2020

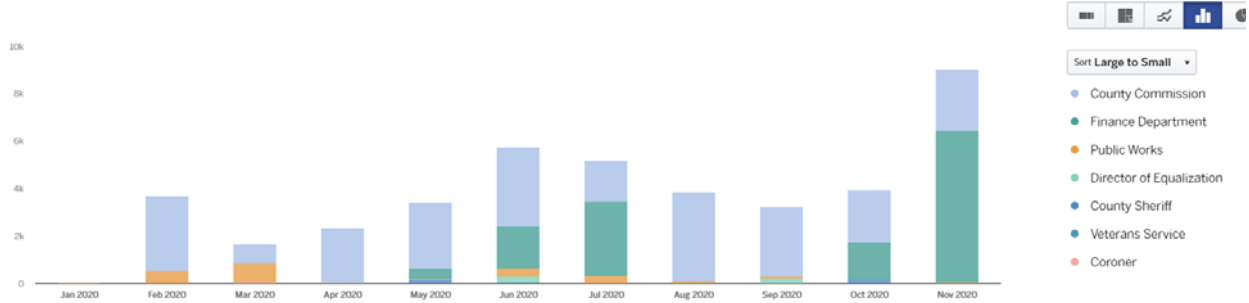
forum Search Showing 92 rows

Back Reset

Broken down by

Departments ≤ 12/31/2020 ≥ 01/01/2020 {} general operations {} Expense {} forum

Visualization



Data

Records

YEAR	MONTH	Funds	Departments	Divisions	Object	AMOUNT (\$)	Expense/Revenue/Transfer	DESCRIPTION	VENDOR	DATE
2020	11	101 General Fund	Finance Department	Operations	Legals	739.26	Expenses	322033 NOTICE OF DELINQ...	FORUM	11/17/2020
2020	11	101 General Fund	County Commission	Operations	Legals	(49.75)	Expenses	321980 CREDIT MEMO	FORUM	11/09/2020
2020	11	101 General Fund	Finance Department	Elections	Legals	4,060.60	Expenses	321971 CASS CO 2020 VOTI...	FORUM	11/06/2020
2020	11	101 General Fund	County Commission	Operations	Legals	661.51	Expenses	322415 11/2/20 MTG MINS...	FORUM	11/30/2020
2020	11	101 General Fund	County Commission	Operations	Legals	966.95	Expenses	322033 10/19/20 MTG MIN...	FORUM	11/17/2020
2020	11	231 Weed Control	Public Works	Weed Control	General Office Supplies	100.00	Expenses	9277 THE FORUM The Forum...	WELLS FARGO BAN...	11/25/2020
2020	11	101 General Fund	Finance Department	Elections	Legals	431.24	Expenses	322033 SAMPLE BALLOT #6...	FORUM	11/17/2020