

LOCAL FINANCE NOTICE

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Introducing the Municipal Contact List

The Division of Local Government Services recently concluded a successful first year of the new GovConnect program, an online service designed to bring municipal officials up to speed in the 21st century. In 2002, we successfully launched the GovConnect website, enrolled officials for online access, and provided orientation sessions for those who were new to using online services. Moving ahead, our focus has shifted to providing local officials with better job-related content and more useful online tools.

It is often difficult for local and State officials to keep up-to-date appointment, mailing and e-mail lists of local officials. As a result, our first effort is addressing the problem faced by Municipal Clerks and other officials: the ever-changing nature of government.

To gain better insight about the problem, we met with a small group of Municipal Clerks at the 2002 Fall Conference of the Municipal Clerks Association and asked for their input. We were told that this information is regularly requested, and that Clerks use a variety of methods to keep the information themselves. As such, we added to our plan the goal of minimizing the work the Clerk must do to provide the information.

As a result, Local Government Services and the State's Office of Information Technology discussed a solution to develop a single directory or "contact list" that could be used not only by State agencies, but by other government agencies and the public. We also concluded that the best and most reliable way to ensure that the information remained up-to-date was through the Municipal Clerk. With this concept as a guide, work began on the GovConnect program.

We showed our initial efforts to a number of Clerks at the 2002 League of Municipalities Conference and received positive feedback and some suggested changes to the program. Additional testing with the Middlesex County Clerks Association provided us with further refinements.

The result is a web-based solution so these lists are available in a centralized location. Now, Municipal Clerks, Chief Financial Officers and Tax Collectors have up-to-date information available to them at the click of a mouse. This single directory or "Municipal Contact List" can be used not only by State agencies, but by other government agencies and the public.

The Municipal Contact List (MCL) is a valuable tool for municipal clerks, state officials, and the public for several reasons:

- Through the State's web site, anyone can obtain current listings and contact information for local government officials;
- State agencies can find local officials and reach them faster and more efficiently; and,
- Local web sites can point right to your information on the State's site so you don't have to repeat the information on your own site.

Success of the program ultimately relies on the cooperation and support of each Municipal Clerk. Registration in GovConnect automatically gives each Clerk access for their municipality. For those who are Clerks in more than one municipality, the system provides you that access as well.
(If it does not, please e-mail us at EGG@dca.state.nj.us.)

Why should Municipal Clerks participate? GovConnect offers many benefits including:

- A secure Internet program that allows maintenance of contact information in one place.
- The ability to meet local needs of information disclosure, and the ability to control titles and information displayed to the public.
- Certain contact information elements can be marked "Private" so it is not displayed to the public, but is available for the Clerk's use.
- Download capability so that the information can be used in a word processor, spreadsheet or database.

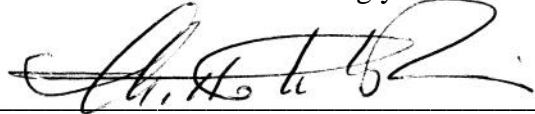
Posting the information includes the municipality's agreement to permit State agency use of their information for State government purposes, including use for regular and email lists. Posting the information also acknowledges that the Mayor's name and the municipality's physical (not email) mailing address will be used on State web sites for public display and aggregated with other municipalities for public download purposes. The State currently provides this, but it is often outdated.

At the same time, the information is "owned" by the municipality and stored on the State Office of Information Technology computer system. The information (pursuant to Executive Order #26) will not be considered a government record subject to disclosure under OPRA. Therefore, aggregate lists are not available for download or purchase by individuals outside of State government.

Clerks had an opportunity to learn more about this application and to receive instructions at the recent Municipal Clerks Association of New Jersey's Spring Conference. Please take some time and use the program. Public access is currently planned for early June (the announcement will be made shortly), so take time now to start working with the program and enter your information by the end of May.

Written instructions are posted in the GovConnect Clerk's Document Library. If you have trouble working with the instructions or the program, send an email to egg@dca.state.nj.us and explain the problem. Also, visit the new Discussion Forum, where we encourage users to post advice or tips.

The Municipal Contact list marks a big step in GovConnect and will provide statewide benefits for all users. Here in the Division of Local Government Services, we look forward to receiving your feedback.



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