



CITY OF COSTA MESA

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FROM THE OFFICE OF THE INTERIM DIRECTOR OF COMMUNICATIONS

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Costa Mesa's website earns an A+ for transparency from national watchdog group

COSTA MESA, CALIF.—The [Sunshine Review](#)—a national nonprofit watchdog group dedicated to “bringing state and local government to light”—this week awarded an A+ transparency grade for the quantity and quality of public information available on the City of Costa Mesa's [website](#).

Only 112 out of the more than 6,000 municipal websites reviewed by the Sunshine Review earned the A+ rating, putting Costa Mesa in the top 1% of city websites for transparency. Costa Mesa previously received an F from the Sunshine Review. You can see Costa Mesa's latest review [here](#).

“Costa Mesa going from an ‘F’ to an ‘A+’ website transparency grade is a real transformation,” said Kristin McMurray, managing editor of the Sunshine Review. “It’s what all citizens should expect of their local government, and Costa Mesa went above and beyond by creating their local salary database.”

The Sunshine Review grades government websites on 10 areas of transparency, measuring the quality of information about its budget, meetings, elected officials, administrative officials, permits and zoning, audits, contracts, lobbying, public records and local taxes.

Costa Mesa's website previously contained some of the public information deemed essential by the Sunshine Review, but was criticized for being not well organized or easily accessible. In addition, over the past five months, the City has added many new types of public information, including [legal settlements and judgments](#), a more detailed and searchable [employee compensation report](#), lists of each bill paid by the City, a [Behind the Budget Numbers](#) page

that dissects the 2011-12 fiscal budget, a [Transparency](#) page, council members' conflict of interest statements, [detailed instructions](#) about how to request public documents, and a more user friendly URL (www.costamesaca.gov).

The City also received kudos last week from the [Sunlight Foundation](#), another national open-government watchdog group. The foundation noted:

“After struggling to get a B in content, C in clarity and C in accessibility (in a [2011 Grand Jury report](#)), the city of Costa Mesa in California has finally upped its transparency. In a new dramatic move, the city recently released a detailed report of all its employee salaries including full and part-time staff. Sunshine advocates praised this effort as a proactive one from the city, and emphasized how citizens will now be encouraged to become more involved in their government.”

The City's communications team plans on expanding transparency on the website in the coming months by adding campaign contributions, contracts over \$10,000, a detailed report on City consultants, and an online request for public documents.

“An A+ rating from the Sunshine Review means that Costa Mesa citizens are now able to more easily remain ‘informed so that they may retain control over the instruments they created,’ to quote the Brown Act,” said Bill Lobdell, the City's interim director of communications. “It's also evidence that the City's transparency push has had measurable results. Because of it, citizens are getting more public information than ever before, allowing them to engage more meaningfully in their local government. This is essential to the health of any city.”

The City is currently undergoing a redesign of its website that will make accessing public information even easier. The work is expected to be finished by year's end.