



CLERK WANTS TO REVISE DISCLOSURES

Updating Outdated Processes

Rōzi Horn

Denver Clerk Register Reporter

The Denver Clerk & Recorder Office is the recipient and custodian of all disclosure reports filed by elected and appointed officials, lobbyist and special districts. For several years, the City Clerk department

of the Denver Clerk & Recorder Office has accepted these disclosure reports by mail, email, and in some cases, by hand delivery. Clerk Debra Johnson wants to update the process and procedures by:

- Updating disclosure forms to provide clear instructions

about appropriate information to disclose

- Adding a requirement for gift disclosure.
- Allowing disclosures to be submitted online.
- Providing transparency of

disclosed information without creating risk to those required to submit extensive personal and professional information.

- Changing report submit date from August 1 to January 1.

IN SUPPORT

Political Advocacy Groups and Lobbyist Supports Clerks' Effort

Colorado Ethics Watch and Colorado Common Cause, government advocacy organizations, support the proposed ordinance update. Peg Perl of Colorado Ethics Watch and Elena Nuñez, of Colorado Common Cause initially wanted to put the issue before voters in the November 2016 general election. However, Clerk Johnson persuaded the groups to bring the proposed changes before Denver City Council instead. The watchdog organizations agreed to this approach and worked closely with Clerk Johnson and her staff to draft the proposal.

Local lobbyist Josh Hanfling of Seward & Hanfling supports the proposed changes to lobbyist disclosure requirements. He believes proposed changes will increase online availability, track lobbying interest and advance transparency.

Two significant changes are the requirement of elected officials and city officers to submit a quarterly gift disclosure report on money and/or gifts received of any value. The implementation of the new disclosure is championed by Common Cause and supported by Ethics Watch.

Another change is moving the annual officers' disclosure submittal deadline from August 1 to January 1.

Clerk Johnson met with many of her fellow elected officials, including Mayor Michael B. Hancock, to explain the proposal and answer questions. She believes this proposal benefits law makers by providing easier record keeping and benefits the public through greater transparency. ♣



TRANSPARENCY

Accessibility equals top customer service

In 2013, the City and County of Denver implemented the Open Checkbook which is available on Transparent Denver website. Through Open Checkbook tool on the website, citizens can obtain budget, revenue, investment and financial reporting information online. The system increases accountability and transparency.

Clerk Johnson's proposal to put all disclosure information on the Clerk and Recorder website aligns with the City's transparency plan. Online access will include disclosure reports and will have a new reporting feature. Users will be able to filter and print the disclosed information.

In a 2015 online report, the National Conference of State Legislatures reports that 29 of 50 states make state legislators' financial disclosures available online.

Clerk Johnson opines that in today's political world, transparency is no longer an option but a necessity. Citizens want to know details of government spending and want to discuss government spending. Therefore, implementing this online system will provide citizens easy access to disclosure information and meet the City's goal of top customer service for its residents. ♣

TECHNOLOGY

Juan Guzmán

Senior Denver Clerk Register Reporter

User friendly and easy access

Accessibility and transparency: Technology is key to making information readily and easily available. Doing so means that we increase transparency into our daily actions which increases trust from our customers. The online system will allow citizens to view, print and filter information. The system's tools will be easy to use and will provide comprehensive reporting.

The Colorado Secretary of State has a similar lobbyist system in place that allows users to view, print and filter reported information based on criteria. Although the proposed online system functionality may be similar to the state's lobbyist system.

The Clerk & Recorder Staff plans to conduct research and inspect other systems to learn pros and cons before going forward with design and implementation. ♣

MAIN POINTS

1. Change annual reporting date to January 1
2. Simplify disclosure form language to provide clear instructions of information to disclose.
3. Add gift disclosure without amount caps.
4. Implement an online submitting process.
5. Create online accessibility.
6. Provide transparency without risking submitters' privacy.

Snapshot

Source: National Conference of State Legislatures

No. of States with Online Access to Disclosures

