

Database breaks down what Stark County spends on each of us

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CANTON Community leaders say a newly released study on the cost of government in Northeast Ohio could lead to more effective and efficient government.

The online database details how much the hundreds of governmental units in the 16 counties of Northeast Ohio collect in taxes and spend on services. The study also has data from other areas of Ohio and the nation for comparison.

"It's a body of information we didn't have before, and, frankly, local government didn't have before," said David Kaminski, director of business retention and strategic projects for the Canton Regional Chamber of Commerce, which was a partner in paying for the study. "This is a set of tools we never had before."

The Canton chamber, along with the Stark Development Board, Canton/Stark County Convention & Visitors' Bureau and Alliance, Canal Fulton, Massillon, Minerva, North Canton and Jackson/Belden chambers, are collaborating on the 21st Century Government Initiative, a study directed at improving the effectiveness and efficiency of governments.

PUBLIC CAN SEE DATA

The database is available to the public at

www.futurefundneo.org. The study uses figures from the 1992, 1997 and 2002 census of governments — numbers that were available before but not compiled in a manner convenient for comparison.

Stark's numbers are partially incomplete because 17 governmental units here didn't respond to the 2002 census, including Jackson Township, Canal Fulton and the Stark/Tuscarawas/Wayne Joint Solid Waste Management District.

The figures show that Stark County spent \$2,794 for each resident in 2002, a 67 percent increase from 1997, while inflation only rose 29 percent. Stark's increase was less than Mahoning County's (83 percent) and Trumbull County's (72 percent), while neighboring Summit County's spending rose only 58 percent.

But Summit was spending \$2,211 per person in 1992 when Stark was spending \$1,650. While Stark spending increased \$1,110 over 10 years, Summit spending increased \$1,277 to \$3,488 per person.

There are internal Stark County numbers. For instance, Canton spent about \$15.5 million on police protection in 2002, while East Canton spent about \$188,000. Canton spent more than \$45 million in salaries and wages, while Limaville spent about \$8,000.

But neither the civic leaders nor the researchers are drawing any conclusions.

"The starting point is 'Who does what?' " said Charles Zettek Jr. of the Center for Government Research, the Rochester, N.Y.-based research company. "Then ask why ... things are the way they are, and is the difference meaningful?" he said.

ACCURATE DATA IS CRITICAL

The data is only as good as the governments that respond to the census, and they aren't required to do so, Zettek said. Other states compile the same kind of data for their use, but Ohio doesn't.

"The most fundamental point is, you can't manage what you can't measure," he said. Before the database was assembled, government officials had no way to compare themselves or the region.

Kaminski said the government initiative has a steering committee that has been working for three months and will be studying the research.

One result could be to "start a conversation on how people might work together" in combining services or purchasing to create efficiencies, Kaminski said.

James Pennetti, the outgoing business retention director, said obtaining the database is the start of a process. There are no preconceived notions. "We are deciding how to proceed with this process," he said.

There is much to be discovered in the mass of numbers in the database, Kaminski said.



Stark County spent \$2,794 for each resident in 2002. Spending includes: Public assistance programs, hospitals, housing, transit utilities, sewers and solid waste, higher education, electric utilities, corrections, financial administration, staff services and others, totaling \$681.

"The initial interest is in who does what in Stark County."

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Governmental units that did not respond to the 2002 Census of Government and are not included in the study:

Beach City

Canal Fulton

East Sparta

Hills and Dales

Magnolia

Minerva

Waynesburg

Wilmot

Jackson Township

Lexington Township

Nimishillen Township

Osnaburg Township

Pike Township

MOLO Regional Library System

Stark County Park District

Stark County Transportation Improvement District

Stark/Tuscarawas/Wayne Joint Solid Waste Management District

Stark County spent \$2,794 for each resident in 2002 including:

Libraries \$39

Recreation \$15

Fire protection \$75

Highways \$96

Water \$59

Judicial \$59

Health/other \$189

Police protection \$130

Education \$1,451

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