



## ***E-Government for Government***

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Distribution: Municipal Clerks

### **GovConnect Municipal Contact List: A Study in State/Local Cooperation**

The municipal clerk is often a municipality's greatest resource, because they are so closely connected to all aspects of government. When citizens, businesses, and other government officials need to contact local government officials, they usually turn to their municipal clerk first to find out information such as names, phone numbers, mailing and e-mail addresses.

However, local government officials are constantly changing. Keeping up with the changes in a single municipality, much less all 566 municipalities in New Jersey, is a challenging task. With that in mind, the MyNewJersey/GovConnect portal now offers the Municipal Contact List (MCL), a new service to assist municipal clerks with this problem.

#### **Solving a Problem – Developing the Municipal Contact List**

GovConnect, a feature of the State's MyNewJersey web portal, is an innovative service that allows state, county, and municipal officials to exchange information in a secure online environment. With its successful launch in 2001, the team that worked to build the service began reaching out to users to add new job-related features.

The GovConnect team, consisting of members of the Department of Community Affairs' Division of Local Government Services (DLGS) and the State's Office of Information Technology, met with a small group of municipal clerks at the 2002 Municipal Clerks Association of New Jersey (MCANJ) fall conference to find out how to make GovConnect more useful.

"DCA wanted to get feedback from the municipal clerks and make them part of GovConnect," said DLGS Acting Director Joseph Monzo. "We want to ensure that users find value in the program, and make GovConnect their primary link to State government and their fellow municipal clerks."

The discussion with the focus group of municipal clerks revealed the need for a "municipal contact list." This list would help clerks manage the requests from organizations, including the State, that regularly need the names and contact information of officials such as mayors, police chiefs, land use administrators and construction code officials.

For instance, municipal clerks can count on a letter the beginning of each year from organizations such as the New Jersey League of Municipalities requesting

information on appointed and elected officials to update their contact information for municipalities. Instead of completing each requestor's form, the municipal clerk could print out the information or send them a data file with the MCL.

Additionally, government agencies at all levels regularly request contact information from municipal clerks. For example, when DCA's Division of Fire Safety was notified of a recall on thermal-imaging cameras, they needed to contact the heads of the fire departments in each municipality to notify them of the recall. Or, when there was a recall on Ford Crown Victorias, the Department of the Treasury's Division of Purchase and Property needed a list of municipal purchasing agents to notify them of that recall. They later needed to inform them of changes in the competitive purchasing program.

In addition to these types of requests, municipal clerks are contacted daily by residents looking to contact a particular local official such as a mayor or engineer.

Each time this information is requested, a duplication of effort is often required. Also, depending on how regularly a department, agency, or organization contacts the municipal clerk to update its records, there can be numerous lists of contact information for a given municipality.

While municipal clerks have managed admirably in maintaining and providing this data, the GovConnect team set out to make the process much easier for everyone involved in the process.

### **The Solution – The Benefits of the Municipal Contact List**

Using a simple survey format, the MCL allows municipal clerks to enter information

about their government officials, including name, mailing address, phone number, and e-mail address and term. Eventually, the public will be able to view MCL information on each municipality from the State's web site. It will also allow the municipal clerk to download their municipality's information to use with local computers.

The MCL permits the municipal clerk to enter information on positions that exist in every municipality, such as mayor, tax collector, tax assessor, municipal clerk and finance officer. A wide range of information can be entered on each individual. In addition to title (which is customizable to meet local practices), MCL allows address, phone, e-mail address, office hours, miscellaneous notes and general instructions to municipal offices. As few or as many officials as their town would like to list can be included.

The MCL can also list emergency contact information. This information and the ability to enter the information are password-protected. The MCL forms request information such as physical location, mailing address and e-mail address. However, the municipal clerk can make the information "private" so it is available only to emergency personnel in the case of a disaster.

Understanding that a municipal clerk can be called off onto a new project at any given moment, the program allows updates as time permits. Information is saved as the user goes along, so he or she does not have to enter all of it at once. Further, users can make updates from any computer with an Internet connection.

Once the information has been entered, only the municipal clerk can download the list into a spreadsheet or do a mail merge for things such as yearly appointment letters. The public can view the

information, but not download it. This limit is imposed because the information is "owned" by the municipality. It is stored on the OIT computer system and can only be downloaded by the "owner." Therefore, aggregate lists are not available for download or purchase. The sole exception is the list of mayors, which by its participation, the municipality agrees to make available to the public through OIT.

The GovConnect team got feedback after demonstrating the MCL at the 2002 New Jersey State League of Municipalities conference. A pilot test with a group of clerks from Middlesex County and the executive board of the MCANJ was conducted from which the group received more feedback. A final group of volunteers also received training on the program and enthusiastically embraced it. Elaine Kiczula, Municipal Clerk in Perth Amboy affirmed that MCL is "a time-saving tool that provides ample data in a concise package."

### **Public View – Using the Municipal Contact List in Your Town**

The MCL will be available on the Internet by January 2004, allowing the public to look up officials from any municipality. The list will be divided into elected officials and non-elected officials for each town. The listing will be alphabetically by name.

Municipalities can also add their MCL page to their own Web site. The page uses commonly used web programming tools, so local webmasters can match MCL data to the look and feel of the municipal web site.

"The municipal contact list shows the state's responsiveness to municipal feedback," said GovConnect Program Administrator Don Piccolella. "Now the municipal clerks will be able to input data once and use it for many different uses.

