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Spending and performance data sheds light on quantity and quality of local government in metro Milwaukee

MILWAUKEE – *Monday, December 20, 2010* – The Public Policy Forum today released its inaugural *Tracking Local Government* report, which is intended to serve as a resource for citizens to monitor fiscal and performance trends for core local government services in metropolitan Milwaukee.

“The report seeks to identify that set of government services that each of us, regardless of our political leanings, hopefully can agree represents the basic ‘to do’ list for government at the local level,” says Forum President Rob Henken. “We then provide a simple way for the ordinary citizen to get a sense of what we are spending on those services and how they are performing.”

The 47-page report identifies 25 local government or government-funded services in nine functional categories that are considered critical to the metro area’s economy and quality of life. For each set of services, the report tracks fiscal and performance data over a five-year period to provide readers with a sense of revenue and expenditure levels, as well as a sense of what taxpayers are getting for their money. The report also provides brief analysis and observations

regarding why the services are important, data trends, and future implications associated with those trends.

“Performance measurement has been increasingly used by all levels of government since the early 1990s to better manage programs and services and communicate results to stakeholders and constituents,” says Henken. “Unfortunately, not all government entities and departments in our metro area do an adequate job collecting performance data, and even those that adequately collect it often do not effectively disseminate it to policymakers and citizens.”

The *Tracking Local Government* report is an effort to compile such data – to the extent it is readily available – in an easily understandable format in one place. In addition to informing citizens, Henken says the Forum’s objective is to “encourage those agencies that are not engaged in an appropriate level of performance measurement to improve their efforts.”

The inaugural *Tracking Local Government* report – made possible by grant funding from the Northwestern Mutual Foundation – is considered a work in progress. Time and data limitations required the Forum to focus exclusively on Milwaukee County, City of Milwaukee and other Milwaukee-based governmental entities, as opposed to looking at government services within other Milwaukee County municipalities or other southeast Wisconsin counties. The Forum hopes to expand the project in the future to include a broader perspective.

The full report can be downloaded from the Forum’s Web site at www.publicpolicyforum.org

Milwaukee-based Public Policy Forum, established in 1913 as a local government watchdog, is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to enhancing the effectiveness of government and the development of southeastern Wisconsin through objective research of public policy issues.

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