

## City Council video archive a 'big step' toward transparency

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By Alex Parker

March 15, 2010 @ 1:00 PM

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It's rare that a top elected Chicago official calls out the city's shortcomings, but if you ask City Clerk Miguel Del Valle, Chicago is far behind other municipalities in putting its dirty laundry out there for all to see.

"It's a world-class city that needs to have a world-class legislative branch of government," he said. But, "we're playing catch up. We're not leading the way here."

In unveiling a City Council video archive housed on the [clerk's site](#) today, Del Valle called it a small step forward in guaranteeing transparency in government, and said the city still has a long way to go.

"There's never such a thing as too much information when it comes to the opening of government," he said.

The video archives, which reach back to October, allow users to view full City Council meetings or choose specific committee discussions. It comes days after the city redesigned its own Web site with the goal of making it easier to use.

Previously, City Council meetings have been broadcast live on the clerk's Web site, but there was no way to reference a meeting once it concluded.

Dick Simpson, a former alderman and a professor of political science at the University of Illinois at Chicago, said efforts to put the City Council's business online have been ongoing for more than a decade.

"It's important as citizens that we're able to hold (aldermen) accountable, and we're able to see exactly what they do, how they do it and whether they are truly representing us," he said, pointing to the role aldermen have in determining the city's budget, appointments and laws.

Andy Shaw, executive director of the Better Government Association, said much of city business is still done behind closed doors, but having a permanent record of the council's meetings is a positive development.

"You cannot have accountability without transparency," he said. "This has been government behind closed doors, in the dark. Sunlight is the best disinfectant."

Del Valle said city officials are taking steps to improve video quality, and he expects to soon link legislative documents with video footage of their discussion. He said he has worked hard to make city proceedings more accessible to the public, citing archived records of roll call votes as one example.

Shaw said the city needs to take it one step further and televise City Council meetings on city-owned cable channels, much like Chicago Public Schools meetings.

"Today is a huge step forward, but we have a mile or two to go," he said.

Simpson, who served in the council when cable television developed more than 30 years ago, said aldermen have been reluctant to put their meetings on the air "because their constituents will have too much scrutiny."