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Why is the city hiding scandals?

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CAROL MARIN cmarin@suntimes.com

Is this a Halloween trick or what? Try going to the City of Chicago Web site, click on the link to YOUR GOVERNMENT, click on CITY DEPARTMENTS and scroll down to LAW. Clicking on that connects you to the city's Department of Law, where you will find its MISSION STATEMENT:

"Provide the highest quality legal advice in guidance to the city, its departments, officials and employees; save taxpayer dollars by effectively representing its clients in legal transactions and civil litigation . . ."

Over on the left-hand side of the page is another link, one reporters routinely use to track just how much the city pays out in SETTLEMENTS & JUDGMENTS.

Click on that and you are led to another link that states: "Please see below the list of lawsuits and claims against the City of Chicago that have been resolved through settlements and judgments in the corresponding year."

But on Tuesday afternoon, all the clicking in the world only got you this: PAGE NOT FOUND. Instead, there were links to take you toward more cheerful things such as information about "Ghostly Games @ Pumpkin (Daley) Plaza" and the "Chicago's 94th Annual Christmas Tree Lighting Ceremony."

If you want transparency, try Casper, the Friendly Ghost but not the City of Chicago.

And that's why, in addition to the PAGE NOT FOUND for city settlements, the Mayor's Office and the Law Department have decided not to articulate the rest of their MISSION STATEMENT, which includes preventing the public from learning the names of police officers who have had serious citizens complaints against them, year after year, with no action taken to stop them. And thus the city is still in court, using our tax dollars, to fight disclosure while it uses more of our tax dollars to pay settlements to citizens whose rights have been violated. Settlements that we couldn't access on the city's Web site Tuesday.

In addition, the city is still making us pay for the torture inflicted on arrestees by former Police Cmdr. Jon Burge and his merry band of men. The city continues to pay for lawyers to defend Burge and refuses to settle with plaintiffs.

It has cost us many millions of dollars over all these years.

And now there is Jerome Finnigan. For every kid who will excitedly put on a police costume to trick or treat today, for every honorable Chicago officer who every day puts on a real badge and gun, the specter of Jerome Finnigan is more haunting than Halloween. And the horror of his story is guaranteed to grow.

Finnigan was on the front page of this newspaper Tuesday as the Sun-Times and NBC5 reported that this 44-year-old, decorated and now-indicted former elite cop is not only criminally charged by both the Cook County state's attorney and the U.S. attorney but now, just this month, he also is suddenly singing to the feds. Finnigan will give the government everything he can about his superiors in the Chicago Police Department in order to save at least some of his skin. Maybe he'll shave some years off what looks to be a long sentence. He faces charges for everything from home invasion to conspiracy to kill a fellow cop to civil rights violations.

Finnigan and six fellow officers, so far, have been charged in the scandal surrounding their now-disbanded Special Operations Section.

In a city that has produced some doozies of police scandals variously named for the district

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or the criminal/officer involved -- Summerdale, Austin, Marquette, Burge, Miedzianowski, Hanhardt -- there are those who believe this latest one will exact a huge toll on Chicago in both treasure and reputation.

It is too high a price to pay for all the fine cops and good citizens of this city.

But if we're going to pay it anyway, we should be able to read it on our own, taxpayer-funded Web site, don't you think?