San Francisco government not so tech savvy

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SAN FRANCISCO (KGO) -- One San Francisco politician describes City Hall's troubled Internet technology system as a disaster and an embarrassment. Despite being close to Silicon Valley, San Francisco is years behind with its computer networks.

San Francisco Mayor Gavin Newsom regularly updates constituents on YouTube and he has more than a million followers on Twitter, but city government is not nearly as tech savvy.

"It's not as simple as you would think," says Supervisor Carmen Chu.

Chu is talking about e-mail. Different systems do not allow one department to easily communicate with another.

"As you know, these days we e-mail often to city employees to try to find information and to department heads to find information and if that doesn't work then we actually have to go separately onto our online website to look for someone's telephone listing," says Chu.

Chu says what she and her colleagues discovered at a hearing on Monday is the tip of the iceberg.

The city spends $200 million a year on Internet technology, but is not even sure how many data servers there are. Keeping track of permits and records is a challenge.

One key project is 13 years behind schedule and millions over budget. It is called "JUSTIS" and is a high-tech system designed to link police and other criminal justice departments and allow them to share information. It was started with a budget of $925,000 and 13 years later it is not done and $22 million has been spent.

"It is the opinion of most of us at the board that this project has been an unmitigated disaster and really an embarrassment in how projects ought to be managed," says Board president David Chiu.

Chiu says we do not have 21st century technology. When the new police chief was sworn in, he too complained about antiquated technology hampering his ability to process crime data.

"Obviously were going to do a lot of things by hand because we don't have the right technology for it," says Chief George Gascon.

Right now many of the city's 27 departments have individual IT systems. That could change to a consolidated approach.

"I don't think the current way we do technology in the city is the most efficient way to do it, but it's the way historically how we developed it and now we have to think of better ways to do it," says Jon Walton with the city's Department of Technology.

The department will now be more closely scrutinized as it moves the city's technology forward.

Link to video:
http://abclocal.go.com/kgo/story?section=news/local/san_francisco&id=7291745