

## Best Practice: Public Access Government Decision-Making

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**CITY:** HELSINKI

**POLICY AREAS:** PUBLIC INTEGRITY; TECHNOLOGY; ENVIRONMENT;  
GOVERNMENT ACCOUNTABILITY

### BEST PRACTICE

**Ahjo** ("The Forge") is the City of Helsinki's electronic decision-processing system which promotes transparency and saves more than 2 million sheets of paper annually. Since the system was launched in 2011, the City Council, the City Board and Committees have processed and published almost all decisions on Ahjo, making the City's decision-making process more transparent.

### ISSUE

The City Councils of Helsinki and office holders make tens of thousands of decisions every year. The government stored these documents in a centralized repository. While the public had access to the decisions, it was necessary to either call or go to the registrar in City Hall and formally request data. Because the information was not as easily accessible, it often did not reach people until it was too late to influence decision-making processes.

Ahjo addressed the need to increase the public's accessibility to the City's decisions and to decrease the cost – both financially and environmentally – of the high paper usage in the government. The Ahjo system has digitized all decision-making processes and now stores them in Open Ahjo. Anyone can access this interface and search through decisions.

### GOALS AND OBJECTIVES

Ahjo aims to streamline the decision-management, decision-preparation and decision-making systems of the City administration by digitizing the processes, improving their openness, and decreasing the consumption of paper. The goal was to merge the separate registries of more than 30 city departments into a single registry in City Hall, thus increasing the ease of accessibility to important documents. The Open Ahjo interface intends to enable both citizens and the media to have access to the decision-making documents before the city made final decisions. This allows more public input and transparency in decision-making processes.

### IMPLEMENTATION

In 2006, the Mayor set up a management group to develop the City's electronic decision-processing and e-meeting system. City Hall departments, offices in charge of general city administration, and Information and Technology ICT services were responsible for most of the development work. Due to the extensive number of city departments and corporations, each of which each has its own decision-making committee or board, practically the whole city administration was involved with the development of the Ahjo system.

The development process included five different subareas:

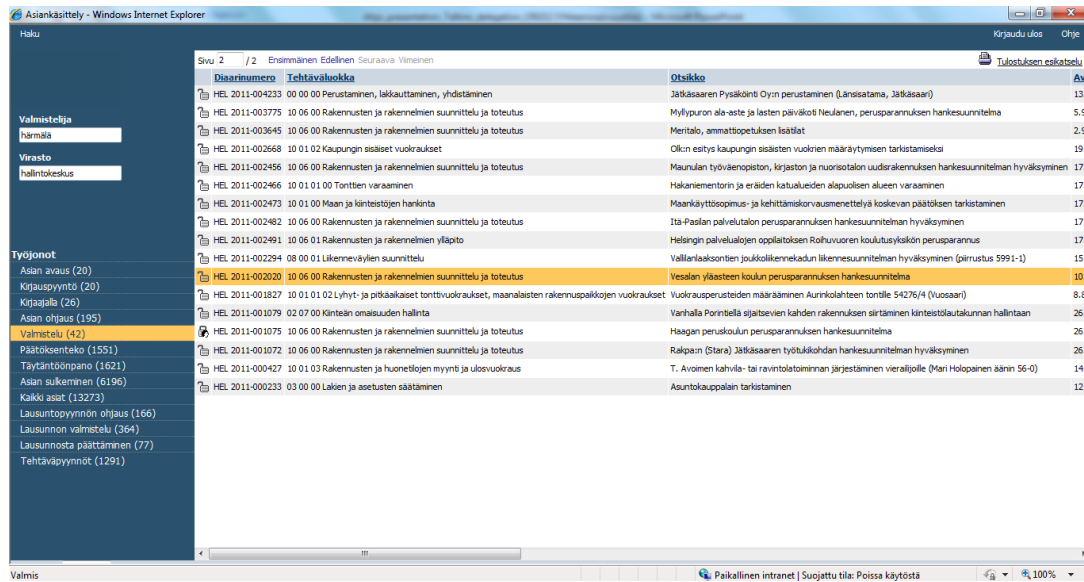
- document management
- document production
- records management
- electronic meetings (including the City Council meeting room's specific meeting system)
- renewal of general work processes for electronic decision processing system

The City of Helsinki engaged Tieto Corporation to implement a comprehensive Ahjo case management system, which is based on IBM FileNet software. The challenge was to change the entire decision-making process – from the drafting of a proposal through to its implementation.

The Ahjo system was implemented in Summer 2011 and revolutionized the City's decision-making process. Over the course of a few months, almost all decision-making was transferred from a manual system to the entirely digital Ahjo system. The City Council had its first meeting using the Ahjo system on 14 September 2011.

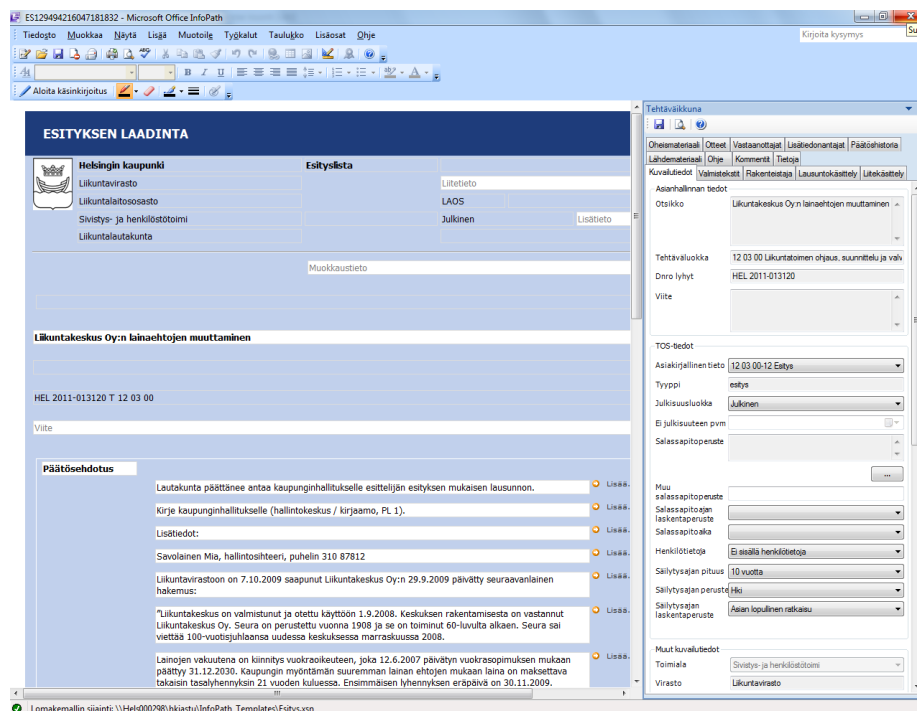
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City officials can access the following applications within the Ahjo interface: case processing, document production, meeting management, document and records management, and the City Hall plenary hall system.



The screenshot shows the Ahjo Case Processing page in a web browser. The page has a sidebar on the left with navigation links like 'Haku', 'Valmistelu', 'Virasto', 'Työjono', and 'Valmis'. The main area displays a table of cases with columns: 'Draa-numero', 'Tehtäväluokka', 'Otsikko', and 'Ava'. The table lists various cases related to city planning and development, such as 'Perustaminen, lakkauttaminen, yhdistäminen' and 'Rakennusten ja rakennelmien suunnittelu ja toteutus'. The status 'Ava' is shown in the rightmost column.

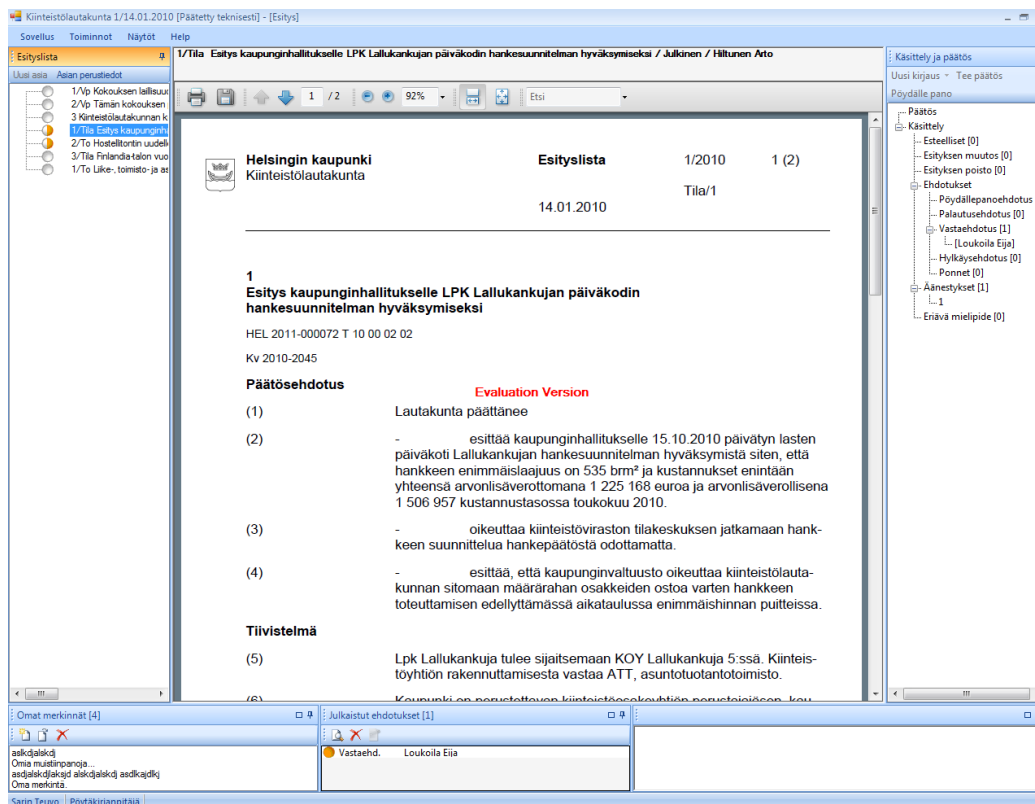
Sample screenshot of Case Processing page



The screenshot shows the Ahjo Document Production page in a web browser. The page has a sidebar on the left with navigation links like 'Tiedot', 'Muokkaa', 'Näytä', 'Lisä', 'Muotoile', 'Työkalut', 'Taulukko', 'Lisäosat', and 'Ohje'. The main area displays a form for creating a document, with sections for 'ESITYKSEN LAADINTA' and 'LIIKUNTAKEKUS OYN LÄÄNEHTÖJEN MUUTTAMINEN'. The form includes fields for 'Esityslista', 'Liikuntakeskus Oyn läänehtöjen muuttaminen', and 'Päätöshetki'. The status 'Lisä' is shown in the rightmost column.

Sample screenshot of Document Production Page

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Sample screenshot of eMeeting application page

### COST

The initial cost of implementing Ahjo was 4 million Euros. Preparing the City Council meeting room for paperless meetings and amending the live video system cost €1.1 million. The remaining €2.9 million went to the content-management system, document-management system, and meeting system.

In addition to these initial costs, Ahjo has an annual running cost of €1.8 million.

### RESULTS AND EVALUATION

The Ahjo system has been successful in improving and streamlining the City decision-making and management systems as well as in increasing the transparency and openness of the City administration.

### TIMELINE

- 2008:** Resolution to move forward with a new decision-making process and content management system. Continued to plan and tender the process over the next couple of years.
- 2010:** Start of system design and implementation.
- July 2011:** Ahjo system taken into use.

### LESSONS LEARNED

- Challenge of teaching the complexity of local government decision-making and administrative systems to technically-oriented ICT planners: these problems were solved only gradually, and many interface adjustments had to be made afterwards.

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- Problems with ICT capabilities of politicians and other users: initially there was criticism that Ahjo technical requirements were too complicated. With more training for users and interface improvements, ICT capabilities have improved.
- Technical problems: Connectivity disturbances during eMeetings led to the formation of back-up plans until the interruption could be resolved (in one or two “worst cases” the decisions, proposals, and votes were recorded manually and later transferred to the Ahjo meeting application).

### TRANSFERABILITY

In large cities with multifaceted decision-making processes, digitizing the system allows for more consistency and cooperation among agencies. Having documents in a content-management system with an open interface allows the reuse of valuable materials. Additionally, the system allows the public to access decisions regarding individual districts and other relevant information for those decisions.

### CONTACTS

Mika Lappalainen  
Information Technology and Communication  
City of Helsinki Executive Office  
[mika.lappalainen@hel.fi](mailto:mika.lappalainen@hel.fi)  
+358 50 3763959  
[www.hel.fi](http://www.hel.fi)

Information about Helsinki's decision-making boards can be found here:  
<http://www.hel.fi/hki/Helsinki/en/City+government/Decision-making> (in English)

Information about Ahjo's application programming and its user interface facility available for developers can be found here:  
<http://dev.hel.fi/apis/openahjo> and <https://github.com/City-of-Helsinki/openahjo>

*Facts and figures in this report were provided by the highlighted city agency to New York City Global Partners.*