

# Open Government Philadelphia

Public Sector **Improvements** +  
Private Sector **Opportunities** =  

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**Transparency, Accountability, Innovation**



**Councilman Bill Green**  
**Philadelphia City Council**  
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## Introduction

Despite the widespread availability of computers for two decades now, Philadelphia city government is still largely run with paper forms and processes that are ineffective and needlessly opaque. This state of affairs – and a significant pending investment in the City’s technology systems<sup>1</sup> – provides the ideal opportunity for us to transform local government through the smart implementation of technology and “Open Government” – a bundle of approaches that will help us be more transparent, accountable, innovative, and successful. For Philadelphia to survive and prosper in the 21<sup>st</sup> Century, we can and must choose to move beyond traditional fiscal crisis response tactics and imprecise “budget management” techniques in order to work better and smarter. While it may sound daunting, Open Government is, in fact, not difficult to implement. With \$120 million in approved funding poised to be spent on upgrading the City’s technology systems over the next six years, now is the time to move on it.

By using technology to infuse additional information and intelligence into government operations, we can at once reduce the cost of government and improve the services it provides. Through Open Government initiatives we can also provide information about public sector operations to the private sector, paving the way for the private sector’s capital, discipline, and pace-of-change to solve problems and improve government services.

Much of the Open Government approach requires technology, which City government clearly needs and for which I have been a strong proponent of our investing in through the city’s capital budget, but technology is not the only element. Open Government also includes improved decision-making and management, budgeting, citizen engagement, and more, much of which is described in this policy paper and related PowerPoint presentation.

What do we have to gain from pursuing Open Government? One example lies in City government’s lack of information-based decision making. At present, the management of Philadelphia is not data-centric and, as a result, we often make poor choices with unintended consequences. The Open Government reforms, in conjunction with those proposed in my prior “Paperless Government” policy paper, will not only help us make better choices with our limited resources but also should save the City **\$200 million a year**. These savings are possible without cutting City services but, instead, improving them.

Furthermore, the Open Government/Paperless Government reforms will benefit the City and its residents in ways that go far beyond these significant savings. We can

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<sup>1</sup> See <http://www.phila.gov/pdfs/FinalPlanFY12-16.pdf> at p. 117.

expect better City services, helping us attract new businesses and residents. We can expect national exposure as the City that takes calculated risks to do things differently in this new fiscal environment, rather than just paying lip-service to the idea of changing how government works. We can excite, energize, and help fuel a new class of nimble and flexible 21<sup>st</sup> century businesses. And in all of this, we will help government improve itself.

Please join us in contemplating Philadelphia's innovative, cost-effective, and citizen-friendly future through Open Government.

## **Make City Government More Transparent**

As the saying goes, “sunshine is the best antiseptic.” With respect to the inner workings of Philadelphia city government, it is long past time to open the curtains and let the light pour in. This transparency must extend well beyond simply advertising meetings and accepting public comments on government actions – the hallmarks of the City's efforts to date – which do not transform decision-making. We must provide ways for the public to see how government functions, including what factors it considers when deciding how to spend tax dollars and how those decisions affect peoples' lives.

The process of organizing and making this information available will in and of itself help improve government operations by requiring departments that do not usually measure their outputs to create year-over-year performance comparisons, including measurements such as per-funding-unit spending. These data collection efforts will pave the way for outcome-based budgeting, an approach to ensuring that citizens receive results for their tax dollars that is discussed below.

### ***Recommendation 1: Enact a Comprehensive Open Data Policy***

Cities across the country have leveraged technology to open their operations to the public in new ways and realize benefits with little new investment or costs. San Francisco and Baltimore, for example, have enacted open data policies that require City departments to post information about how they operate and the details of their performance on a centralized City website. These data sets cover a broad range of information from crime statistics and fire calls to building permit applications and transit system timing, and so on. The data are aggregated into user-friendly data sets (frequently in Excel, CSV, ZIP, or other exportable format) and posted online.<sup>2</sup> Often

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<sup>2</sup> See <http://datasf.org> for San Francisco's outstanding data warehouse website.

this information is easily convertible into use with Geographic Information Systems (GIS) or posted alongside GIS resources to allow for integration with geo-based decision-making, an affiliated and powerful management tool.

Where such data sets do not yet exist, departments in other cities are creating them. This process – which may be the first opportunity for City departments to truly take a full inventory of what they do and how they do it – provides a baseline for better fiscal management and information discipline, as well as creating the opportunity for outcome-based budgeting.

These data sets present enormous opportunities for decision-makers and the public to better understand what is going on in the City and how the government is responding to particular issues. Disparate data sets can be correlated to identify and analyze emerging trends, better coordinate responses to problems, and pinpoint new issues requiring a coordinated response. Furthermore, when information about how government functions is made public, it also offers problems for private sector capital, discipline and timing to solve – potentially creating new businesses and jobs while solving significant problems, all with relatively little cost to government. As highlighted in the PowerPoint, when other cities have implemented open data policies, entrepreneurs and members of the civic community have leveraged information about government operations to propose internal improvements and new business ideas to improve citizen quality of life. We should expect the same cycle of innovation and engagement here in Philadelphia.

In addition to furthering the goals of transparency and accountability, providing access to government data can increase citizen engagement in helpful and creative ways. For example, and as discussed in more detail in Recommendation 9, citizens could sign up for automatic email alerts or search for and find information about all license and permit applications for new development or for stores that seek to sell alcoholic beverages within a defined geographic area or other customizable criteria. This would facilitate citizen awareness about projects that will impact their neighborhoods and enhance opportunities for meaningful, timely input on neighborhood investments. This process will, I believe, wind up reducing the time-consuming and costly back-and-forth between citizens and the development community.

As in many technology-related areas, Philadelphia lags far behind its peer cities in opening its data to the public. The City does not even post results of all past elections on its official website. In many cases, the public is forced to pursue a cumbersome request process – either under the state open records law or the federal Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) – to access government data. In those cases where the City does produce and or publish information digitally, it often does so with respect

to only a limited subset of the fields used to collect information on related paper forms. In the absence of an official open data policy, we are missing the opportunity to bring both public and private sector attention to the challenge of making government systems work better.

The new OpenDataPhilly website – a pro bono initiative of local software firms and spearheaded by local favorite Azavea that is being launched during Philly Tech Week 2011 – and related initiatives should be commended and supported as a first step. They offer a great start on the road toward Open Government and highlight the exciting potential in this area.<sup>3</sup> However, support for this initiative by City employees and the publication of a sub-group of City data sets is not enough. The City of Philadelphia should be leading these efforts, coordinating the public-private partnerships that will vault information generated by government into creative uses and deploying Open Government as an internal tool to improve performance.

To bring Philadelphia into the 21<sup>st</sup> Century when it comes to data access, I am introducing legislation that will require all City departments to post whatever electronic data sets they have on a central “data warehouse” website freely available to the public in searchable and malleable formats. Furthermore, all information that is collected on paper forms throughout city government should be provided for use through our data warehouse – including every information field we collect, not just a small subset of the fields we capture on paper forms. This legislation will incorporate a wide definition for what is considered “public” – certainly requiring that all matters of public record be made available to the public via our open government efforts while also, of course, taking into account privacy-related considerations.

The legislation will provide that if such information is neither currently available nor produce-able in a reasonable period of time, City departments must produce an audit identifying barriers to compliance and steps to reduce the barriers and to make needed improvements. When crafting this legislation, we will draw upon the best open data policies in place in other cities and states, balancing security, transparency, citizen engagement, and the potential for business development.

### ***Recommendation 2: Provide Easy Access to Legislative Voting Records***

It is a truism that to hold their elected officials accountable, citizens want and need to know how their representatives voted on important matters. Although Philadelphia City Council has made strides over the past several years in making the text of legislation and hearing transcripts available online, the current process for determining which Councilmembers voted for and against a particular bill is

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<sup>3</sup> See <http://opendataphilly.org>.

cumbersome, to say the least. The vote record is accessible to the public only through the PDF file of the official “Journal” of the Council session at which the bill was up for a final vote – a voluminous document listing all the bills and resolutions introduced that day, reports from all Council Committees, and, finally, the bills and resolutions voted on during the session.

City Council should provide searchable voting information online – including members’ votes on bills both in committee hearings and at final passage. In doing so, Council should consider building upon the new “City Council Legislation Digest” tool, which was created last month by Philly Data Camp and the Code for America Philadelphia Fellows. The Legislation Digest will enable citizens to learn about matters pending in City Council through an easy-to-access and customizable tool, sparing them from having to wade through reams of paper and countless multi-page documents.<sup>4</sup> This combination of technology and more dynamic, efficient ways of sharing what City Council does and the decisions it makes will help further educate and engage citizens. As an added bonus – and characteristic of many Open Government initiatives described in this paper – the very process of developing the tool generated interest and excitement.<sup>5</sup>

### ***Recommendation 3: Post the City’s Check Registry Online***

As the economic downturn threw governments into financial turmoil, the focus on government spending appropriately, and understandably, intensified. In an effort to build public trust and improve transparency in fiscal operations, many jurisdictions are working to improve citizen access to government financial information – sometimes starting with the simple step of posting government bank statements on a website.

Cook County, Illinois has gone further in its effort to improve public access to the county’s financial information. The county put its entire check registry online and developed a searchable database including every non-payroll expenditure made by county government. The Cook County database can be searched by payee and month, and every expense has an amount and description listed.<sup>6</sup>

Here in Pennsylvania, the General Assembly is considering House Bill 15, the “Pennsylvania Web Accountability, Transparency and Contract Hub Act” or “PennWATCH Act.” The legislation will require all state government agencies, as well as the executive, legislative, and judicial branches, to report both their spending and their revenue sources. The intent of the legislation is to increase transparency,

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<sup>4</sup> See <http://phillydatacamp.com/projects/legislative-subscription>.

<sup>5</sup> See <http://technicallyphilly.com/2011/03/02/philly-data-camp-city-council-legislation-email-blast-philly-api-and-other-projects>.

<sup>6</sup> See [http://www.cookcountygov.com/portal/server.pt/community/open\\_county\\_initiative/320/check\\_register/493](http://www.cookcountygov.com/portal/server.pt/community/open_county_initiative/320/check_register/493).

eliminate redundancies, and save money. This step in the right direction at the state level needs to be matched here in Philadelphia.

To help citizens better understand how their tax dollars are being spent, I will introduce legislation requiring the City of Philadelphia to follow Cook County's lead by posting its check registry online, listing all non-payroll expenditures and identifying the purpose and recipient of each outlay. Placing this information online will open up the City's non-payroll spending to a new level of transparency and allow policymakers and members of the public to more clearly understand what tax dollars are being spent on and who is receiving public funds.

This also could help the City make wiser investments. Local public funds that leveraged or were otherwise supplemented by other private funding or additional funding from state and national government could be clearly and comprehensively identified and tallied, allowing greater insight into what public spending best attracts additional funding. We could then use this information to make spending decisions that maximize leverage, as appropriate.

#### ***Recommendation 4: Enhance Functionality/Substance of Contracting Websites***

While the City of Philadelphia spends well over a billion dollars every year on contracts for materials, supplies, equipment, and professional services, this significant area of public spending receives relatively little scrutiny. The City has made an effort to list its upcoming contracting opportunities online, but does not actively recruit interest from potential vendors online or provide detailed information about who is awarded City contracts (other than for professional services contracts) and the substance of their specific proposals.<sup>7</sup>

The first step to improving the City's contracts website is to create a notification system that informs potential vendors when new opportunities are posted. Informing businesses of contracting opportunities will encourage participation from a more diverse pool of potential vendors in contrast to the status quo, which seems to depend upon businesses visiting the site daily in the hopes of identifying new, relevant bidding opportunities. Potential vendors should be able to customize their requests for notification so that, for example, engineers receive notice about engineering projects but not education curriculum development (unless, of course they have requested broader notice). The Greater Philadelphia Chamber of Commerce's new "eBid Connect" system is a well regarded improvement along these lines. The new system enables the

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<sup>7</sup> See <http://www.phila.gov/contracts/>.

Chamber to more assertively make business opportunities available to its members on both the client and vendor side via daily emails and customizable outreach settings.<sup>8</sup>

Step two is requiring the posting of detailed information regarding all bidders for City contracts, including the substance of their proposals and the chosen recipient for all City contracts, not just professional services contracts. Publishing complete information about City contracts is a critical component of meaningful transparency regarding City spending. Furthermore, the disclosure requirement should help foster a more efficient and effective bidding process, including streamlined record-keeping and implicit pressure to seek and compare apples to apples proposals. I will introduce legislation requiring the publication of this information.

In addition to improving the information available on the City's contracts-related websites, we must improve the sites' interfaces. "eContract Philly," the City's online portal providing information on non-competitively bid contract opportunities, is far from user-friendly. The website only functions properly when viewed in Internet Explorer on a Windows PC. As a result, industries that operate in a predominantly Mac-based environment – including design, film, etc. – are shut out of a system that is supposed to be transparent and open to all. This reduces the number of applications – and, thus, the overall quality of competition – for City contracts.

Furthermore, it is not possible to directly link to a specific contract or opportunity from the eContract Philly website. Without access to a hyperlink, guiding people to a specific bidding opportunity requires directing them to the website and then taking them through step-by-step, detailed instructions to find the particular contract opportunity.

An intuitive, well-designed and contemporary website is an indicator of an organization's overall ability to effectively market itself, both online and off. The City's websites in general – and our bid-letting interface specifically – should exemplify innovation and user-friendliness, opening the door to the investment opportunities available within the City, not frustrating potential users by being stuck in the past.

The technology exists to improve the City's contracts-related websites; now we just need to embrace it.

### ***Recommendation 5: Post Financial Disclosure Statements Online***

Under existing state and city laws, elected officials, candidates, and many public employees are required to file annual Statements of Financial Interest with the Department of Records or their supervisors. These statements require elected officials

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<sup>8</sup> See <http://www.greaterphilachamber.com/Resources.aspx?PageContentID=434>.

and public employees with significant decision-making authority to disclose their sources of income, creditors, business interests, and certain real estate interests. These records are available for public inspection by visiting the Records Department in City Hall, but are not available online.<sup>9</sup> To enhance transparency and accountability, I will introduce legislation requiring the Records Department to post these disclosure statements online – something the state has done for years.<sup>10</sup>

The public has a right to know from what sources their public officials receive income or gifts, to whom they are in debt, and whether they have significant business or real estate interests. Personal information, such as home addresses and telephone numbers, could be redacted for privacy purposes.

Accessing this information should not require citizens to make an inconvenient and time-consuming trip to City Hall or City personnel to spend time photocopying documents in response information requests. The City has made campaign finance reports available online for years by requiring campaigns to file reports electronically. Financial disclosure statements should be filed and posted electronically as well.

#### ***Recommendation 6: Create an Online Directory of Boards and Commissions***

Philadelphia has dozens of boards and commissions that adjudicate administrative matters and provide policy recommendations to elected officials on a range of subjects. From the Board of Building Standards to the Zoning Board of Adjustment, these entities exercise significant decision-making powers that impact citizens' lives in substantive ways. Despite the influence and impact of these boards and commissions, the public rarely knows who serves on them, who appointed the members, what their duties are, and what compensation they receive, if any.

To improve the public's understanding of how government functions on a day-to-day basis, we need to improve public access to information about what these boards and commissions do and who sits on them. The City of Chicago recently accomplished this goal by creating an online database of all boards and commissions. The searchable database lists every City board and commission and explains the functions and membership of each.<sup>11</sup>

Philadelphia should implement and expand on the Chicago model by concisely explaining how each board and commission relates to the work of City departments, including license and permit approvals processes. To do so, the City should create a

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<sup>9</sup> To download the specific forms and find out who is required to submit each form, visit:

<http://www.phila.gov/ethicsboard/financialdisclosure.html>.

<sup>10</sup> See [www.ethics.state.pa.us](http://www.ethics.state.pa.us).

<sup>11</sup> See <http://webapps.cityofchicago.org/moboco/org/cityofchicago/moboc/controller/view/welcome.do>.

centralized and easy to navigate section of its website with information about all boards and commissions. To this end, I am introducing legislation requiring the City to publish online the following information about every board, commission, and quasi-governmental entity exercising municipal functions:

- Powers and duties of the entity;
- Enabling legislation creating the entity;
- List of board members, primary employer and job title, who appointed them, and when their terms started and will expire;
- Past and current meeting agendas;
- Contact information, including phone number and mailing address;
- Time and location of past and future meetings;
- Minutes from previous meetings;
- Rules and bylaws, including procedures for public comment; and
- Links and tie-ins with the work and approvals of City departments.

Setting up a website detailing the required information should be straightforward, and a link to it should be prominently posted on [www.phila.gov](http://www.phila.gov), as well as on the websites for the Mayor and City Council.

## **Hold Government Accountable for Spending by Reforming the Budget Process**

In the public sector, just as in the private sector, we should be focused on expanding what works and shutting down what does not – and we should pursue this approach not only in times of limited resources, like now, but also as part of our basic fiduciary duty to deliver value to citizens. But our ability as a government to do so is undermined by the input-focused structure of the City budget, which merely describes what money is coming in and how the City plans to spend it. We need a budget for the 21st Century – one that is structured around the outcomes generated through the expenditure of tax-dollars – in order to make data-based budgetary decisions. Furthermore, we need to share this outcome information broadly with the public to both solicit input from citizens about their priorities and also provide them with the tools to hold government accountable for delivering promised results.

### ***Recommendation 7: Adopt Outcome-Based Budgeting***

Philadelphia organizes its annual operating budget using a format that broadly aggregates spending into a few categories (e.g., salaries, contracted services, supplies and equipment, debt service, and so on) for each department. This approach was

established in the City's Home Rule Charter, adopted in 1951. The general format of Philadelphia's budget has changed very little in the last 60 years: funding is organized by department and bureaucratic unit, rather than by particular service provided linked to a desired outcome that should be achieved.

The form of the City budget may have sufficed decades ago, but in times of increasingly scarce public resources, with an appropriate appetite for greater public scrutiny and advanced technology to make information publicly available, it does not provide sufficient data to make informed budgeting decisions. Hamstrung by this dated structure, the overarching budget discussion is usually framed as "What is the increase or decrease compared with last year?" rather than "What results do we want? What is the best and most cost-effective way to achieve them? How are we tracking the results of our investment?" Until we know the cost and effectiveness of what we do, we will continue making incremental changes to department budgets year over year — upwards, more often than not — without sufficiently understanding the value received for the money or better ways to realize our goals.

The antiquated structure also limits the ability of different departments to plan collaboratively. We know from experience — for instance in the work of the Criminal Justice Advisory Board in reducing the City's prison population from close to 10,000 to under 8,000 inmates over the past two years, while saving taxpayers \$25 million — that City departments must collaborate more effectively to improve services, but our current budget structure neither reflects nor incentivizes this kind of cross-agency work that we know can deliver both savings and improved outcomes.

Philadelphia needs a new budget process commensurate with the size and complexity of modern-day government operations and spending, and based on outcomes, not inputs. To accomplish this goal, I have introduced legislation<sup>12</sup> that would require the City to:

- detail the true cost of each function funded with tax dollars, set performance goals for each such function, and report annually on how well these goals are met;
- perform and disclose cost-benefit analysis for all capital projects (on which the City plans to spend over \$3 billion this coming fiscal year), including the rationale for proceeding with projects for which costs exceed the benefits;
- annually submit a five-year IT strategic plan outlining how the City will use technology to improve performance goals and reduce the cost of government..

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<sup>12</sup> See Bill Nos. 100490, 100491, and 100492 at <http://legislation.phila.gov/mattersearch/Index.aspx>.

Under this legislation, City departments would be required to state clearly what they will deliver for the funds appropriated for each individual program, not for the department as a whole. This will enable us to set a measure of expected productivity enhancements year after year, even for programs that are working well.

Governments across the United States – local, state, and federal – already use outcome-based budgeting, cost allocation, cost-benefit analysis, and strategic planning. Jurisdictions using budgeting for outcomes include Iowa, Michigan, Dallas, and Baltimore, and the state of Washington moved to a program-based budgeting system in under a year. It is time for Philadelphia to join the club.

While outcome-based budgeting represents a sea change for the City, it may, in fact, be a change embraced by City departments. The focus on outcomes will encourage departmental leaders to focus on future improvement, and provides them with a framework for seeking the resources needed to realize that outcome. It will also encourage department heads to better align and coordinate their work with that of their fellow department heads because the structure of the budget will facilitate (and even incentivize) sharing resources to realize mutually agreed upon and desired outcomes.

The City needs to start the data-gathering and analysis now so that next year's budget and five-year plan set forth concrete outcomes for programs against which we can measure progress. This effort should piggyback on related analysis that is needed for the City's planned \$120 million investment in technology. We need to understand what we are doing now so we can deploy technology to improve our operations, not just replicate existing, oftentimes inefficient processes.

City government must set concrete performance goals and hold itself accountable for meeting those goals. That includes defunding programs that are not delivering results. Otherwise, we are not holding up our end of our bargain with citizens. Philadelphians are right to expect more of us.

***Recommendation 8: Improve Public Access to Budget Information***

As do most major cities, the City of Philadelphia includes budget information on its website ([www.phila.gov](http://www.phila.gov)), and has done so for years, but the information is both lacking in sufficient detail and often difficult for the public to understand. For example, the City posts a summary of its operating budget and Five-Year Plan online, but does not provide easy access to the supporting detail that breaks down how each department plans to spend its resources and shows year-over-year changes. Although the City now

posts the budget detail on the Office of the Director of Finance's website,<sup>13</sup> it does so via three large PDF documents that are hundreds of pages each and not easy for a casual visitor to the City's website to find.

I am introducing legislation that will improve online access to the City's operating budget. Pursuant to this legislation, each operating department would be required to include detailed information about its budget on its departmental website so the public knows what the department does with its funds and how much particular services cost to perform. Further to the goals of transparency and public access, this information must be released in search-able, index-able, and download-able formats (e.g., Excel, CSV, ZIP) that allow for data-mining. Additionally, the Office of the Director of Finance would be required to break down by department and program function the supporting detail posted on its website, rather than simply uploading three large documents with hundreds of pages for people to sift through.

As is the case with the open data policy described previously, the mere process of compiling this information and preparing it for improved public access will elucidate currently obscure or difficult to discern information, comparisons and patterns that will be of use to both public officials and citizens.

## **Spur Civic Engagement and Facilitate Innovation**

In addition to enabling policymakers and concerned citizens to make more informed decisions while enhancing transparency about government operations, the Open Government approach includes creative ways to engage citizens and, potentially, help start businesses.

### ***Recommendation 9: Increase Access to Public Alerts***

For years, City Council has embraced technology to bring greater transparency to its operations. All scheduled committee hearings are posted on Council's website, along with an agenda for each meeting and the full text of all introduced bills.<sup>14</sup> Council's website also features full transcripts of committee hearings and full sessions in searchable PDF format, allowing members of the public to read the testimony and debate on any particular piece of legislation. There is still work for Council to do –

<sup>13</sup> See [http://www.phila.gov/finance/FY10\\_Budget\\_Detail.html](http://www.phila.gov/finance/FY10_Budget_Detail.html).

<sup>14</sup> See [www.phila.gov/citycouncil/](http://www.phila.gov/citycouncil/) or <http://legislation.phila.gov>

including implementing Recommendation 2 above and also going paperless<sup>15</sup> – but if Council can use the internet to bring this much transparency to its operations, other City agencies can as well.

City government routinely considers issues and makes investment decisions that can have a significant impact on particular neighborhoods. Unless a citizen is hyper-vigilant and checks dozens of websites and several newspapers regularly, however, it is difficult to learn about these matters in advance.

To improve public engagement and enhance the average citizen's ability to understand what is going on in his or her neighborhood, I will introduce legislation requiring the City to create a program that allows citizens to sign up for various email alerts on matters of interest. These alerts should include specific information about the pending matters and when they are up for consideration, details on how public comments can be submitted on the issue prior to a decision being made, and an explanation of any post-decision appeal process. Oftentimes issues and disputes arise not solely because of a decision, standing alone, but due to the lack of an explanation for why it was made. Better guidance to decision-making forums can help ameliorate these friction points. Rather than the standard flare ups when people become understandably upset upon finding out about an issue after a decision has been made, we can use technology to spur proactive, positive civic engagement.

Under this model a citizen could, for example, go to a centralized City website, enter her street and email addresses, and select what types of issues are of concern to her. Applications for building permits, zoning variances, and malt beverage licenses, for example, could be distributed electronically to people within the relevant ZIP code or user-defined radius. Pending Council legislation pertaining to particular properties, streets, or commercial corridors should also be included in these alerts. Sheriff sale information could also be included, opening up that clearly problematic process to a wider audience, with simple maps that highlight the properties being auctioned by address rather than an otherwise opaque lot or writ number.<sup>16</sup>

Several City agencies have begun to embrace social media tools, most notably Facebook and Twitter, to interact with the public. This is a step in the right direction and other agencies should be encouraged to follow suit. Social media is not only a quick and cost-effective way to alert the public, it also provides the opportunity for a back-and-forth interaction, something which subscription emails rarely provide.

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<sup>15</sup> Philadelphia City Council should follow Sacramento Council's example and go completely paperless. The process will not only reduce paper and the expenses that it requires, but will, like in Sacramento, push improvements in how Council functions. See <http://www.govtech.com/technology/Making-a-Paperless-City-Council-040511.html>.

<sup>16</sup> See <https://philadelphiasheriffsales.com/info/help#g.7>.

Finally, in recognition of the fact that 40% of Philadelphia households lack at-home Internet access, the City should also explore ways to disseminate information via text message, as cell phone use is widespread. Several agencies are already doing so: the Center City District and Philadelphia Police Department partnered to create Alert Philadelphia, an email and text messaging service to provide immediate notification of emergencies.<sup>17</sup> The Philadelphia Department of Public Health (PDPH) and SEPTA have similar text messaging services. When it comes to notifying the public, we need to be creative about pushing information out to citizens through multiple platforms to ensure as wide-spread dissemination as possible.

### ***Recommendation 10: Sponsor an Annual Apps Competition***

In concert with the enactment of an Open Government ordinance and at a suitable milestone in the development of the central online data warehouse, the City should sponsor an annual public competition to develop new computer applications to utilize the data and generate publicity and excitement about the new resources that have been made available. The competition should be held in close collaboration with Philadelphia's vital entrepreneurial, civic, and technology organizations to maximize its impact and inclusion and bring these creative, talented individuals into the fold.

Cities throughout the country have sponsored similar contests. Washington, D.C. recently held a widely publicized "Apps for Democracy" competition, which leveraged \$50,000 in prize money to encourage software developers to create 47 new iPhone, Facebook, and web applications in 30 days. The competition yielded \$2.3 million worth of new applications.<sup>18</sup> Many of the applications developed during the competition are now available for the public to download on computers or handheld devices, enabling end-users to have new and highly useful information at their fingertips. It was also fun and a great inexpensive piece of publicity for the District, drawing the attention of exactly the type of citizen and worker we would like to have more of here in Philadelphia.

A wide variety of applications were developed from D.C.'s competition. For example, one app maps bicycle lanes, Metro stations, parks, and bike routes to make the City more accessible to avid cyclists. Another shows where popular bars are located and aggregates this locational data with crime reports from particular times of day, allowing users to find a safe way home. A third plots parking regulations on a map, allowing users to identify what streets they can park on at particular days and times without getting a ticket (an app we could expect to have great appeal here in the land of "Parking Wars").<sup>19</sup>

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<sup>17</sup> See <http://www.centercityphila.org/about/Crime.php> for more information.

<sup>18</sup> See [www.appsfordemocracy.org](http://www.appsfordemocracy.org) for more information about the D.C. contest.

Once Philadelphia has a sizable data warehouse online, I will introduce legislation appropriating sufficient funds for City Council to sponsor an apps contest and commit to holding it annually. For the small cost of prize money and hosting a few modest events the contest would provide a venue for talented software developers based locally and nationally to develop computer applications that have value to both the public and policymakers. These applications would give a useful purpose to the City's raw data sets in a very inexpensive manner. Were the City to contract with software developers to create apps for its own use, it would likely spend tens of thousands of dollars to create each one without garnering the same level of open creativity a competition inculcates or the same level of promotion and hype. For the small price of prize money, the City can instead leverage the competitiveness and ingenuity of our creative sector to develop useful apps at minimal expense through an open competition.

## **Conclusion**

Open Government Philadelphia – both as a philosophical approach to how government should work and as a series of concrete actions – is aligned with the City's current needs, its upcoming challenges, and, importantly, its available resources. This is no “unfunded mandate” – we are poised to spend \$120 million dollars on upgrades to the City's technology systems over the next six years.

But for this investment to yield the return we hope for and desperately need – namely, innovation that increases the effectiveness of city government while reducing its size and cost, rather than just upgrading paper-based systems to a computer-based platform without changing the way our city actually works – we must proceed with purpose, foresight, and a bold vision. Enacting the Open Government platform will help us deploy this pending funding in a catalytic, future-oriented way. We can go beyond business as usual and, instead, precipitate the workflow and systems changes we know are needed and that Open Government can help implement.

Other considerations also suggest that now is a unique time for this effort. Approximately 40% of the City's workforce is reaching retirement age in the next five years, making this a historic opportunity to use the smart implementation of technology, combined with a major capital infusion, workflow analysis, and re-training to fundamentally alter how the City conducts its businesses, and helps others conduct theirs.

By design, this paper was released during Philly Tech Week 2011 – a week-long series of events offering numerous bright examples of the creativity, collaboration,

innovation, and civic engagement that is characteristic of the City's invaluable, vibrant technology community. Philly Tech Week, and the people it engages, are showcasing many of the tenets and features of Open Government: transparency, improved decision-making, entrepreneurship, business development, and really cool ideas that engage citizens. It is time we took the best practices from this future-leaning sector of our local economy and brought them to City government. Citizens deserve no less and our future as a growing, vibrant City depends on it.