278-2024

Communication

Request of Wayne Gazzola to address Council regarding artificial intelligence processes in democracy

Placed on File

A brief description of Communication: AI processes in democracy

Agenda Items

278 Communications in **April 10-11, 2024 Council Agenda (https://www.portland.gov/council/agenda/2024/4/10)**

Placed on File

Requested Agenda Type

Communications

Date and Time Information

Requested Council Date
April 10, 2024

I meant to cancel this communication as I need more time for reading a number of books and then writing my thoughts out on this. Please share the following written communication with council:

[COMMUNiCATION] AI processes in government:

I ask the council to consider the implementation of an AI process for public records requests – key word 'consider'. Too much change, too fast, can be dangerous when applied to government.

The general trend of government for the last millennia has been increased power to people. To this end, AI may be he next stage of advancement if it is seen as a tool to enhance the powers of engagement among people as well as to educate them.

In our current democratic Republic a significant problem is that we grant such power to things of popularity. Consider however, the possibility that the real problem is not that popularity, a collective phenomena which is subject to groupthink, is the problem so much as it is the fact that only the dumbest things can become popular.

In the original democracy in the ancient city of Athens a matter would not be voted on unless and until citizens had reached a consensus after a process of engaging with one another at a public space so as to challenge one another's thinking and educate each another. Only 60-70 years ago it at least could be said public representatives did something similar among one another. They did so across partisan lines and behind closed doors. Then the video camera demanded entrance to every political discussion and representatives became even more subject to the stupidity of tabloid news culture. Partisanship since then has grown unchecked. Now it has come to this; our primary civic engagement processes are essentially owned and trademarked by Facebook and X. Other than this our civic engagement process is boiled down to three minute presentations once a month facing council instead of one another.

Now imagine an AI implemented for public records request. Whereas it used to be a time consuming matter to inquire about some building or park getting closed, the end results of which may well depend on your choice of wording or on someone else's willingness to help, and in the end it will be unclear how this closure might relate to something else, an AI could incentivize people to engage by streamlining this process.

Another application which would be of even greater benefit to the public is that an AI implemented for public records would help check politicians in their unethical abuse of the word 'data'. Real science is about withstanding scrutiny, not just digging through a pile of evidence to find what suits what we want to sell to the public. And there is a reason in science that plans evolve from principles, and principles evolve from our understanding of nature. But in politics this process is reversed; plans are implemented only partly based on principles which could withstand serious scrutiny. In lieu of rigorous vetting of these principles in which policy is based, the infamous 'united front' is sought by bureaucrats and politicians - as though numerical uniformity can replace basic laws of nature and human logic. By the time this strategy gains any ground, election time comes around and it's rinse and repeat; we start back at square one.

Meanwhile, to some extent representatives cannot form and live by morals because morals are not always popular.

Among a number of potential drawbacks are the repercussions of this scheme is the largely unknown prospect of what might happen should people becoming more empowered. The more one studies the popular mind (e.g. groupthink) the more one understands how dangerous it could be to give it more unchecked power. Again though, much of that probably stems from the fact that it is a groupthink instead of a case of a number of EDUCATED INDIVIDUALS collectively forming a consensus and voting on something which our current civic engagement process is conducive towards.

In the words of the influential Karl polyani, "too much change, too fast, is never a good thing". On the other hand, it might be best to get ahead of the notion of AI making it's way into government and to Implement it in a very modest and gradual fashion, else the thought gain traction with the public and the pressure to let it into the government bubble builds up to the point that the bubble simply collapses one day.

*Ted, I'd say in your last six months plant a seed for something that is worth planting, but by now I know you lack morals.

Wayne Gazzola

On Tue, Apr 9, 2024, 9:13 AM Council Clerk <no-reply@zoom.us> wrote:
> Hi 278. Wayne Gazzola,
>
> This is a reminder that "City Council Meeting - Wednesday, April 10, 2024 9:30 a.m." will

begin in 1 day on:
Date Time: Apr 10, 2024 09:30 AM Pacific Time (US and Canada)

See below for important hearing tips

Join from a PC, Mac, iPad, iPhone or Android device:
Click Here to Join
Note: This link should not be shared with others; it is unique to you.
Passcode: 6$9pzk2xp
Add to Calendar   Add to Google Calendar   Add to Yahoo Calendar

Or join by phone:

US: 888 788 0099 (Toll Free)
Webinar ID: 868 2510 7070
International numbers available: https://us06web.zoom.us/u/kv4KN9tPi

Visit https://linktr.ee/CouncilClerk to view the agenda, testimony order, and more information about participating in the meeting.