Agenda Item 1374 TESTIMONY REGULAR AGENDA

36735

OPEN SOURCE TECHNOLOGY

IF YOU WISH TO **SPEAK** TO CITY COUNCIL, **PRINT** YOUR **NAME, ADDRESS, AND EMAIL.**

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Date 09-30-09

Supporting Statement **September 30, 2009**

CITY OF PORTLAND
OPEN DATA RESOLUTION

Joel Donaldson: Public Servant in Information Management. Degrees from Reed College and PSU in Communitarian public policy and information management. Technology Professional since 1997 working on technology projects in U.S. Senate and PSU e-Government program. Most recently Strategic Technology Analyst and Management Analyst for City of Portland Bureau of Technology Services. Also, for fun, a technology advisor and project manager for social science study dependent entirely on open source - Virtual Destinations and Student Learning in Middle School: A Case Study.

I applaud the Mayor for taking such a bold step for open government, cost savings, and job creation for our region. This is potentially a historic moment for the City and the region. As another great explorer once said, this is "one small step for a man; one giant leap for mankind".

The growing chorus of arguments for Open Government are compelling. Tim O'Reilly, for example, is one of the most widely known champions of open government (see attachment: Tim O'Reilly, "Gov 2.0: The Promise Of Innovation: Can government become a platform of, for and by the people?", Forbes.com, August 10, 2009).

We want results, so it is important to understand critical success factors. One of the factors most critical to long term success in the open government movement is understanding and effectively addressing the special interests involved. Open source issues are particularly hairy because of the cultural conflict involved.

The foundation of the open source movement is a new philosophy, a new way of decision-making that is more communitarian, democratic, and collaborative. It's based on wide-spread access to information and open collaboration – a meritocractic way of thinking that invites feedback from everyone, regardless of official status or formal training, and frequent releases of interim versions to encourage testing, feedback, and quick evolution to a better solution to the problem.

This is not just about software development. It's about how information is shared and how decisions are made. Increasingly in this information age, he who has the information is king. The open movement is demonstrating that there is a better way – the democratization of information and decision-making. Consider Wikipedia that essentially rendered MS Encarta moot. Consider the campaign fund-raising and election of our President, the healthcare debate, and even the financial reforms to more effectively ensure that the actions of the 1% who control 99% of the wealth in this country benefit the 99%, not just the 1%. Decision-making is becoming more democratic.

Yet these collaborative and uniquely democratic ways of making decisions making scare some. In order to understand the issues the City will face in introducing this open approach to data and open source, and the cultural challenges involved – it is important to clearly understand the different perspectives involved. From my experience, limits in technology, tools, or processes rarely present a policy or organizational challenge. Rather, the real challenges are the limits and boundaries in people's minds.

The traditional approach to development is: "Too many cooks spoil the broth". Called "Brooks' Law", this approach assumes that only a small select few are capable of, have an understanding of, and therefore should be allowed to, design, create and improve the solution. The rest of us should be passive users or executors of their will. This approach, however, is based on the assumption that others don't have necessary information and coordination of many collaborators is prohibitively complex and expensive.

The new open paradigm makes the opposite assumption: "Given enough eyeballs, all bugs are shallow". Called the "Linus Law", the assumption is that quality solutions, are the result of massive collaboration based on open access to the information.

This assumption is proving true for the first time in history because of the internet and today's collaborative and information sharing technologies. Many academics are predicting a revolution in knowledge creation as this method moves beyond software to include all information and all review processes in our society.

But this change is slow and faces massive resistance throughout our society, particularly traditional industries. Why this resistance to progress? Because it requires a change in people's minds, not to mention it forces countless industries to revisit their business models and profit expectations.

Public policy that changes traditional ways of thinking is like moving an iceberg. The resistance will come from the informal, and often unspoken, side of our organizations, institutions, even public policies – the "culture". Industry's "bread and butter" often depends on maintaining long-standing ways of thinking about information access and decision-making. I would argue that unless there is evidence that an equally massed force is on the open source side, a full frontal assault will fail. It requires understanding its internal motivations and leveraging those interests in a common direction.

The City should consider this only the first step in a long-term journey to a truly open and "enlightened" City, Region, State and Country. We must clearly understand and define a long-term and carefully orchestrated roadmap to our vision for an Open City that truly enables the success of its residents and business partners.

Gov 2.0: The Promise Of Innovation: Can government become a platform of, for and by the people?

By Tim O'Reilly, Forbes.com, August 10, 2009

Over the past 15 years, the World Wide Web has created remarkable new business models reshaping our economy. As the Web has undermined old media and software companies, it has demonstrated the enormous power of a new model, often referred to as Web 2.0.

Now, a new generation has come of age with the Web and is committed to using its lessons of creativity and collaboration to address challenges facing our country and the world. The Facebook Causes application has more than 60 million registered users who are leveraging the power of social networks to raise money for charity. Meetup.com helps interest groups formed on the Web get together in person--and a remarkable number of groups do so for civic purposes. A quick search turns up nearly 20,000 meetups devoted to cleaning up local parks, streets and neighborhoods. Twitter and YouTube have played major roles in helping organize political protests in Iran's recent election. Everyblock and Stumblesafely take government crime statistics and turn them into public safety applications for the Web or iPhone. The list goes on.

Meanwhile, with the proliferation of issues and not enough resources to address them all, many government leaders recognize the opportunities inherent in harnessing a highly motivated and diverse population not just to help them get elected, but to help them do a better job. By analogy, many are calling this movement "Government 2.0."

President Obama exhorted us to rise to the challenge: "We must use all available technologies and methods to open up the federal government, creating a new level of transparency to change the way business is conducted in Washington, and giving Americans the chance to participate in government deliberations and decision-making in ways that were not possible only a few years ago."

There is a new compact on the horizon: Government maintains information on a variety of issues, and that information should rightly be considered a national asset. Citizens are connected like never before and have the skill sets and passion to solve problems affecting them locally as well as nationally. Government information and services can be provided to citizens where and when they need it. Citizens are empowered to spark the innovation that will result in an improved approach to governance.

This is a radical departure from the old model of government, which Donald Kettl so aptly named "vending machine government." We pay our taxes; we get back services. And when we don't get what we expect, our "participation" is limited to protest--essentially, shaking the vending machine.

In the vending-machine model, the full menu of available services is determined beforehand. A small number of vendors have the ability to get their products into the machine, and as a result, the choices are limited, and the prices are high.

Yet there is an alternate model, which is much closer to the kind of government envisioned by our nation's founders, a model in which, as Thomas Jefferson wrote in a letter to Joseph Cabel, "every man ... feels that he is a participator in the government of affairs, not merely at an election one day in the year, but every day." In this model, government is a convener and an enabler--ultimately, it is a vehicle for coordinating the collective action of citizens.

So far, you may hear echoes of the dialog between liberals and conservatives that has so dominated political discourse in recent decades. But big government versus small government is in many ways beside the point. To frame the debate in terms familiar to technologists, the question is whether government is successful as a platform.

If you look at the history of the computer industry, the most successful companies are those that build frameworks that enable a whole ecosystem of participation from other companies large and small. The personal computer was such a platform. So was the World Wide Web. But this platform dynamic can be seen most vividly in the recent success of the Apple (AAPL - news - people) iPhone. Where other phones have a limited menu of applications developed by the phone provider and a few carefully chosen partners, Apple built a framework that allowed virtually anyone to build applications for the phone, leading to an explosion of creativity, with more than 50,000 applications appearing for the phone in less than a year, and more than 3,000 new ones now appearing every week.

This is the right way to frame the question of "Government 2.0." How does government itself become an open platform that allows people inside and outside government to innovate? How do you design a system in which all of the outcomes aren't specified beforehand, but instead evolve through interactions between the technology provider and its user community?

The Obama administration's technology team has taken the first steps toward rethinking government as a platform provider. One of the first acts by Vivek Kundra, the national CTO, was to create data.gov, a catalog of all the federal government's Web services. (Web services, as opposed to static government Web sites, provide raw government data, allowing third parties to build alternate services and interfaces to government programs.) The Sunlight Foundation's Apps for America Contest (modeled on the successful Apps for Democracy program that Kundra ran while CIO of Washington, D.C.) is seeking to kick off the virtuous circle of citizen innovation using these data services.

Rather than licensing government data to a few select "value added" providers, who then license the data downstream, the federal government (and many state and local governments) are beginning to provide an open platform that enables anyone with a good idea to build innovative services that connect government to citizens, give citizens visibility into the actions of government and even allow citizens to participate directly in policy-making.

That's Government 2.0: technology helping build the kind of government the nation's founders intended: of, for and by the people.

Tim O'Reilly is the founder and CEO of O'Reilly Media, a premier computer book publisher. Tim is chaired Gov 2.0 Summit with Richard O'Neill.