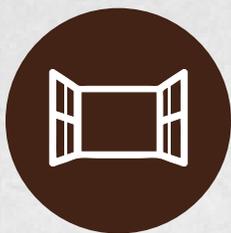


MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT & OPEN DATA: MAKING TRANSPARENCY MORE THAN A BUZZWORD



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MAY 13, 2014

KEY POINTS

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- *Transparency in government is desirable for the purposes of accountability and innovation.*
 - *Because of technology, the onus can shift from keeping data private until someone seeks its release, to being available unless there is a reason to keep it private.*
 - *Data should be kept private if it is for security or privacy reasons. Decisions about what information is private should be based on a set of publicly available and vetted criteria.*
 - *Open data is that which is freely available to be used by anyone with minimal restrictions. Open data enables citizens to find solutions to city issues and to create beneficial services.*
 - *Transparency is a question of how easily the public can put their government's claims to the test and figure out how it came to the decisions it did.*
 - *Transparency becomes more difficult as governments grow and become more complex. Fewer layers of government make it less easy to hide corruption.*
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CAN BE POINTED OUT AND
CORRECTED.”*

– President Harry S. Truman



1. INTRODUCTION

Transparency is a buzzword that politicians love to use during campaigns. It is one of those words that George Orwell would associate with *democracy, freedom, patriotism, and justice* – they are words almost universally felt to mean something praiseworthy but can mean something different to the person saying it than to the listener (1946). Politicians frequently talk about the need for government to be more open and accountable – agreeing these are fundamental qualities of a democracy.

Politicians also love to use social media and modern technology to engage voters, especially during campaigns. They create Facebook pages, Twitter accounts, and post informative videos on YouTube.

Several Calgary Councillors and City staff are adept with social media and emphasize the importance of increasing openness in government. Mayor Naheed Nenshi proclaimed September 26-30, 2011, “Right to Know Week,” participating in a federal initiative emphasizing the need for citizens to know what their governments are doing. The Week helps to raise public awareness of Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act (FOIP), which grants citizens the right of access to records in the custody or control of public bodies (Jacoby, 2011).

On October 1, 1995, Alberta’s FOIP Act came into effect, aiming to strike an appropriate balance between the public’s right to know and a right to privacy. The legislation came into effect for the City of Calgary in 1999 (City of Calgary, 2014a). The process of obtaining records typically involves paying a fee and waiting for the request to be processed. Then, if the information is not subject to a specific exemption set out in the FOIP Act, the information will be sent to the requester.

Mayor Nenshi sums up the spirit of transparency in his blog, writing, “We cannot let only legislation be the way citizens collect information about their government. Instead, we must

commit to sharing more than what is ‘required’ – we must take our own action to explain our decisions, provide background information, and let citizens into government” (2011).

Governments are in luck. The modern technology they utilize while campaigning and communicating with the public makes it easier for them to be proactive and transparent. Within seconds, anyone can upload data and share it with the world. No longer do governments need to print off thousands of pages and send them through the postal service when they receive a request.

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The onus can now shift from information being private unless someone seeks its release to data being publicly available unless there is a valid reason to keep the information private. When government information is leaked, people sometimes question why it was not publicly available in the first place. Incidents like this can have harmful ramifications for governments that do not want to be distrusted or perceived as having something to hide (Leonard, 2011).

Suzy Thompson suggests that the theme in 2012 for both the Alberta government and Calgary’s municipal government was transparency. She writes that whether “government has become more accountable and transparent over 2012, or has simply increased the rhetoric around the subject, is unclear” (2013). Politicians might mean something different than what the general public thinks when talking about *transparency*, *openness* or *accountability*.

Public discourse is needed on how transparency should be defined and what it looks like in practice. What specific information should be publicly available and how it can be obtained are important questions.

Transparency is not an “all or nothing” concept but is a spectrum of less transparent to more transparent. Calgarians need to determine where along this spectrum their city currently lies and where the optimum point is for the city to rest.

For privacy and safety reasons, transparency cannot mean that absolutely no information held by a government is private. On the other hand, releasing only select documents several years after they come into being is likely not transparent enough.

This paper will first explore the potential effects of wider information sharing, discussing how sharing data not only enhances democratic accountability but promotes innovation. It will consider reasons that governments might have to withhold information and whether these reasons are legitimate and concerned with the public interest. The second portion of the paper examines the level of transparency at Calgary's City Hall, specifically, and analyzes the steps Council has taken towards open government in comparison to other cities. This paper will conclude with suggestions to move Calgary toward a more open and democratic society, finishing with an argument that a smaller and less complex government has an easier time being transparent.

2. PROS AND CONS OF OPEN GOVERNMENT

Transparency in government is desirable for at least two reasons: accountability and innovation. Governments are more likely and better able to abuse their power if what they do is kept secret. Governments also possess significant amounts of information that non-governmental organizations and individuals can use to their benefit and to the benefit of society.

2.1 ACCOUNTABILITY

Accountability is a fundamental part of well-functioning democracy. In a democracy, the government is supposed to serve the people, and the people are the government's supervisors. If citizens do not approve of the way a government behaves and performs, they can vote the government out at the next election. The citizenry is better-able to keep elected officials accountable for their actions if they know what they do. For example, when it was discovered the City of Calgary paid the Pembina Institute \$340,000, City Council needed to justify this

decision. Debates took place over whether this action was improper or justified, with citizens taking different opinions (CBC News, 2013).

In order for people to evaluate whether the government acted appropriately in different circumstances, they need to know what information the government had to work with and what deliberations took place before decisions were made.

2.2 OPEN DATA & INNOVATION

Broadly speaking, open data is data that is freely available to be used by anyone, with minimal restrictions. (For more information on what constitutes open data, see Section 4.4) Governments possess data and collect statistics of a wide variety; it might be weather patterns, the number of car accidents at a certain intersection, or the locations of water fountains. Sharing this

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data encourages innovation and fosters job creation; available data enables citizens to find solutions to city issues or to create beneficial services.

History has shown that releasing government data has resulted in tremendous benefits to society. For example, when satellite information that used to be held by the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Agency became available for public use, global positioning systems (GPS) and weather forecasting tremendously benefited the public because of the products and thousands of jobs created (Newsom and Dickey, 2013). Bill Clinton said, "I predict [open data] will create a whole new class of employment demand, which is data sifters" (Newsom and Dickey, 2013, p. 32).

People do use data and technology; consider the success of the Apple iPhone. Unlike phone companies that offered users a limited menu of

applications, Apple built a framework allowing virtually anyone to build applications. This led to an explosion in creativity; in a little more than 18 months, more than 100,000 applications appeared, with many more appearing every week (O'Reilly, 2010).

Web 2.0 is the name given to a new approach to the Web. Sites such as Google, eBay, Wikipedia, Facebook and Twitter have learned how to harness the power of its users to add value to and co-create its offerings. Tim O'Reilly writes that:

the World Wide Web has created remarkable new methods for harnessing the creativity of people in groups... with the proliferation of issues and not enough resources to address them all, many government leaders recognize the opportunities Web 2.0 technologies provide 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 (2010, p.11).

O'Reilly goes on to say that information is the lifeblood of the economy and the nation, so the government has the responsibility to treat its information as a public asset. Citizens have the skills and passion necessary to solve local and national problems, and they are connected like never before (2010).

A great example of a Calgarian who took the City's data and did something positive with it is Dustin Jones. Through freedom of information, he obtained data on pedestrian collisions and plotted out the most dangerous intersections. Thanks to Jones, pedestrians and drivers can know which intersections they need to be particularly careful about crossing (Klingbeil, 2014).

2.3 REASONS OFFERED AS JUSTIFICATION NOT TO BE TRANSPARENT

Governments will offer justifications for keeping information secret, and some of the justifications involve reasonable concerns, while others do not. Some people may be opposed to governments sharing data because of privacy or safety concerns, the risk of data being misinterpreted, or because people may lose faith in the institution of government. People might also be unsure about the technical aspects and financial costs of open government.

2.3.1 PRIVACY

The reason most often used to justify not sharing government data is concern for the privacy of individuals. Most people agree individuals have a right to privacy to some extent or another, such as when it comes to their health records or financial situation. Despite the Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms lacking a specifically entrenched

right to privacy, the Supreme Court of Canada has protected privacy as a fundamental human right (Harris, 1997).

Governments are one of the largest holders of personal information (Harris, 1997). They have information about people that could be used in identity theft, such as a person's full legal name, date of birth, and Social Insurance Number. Even if some personal information is removed, identities can often be inferred with minimal information. People's privacy can still be violated if certain information is made public, whether or not it is intentionally used for harm or not.

Consider that if records after investigations of harassment or discrimination are made public, people are much less likely to discuss issues if they know their identities may be inferred or revealed. Public disclosure of investigations could have a "chilling effect" on further investigations (Schrier, 2010).

While privacy concerns are real, there is no fundamental conflict between privacy and open government. Canada already has privacy laws in place to provide guidance and protect individuals and the public. The practice of appointing a Privacy Commissioner to protect and promote the privacy rights of individuals began in 1977. The *Privacy Act* was also introduced the same year as the *Access to Information Act* in 1983, which places limits on the collection, use, and disclosure of personal

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information (Government of Canada, 2013). Governments have the option of re-evaluating and tweaking privacy policies and procedures before pursuing proactive disclosure of documents.

2.3.2 SAFETY

A second reason governments or the public may be against making government data freely available is a concern for public safety. For example, many cities refrain from making public the locations and natures of 911 calls. Revealing a specific address to which a domestic call was made could fuel additional

attacks on a victim (Schrier, 2010).

Some people, particularly in the United States, are also worried about terrorism. After September 11, 2001, policies were enacted to restrict access to information that had the potential to aid terrorists. Gary Bass, who is “about as doctrinaire as they come about the ‘public’s right to know,’” admits that some information removed from government sites following the September 11 attacks likely posed too great of a security threat during a time of war. He says, “Information that is uniquely available to one source and provides significant detail, such as maps or floor plans to potential targets, shouldn’t be on the web” (Eggers, 2005, p. 141).

Bass takes issue with what he sees to be arbitrary decisions about what information is pulled and kept private. He believes that decisions about what information is public should be based on a set of publicly available and vetted criteria (Eggers, 2005). If a government chooses not to publish a document because of public safety concerns, they must offer justification and be consistent in their judgments.

2.3.3 MISINTERPRETATION OF DATA

Some people are concerned about the potential for people to misinterpret data. United States

senators apparently had this concern. Derek Willis of the New York Times discovered a directory of XML files of voting records for past sessions on the Senate Web page. When he asked the Webmaster whether the voting data was available for the current session, he was told:

A few representative votes (only a few from the early congresses) were published out to the active site during some testing periods. I really need to remove them from the site... Senators prefer to be the ones to publish their own voting records. As you know, looking at a series of vote results by Senator or by subject does not tell the whole story. Senators have a right to present and comment on their votes to their constituents in the manner they prefer (Brito, 2010, p. 245).

Doubtless, politicians would prefer to control what and how information is released about them. Two years after Willis brought public attention to the issue, a group of senators – likely embarrassed – called for a repeal of the prohibition on publishing their voting records on XML. The senators wrote that this policy actually increased the likelihood of errors and omissions when outside groups were forced to create the databases. Moreover, the suggestion that senators would “intentionally hamstring the distribution of roll call votes... [to] put a better spin on them is concerning. The public is capable of interpreting our votes on its own”

(Brito, 2010, p. 245).

There is always the risk that some people will misinterpret data, whether or not the data came from government is irrelevant, and having open government data allows other organizations and individuals to make accurate interpretations and corrections. If the misunderstood data concerns persons within government, independent bodies are possibly able to defend the truth more effectively than the accused and already untrusted party. But the ultimate question when it comes to the interpretation of data is, “Who gets to be the judge?” In a democracy, the public get to be the judge.

2.3.4 LOSS OF FAITH IN GOVERNMENT

Perhaps senators in the example above were more worried about dealing with embarrassing questions from constituents than about the misinterpretation of data. Governments have an incentive not to be transparent because transparency is a potential threat to their political careers. In many ways, by being transparent, a government’s own administration is handing their political opponents exactly what they need to give the government bad publicity (Eggers, 2005).

Politicians may be hesitant to be transparent not because they are corrupt but because they

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are worried the entire institution will suffer from the scandals of one person who inappropriately claims expenses or because of the failure to achieve some goals. In response to this, former New York City Mayor Rudolph Giuliani says:

Putting all your performance statistics on the web creates a more realistic set of expectations for the public. You don't have to pretend that everything is perfect. The public expects a good-faith effort to improve things. As long as you've done this, the public will accept it if some statistics go in the wrong direction. It creates a more honest basis for building political support. It all comes down to how you define your role as governor or mayor: Are you trying to deliver better results or just trying to spin your constituents? (Eggers, 2005)

Archon Fung and David Weil would like to see the discourse on transparency shift from being merely focused on accountability and corruption to registering approval when governments perform well – when it protects the public interest and

solves problems effectively and justly (2010). Citizens have a responsibility to be positive, not just critical, if they expect governments to be transparent.

The benefits of open data likely outweigh the cons. It is human nature to behave better when someone is watching, so the more the public knows about what politicians are doing, the more inclined politicians will be to behave honourably and perform better (Newsom and Dickey, 2013).

2.3.5 TECHNICAL AND COST BARRIERS

In some cases, people in government may be unaware of what is technically possible or believe a switch would be prohibitively expensive (Brito, 2010). Governments continually face a question of costs, including how much money should be spent to keep and expose data.

Fortunately, it is getting remarkably less expensive to store electronic data. Consider that in 2010, Bill Schrier, the former chief technology officer for the City of Seattle, wrote that the City actively stored about five terabytes worth of e-mail. As a rule, e-mail was deleted after 45 days unless a user explicitly archived it. People criticized the municipal government for keeping the e-mails for too short a time, but saving e-mail for a year was estimated to require an additional initial storage cost of \$1.8 million for about 30 terabytes of data (Schrier, 2010). Now, only a few years later, a four

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terabyte drive can be purchased for a few hundred dollars (Shopbot.ca, 2014). There are still costs to storing data, but technology is becoming more efficient at a rapid rate.

Former Calgary Alderman Gord Lowe says subjects of FOIP requests are better made available publicly so citizens do not have to ask for them through a process that costs taxpayers. Lowe declares that often people do not know how much the process costs and how much time and effort the city spends in dealing with FOIP requests. Preparing documents can cost up to \$45,000, and more tedious requests can result in a fee of \$6.75 per 15 minutes. If the information is publicly available and a person asks city employees to recompile it, he would like to see the person or organization pay the full costs of putting it together (Gandia, 2013).

Practicing open government ultimately does have its financial costs, and taxpayers need to decide

whether the costs are worth it. While the majority of society might not make FOIP requests or go online to examine government documents, members of the media and government watchdog groups seek to learn how tax dollars are being spent and help to keep public officials “on their toes.” They generate public pressure for governments to improve their performance, and this in turn generates better performance (Eggers, 2005).

If no one were paying attention to the data being released, governments would have no qualms about releasing the data. Governments should work to minimize the costs of open government as much as possible, but open government ultimately promotes an efficient use of tax dollars.

2.4 GOALS OF OPEN GOVERNMENT

Importantly, transparency is a means to keep the government accountable, not the end goal. Brian Reich writes, “Too much attention has been paid to the process of making our government more transparent and not enough consideration has been given to whether the goals of transparency are truly being achieved” (2010, p. 134).

As people critique their government’s practices, they should keep in mind the goals of transparency and what they would like to be the result of open government. A goal might be to see taxpayer money spent more efficiently or to see the government more responsive to citizens with legitimate concerns or needs.

3. HOW IS CALGARY DOING?

Calgary's City Council sees public participation as a key measure of transparency, but transparency should be about how much information the City shares with its citizens. The information shared should be useful, understandable, and easy to find. Calgary has launched an Open Data Catalogue, a great step toward open government, but there is much room to expand its practice of data sharing. The City still keeps much of its business and data private.

3.1 ACCOUNTABILITY IN PRACTICE

On October 3, 2011, a policy came into effect in Calgary called the Transparency and Accountability Policy (CC039). In this policy, *transparency* is defined as:

The principle that The City of Calgary ensures the decision-making process is open and clear and actively encourages and fosters public participation in its decision-making processes to enhance public trust.

Accountability is defined as:

The principle that The City of Calgary ensures access to clear and understandable information and is responsible to the public for decisions and actions.

The City of Calgary states that it will, "Use transparency and accountability mechanisms, including public engagement that helps to ensure that Council decisions reflect citizen needs and priorities" (2011).

In her "2012 transparency report," Suzy Thompson notes that the government made an unprecedented effort to get public input on budget priorities, including inviting the public to make presentations in council and conducting in-person, telephone and online surveys (2013). Transparency and accountability at Calgary's City Hall appear to be as much about public engagement as about openness, but ironically the public engagement process is not open. It caters to special interest groups and can be used by politicians as merely a public relations tool (See Heinrichs, *The Consulter's Conceit: How Phony Public Consultations Undermine Democracy and the Market*, 2013).

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Transparency should be more about the government sharing information, not about citizens sharing information with the government. Rather than ask how well the City engages the public, we should be asking how much and how well the City shares its own information.

Notably, Mayor Nenshi has published his office budget and expenses on his blog, a great step toward a more open and transparent government. Similarly, individual ward expense reports can be found on the City's Web site, though these reports do not include a Councillor's travel expenses (2014b).

Mayor Nenshi has also emphasized that for the purpose of transparency, he publishes on his blog the names of those he meets with in his office (Daorcey, 2011). Legislated requirements may be better than those dictated by convention, as it appears that politicians may "opt out" of their pledges at any time.

Mayor Nenshi has published meetings for the months of May 2011 until December 2013 on his blog, but not since then (Mayor Nenshi's Blog, accessed May 7, 2014). Regardless, publishing whom one has meetings with in one's office is an idea that falls short, because politicians and their staff can and do have meetings with people outside of their offices. This shortfall does not mean politicians must inform the public about every conversation they share with a person outside of their office, as these can be personal and private – not to mention an impossible task, but lobbyists sometimes take any available opportunity to speak with government officials, and will do so outside of their office. The public needs to keep this in mind.

Paul Hughes asserts that the mantra of imagineCALGARY is to "unlock the doors of government and let citizens in" but that, ironically, "the meetings about implementing this grand strategy are ***not open to the public or media***" (2012, emphasis added by Hughes).

Calgary's City Council conducted nearly a fifth of its business in camera, meaning in secret, after Nenshi's election as mayor. The vast majority of its meetings (78%) were closed to the public for at least some portion. Examples of in camera topics include downtown revitalization, composting, the "Calgary Kart Racing Club," golf courses, and seed funding for the Calgary Centre for Performing Arts (Farkas, 2013).

The City needs to explain to the public in plain language what matters they consider confidential. Because the meetings are held in secret, one has difficulty judging whether the reasons are legitimate. Notably, 16% of the motions to make deliberations secret were opposed unsuccessfully by at least one member of Council. (Farkas, 2013).

Councillors recently debated whether to disclose the salaries of City staff that make more than \$100,000. Licia Corbella believes that sunshine lists result in staff demanding higher wages, with their abilities to negotiate enhanced by knowledge of what their predecessors made and what other employees make (2013). Yet Councillor Ward Sutherland claims Winnipeg and Vancouver have not experienced wage inflation problems as a result (Markusoff, 2013). David Marsden writes that sunshine lists allow taxpayers to see the injustice that is being done when it comes to how much government employees make (2014), while Mike Morrison disagrees and writes, “in reality, the list will reveal the salaries of its scientists, engineers, mental health professionals, urban planners, lawyers, and policy officers... We also have to be honest with ourselves and say that \$100,000 is not the impressive salary that it used to be” (2014). Indeed, the effectiveness of sunshine lists is still undergoing study, and whether they are an acceptable infringement on staff’s privacy is a debate that Councillors, City staff, and Calgarians should have.

3.2 OPEN DATA IN CALGARY AND OTHER CITIES

In Canada, the city governments of Edmonton, Toronto, Mississauga, Vancouver, and Nanaimo were the first to introduce beta versions of open data portals. Following province-wide regulation in November 2009, Quebec municipalities also began pursuing proactive disclosure, including internal documents. In March 2010, Calgary’s City Council passed a motion to launch an open data pilot project in Calgary (Davies and Lithwick, 2010).

Table 1 illustrates data as available on May 8, 2014. It includes data found in each city’s Open Data Catalogue only; information that is given an “N” may still be available elsewhere on the City’s Web site or by contacting the City.

Calgary has recently revamped its Open Data Catalogue and added new data, such as 311 data pertaining to roads. However, the catalogue primarily constitutes of geospatial or census information that can often be discovered elsewhere, and it lacks information published by other Canadian cities. Edmonton currently has approximately 400 downloadable datasets, while Calgary has less than 100 (As of May 7, 2014).

A few years ago, the City of Edmonton said, “All over the world people have been demanding increased access to government information. New technology has made these requests a possibility”

**TABLE 1:
MUNICIPAL OPEN DATA AVAILABILITY
ACROSS CANADA**

	CALGARY	EDMONTON	VANCOUVER	OTTAWA	TORONTO
<i>Various Amenity Locations</i>	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<i>Election Data</i>	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<i>311 Service - Roads</i>	Y	Y	Y	Y	Y
<i>Census Data</i>	Y	Y	Y	N	N
<i>Traffic Counts/Volume</i>	N	Y	Y	N	Y
<i>Transit Schedule/Routes</i>	Y	Y	N	Y	Y
<i>Transit Usage</i>	N	Y	N	N	Y
<i>Council Voting Records</i>	N	Y	N	N	Y
<i>FOIP Statistics</i>	Y	N	N	N	Y
<i>Council Expenses</i>	N	N	Y	N	Y
<i>Council/Committee Meeting Statistics</i>	N	Y	N	N	Y
<i>Employee Count</i>	N	N	N	Y	N

Y indicates data available, N indicates unavailable. Data may be available elsewhere on City website.

(2010a). The City held an “Apps4Edmonton” contest in 2010. People were encouraged to create apps with publicly available data that would enhance the city in some way. Categories included livability, land use, environmental preservation and sustainability, transit and transportation, municipal planning, and economic development (2010b).

DinerInspect, one of the winning apps, was one of 32 apps submitted and one of 86 app ideas generated by the contest. DinerInspect allows users to search for the results of restaurant inspections based on location (City of Edmonton, 2010c). Likewise, Ottawa held an Apps4Ottawa in 2011 and 2013, generating numerous apps, such as “RentCompass,” apps showing transit arrival times

and apps showing events in the area (City of Ottawa, 2010-13).

The City of Calgary has much more data that could be released. The City began partnering with the University of Calgary in 2007, and university researchers are working with city employees to solve problems related to transportation and homelessness, for example. According to Urban Alliance team leader Darrel Danyluk in 2008:

Real-life, real-time data from the city that supports all projects within the Alliance are available to the university researchers through a unique data-sharing agreement. And that’s

no small resource. The city alone has more than 100,000 gigabytes of data on every conceivable topic about Calgary and the high quality of life that its citizens enjoy (Utoday, 2008).

“There is huge potential synergy for the city and the university to work together,” says Chris Wade, director of infrastructure services for the City of Calgary. “We need to start to re-think how we develop as cities. We have huge, pressing challenges and there is an opportunity here to find solutions to real problems” (Ouellet, 2007).

If the City desires public participation in solving pressing challenges, it should release the same data to all taxpayers who ultimately paid for the data to be collected. While the data Calgary has released is no doubt valuable, it is worth noting the concerns of Calgarians, as discovered by public opinion research. These concerns, in order of priority according to the Manning Foundation’s Second Poll of Calgarians’ Attitudes on Major Civic Issues (2013) are:

- Traffic congestion on Calgary roads
- The level of accountability of city councilors to the citizens they represent
- The cost of living for average families in Calgary
- The impact of the recent floods on the city’s finances
- The cost of housing for average families
- The amount of property taxes charged to Calgary property owners
- The personal safety and security of passengers at C-Train stations after dark
- Dealing with the \$52 million in overpaid school taxes
- The cost of city services to Calgary residents
- The amount of crime, drugs, theft and graffiti in the city
- The rate at which the City is growing
- The level of service and efficiency of the C-train service
- The availability of walking and bike paths in the City
- The complexity of dealing with City Hall
- Adequate support for local culture and arts in Calgary

Similarly, the City of Calgary's own Citizen Satisfaction Survey asked residents what they view to be the most important issue facing their community that should receive the greatest attention from their local leaders. Infrastructure, traffic, and roads rest at the top of Calgarians' issue agenda, with people particularly concerned about road conditions. Other issue areas that were mentioned include transit, flood related issues, growth and planning, taxes, affordable housing, and budget and spending (Ipsos Reid, 2013).

It is not clear how much Calgary's current Open Data Catalogue helps to hold the government to account and suggest improvements on these issues, but it is no doubt useful to be able to map the city with various data layers and know when transit is scheduled to arrive at different locations. Data regarding the finances, activities, and performance of city services is conspicuously absent (City of Calgary, 2013a). Data that encourages accountability is that which allows people to evaluate government performance. In order for citizens to determine whether transit is being effective and efficient, they must know the statistics on its usage and not simply the transit routes.

When cities publish information elsewhere on their Web sites, it is not always data that can be used in the same way as open data. For example, Calgary's Mobility Monitor reports on strategic trends and events that affect the implementation of the Calgary Transportation Plan. The reports imply that the City collects data on transit usage, but the data is compiled, interpreted, and placed

on the Web site in the form of PDF reports (City of Calgary, 2014c). The City should make the raw data available to citizens, as well, who can then draw their own conclusions and make additional insights. Similarly, historic traffic volume flow maps are published as part of the Transportation Collection Data Program, albeit in PDF format. Intersection turning movement counts can be purchased by contacting the City (City of Calgary, 2014d).

The City has an open data version of a list of licensed Calgary businesses. But if a person or organization wants addresses and additional information included, the City is selling it for \$2,275. Calgarians may want to ask why the City sells people's information to those who can afford it. The City also sells a file with Calgary's street names for \$64.17 (City of Calgary, 2013b).

4. RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CALGARY

The City of Calgary can take several steps to improve transparency. It can simply expand its existing practice of data sharing, but ultimately it should aim to publish any data that can be released without violating privacy or safety standards. The City could also share a list of files that it retains, even if the files themselves are not published.

4.1 EXPANDING THE PRACTICE OF DATA SHARING

The City should release data about its own affairs and the performance of the municipal government, rather than data which primarily focuses on the location of infrastructure.

A set of data that stands out in Calgary's Open Data Catalogue and gives insight into the quality of city services is the road service request data, which was added in October 2013. These records give an indication of where infrastructure is in poor condition. If citizens could be told when the requests are responded to, this would make it easier to

gauge performance.

Following are some examples of data the City might share:

- Recreation centres and after-school programs are major services offered by the City, presumably the City has data on the level of usage by time and by location. In addition to releasing data on the locations of such facilities, data on visits, staffing levels, user fee revenues and costs would help interested citizens better understand the value of these services.
- Transit is seen by many to be a solution to traffic congestion, and Calgary Transit periodically releases ridership statistics for transit. Beyond releasing data sheets for transit schedules, is it possible that the City has much richer data on the use of transit over finer time periods and by route?
- The cost of living is closely linked to the cost of housing and one of the factors that affects the supply and cost of housing is the

planning process. The planning department is responsible for processing various applications for the changed use of property. What statistics are kept and can these be released?

- Following from the affordability issue there is considerable debate in the City over whether the city should grow ‘up’ or ‘out.’ Much of this debate centers on infrastructure costs, both capital costs and maintenance. As suggested by the 311 release, the City may have data on which parts of the city consume the most maintenance. Similarly, cities are required to account for city infrastructure and depreciation of this infrastructure. Having access to this data could much better inform this debate.

This list of examples could continue for practically every municipal service and asset, but some principles can be drawn out of them. For any given service or asset:

- What does this service or asset offer residents?
- What are the asset values and replacement liabilities attached (for assets)?
- What is the volume of the service offered (e.g. responses from a fire hall, visits to a recreation centre)?

- What other performance metrics are attached to this asset or service (for example the fire service’s release of response time data)?
- What operating costs are associated with the service?
- What are the staffing requirements for this service?
- How does this data distribute spatially across the City?

To the extent that the City has this data, it should be released in the spirit of public knowledge and public participation in improving government. Expanding the practice of this type of data sharing would allow citizens, companies, and other stakeholder groups to better assess the performance of the city and consider policy options. The emphasis of open data in Calgary and in municipalities across Canada should now shift from releasing data about physical locations of amenities in the city to data regarding the costs and performance of municipal assets and services.

A helpful gauge of transparency is the question of whether the public knows how Council came to the decisions that it did and can put its government’s claims to the test. How easily citizens can learn what they need to know is important. Transparency is not about having data hidden somewhere that a member of the

TRANSPARENCY IS NOT ABOUT HAVING DATA HIDDEN SOMEWHERE THAT A MEMBER OF THE PUBLIC WHO HAS THE TIME AND MEANS TO OBTAIN OR DEDUCE THE INFORMATION CAN USE.

public who has the time and means to obtain or deduce the information can use. Citizens that wish to run their own analyses of traffic volume information, for example, should not need to first copy all of the data from PDF documents into an Excel spreadsheet by hand.

4.2 LIST OF DOCUMENTS

Governments should provide the public with a list of document titles, whether the documents are released or not. This informs the public of topics being discussed by government and what type of data the government collects; however, a problem is that documents can be given inappropriate titles. The municipality could also publish a list of all FOI requests.

The federal government has created a list of previous FOI requests, labeling them as “all disclosed”, “disclosed in part”, and “no records exist” (Government of Canada, 2014). If desired information has been previously released, such a list makes it much easier and more efficient for both parties the second time it is requested. Municipal governments should do the same if the data released under the FOIP Act is not going to be automatically available to the public.

4.3 ALL RELEASABLE DATA SHOULD BE AVAILABLE

Ultimately the practice of making data available upon request should shift to the practice of making data available by default. This means that all electronically stored information or recordings, including but not limited to documents, databases, transcripts, and audio/visual recordings should be made available. Public data is that which is not subject to valid privacy, security or privilege limitations, as governed by other statutes.

4.4 GUIDELINES FOR DATA THAT IS TO BE SHARED

The following serve as guidelines regarding data that is to be shared, based off Josh Tauberer’s principles in his book *Open Government Data* (2012).

4.4.1 ORIGINAL/PRIMARY DATA, NOT JUST REPORTS

Data should be published with the finest possible level of granularity, not in aggregate or modified forms, with the risk of throwing away potentially usable public information or making debatable interpretations. If the government chooses to transform data for end users and make reports, it can still provide the primary, full information for users as well.

4.4.2 DATA SHOULD BE RELEASED IN A TIMELY FASHION

Data should be made available as quickly as possible to preserve the value of the data, particularly during current policy debates. However, if technical constraints prevent data from being released in a timely manner, this is not a reason to never publish it.

4.4.3 DATA MUST BE ACCESSIBLE

Available documents should be in a central place. If citizens cannot find the information they are looking for on the City's Open Data Catalogue or through a search function on its Web site, this does not count as available. Data should be "findable." Findability is the likelihood that an organization or individual can get the information they seek.

4.4.4 DATA MUST BE MACHINE-PROCESSABLE

Data must be structured in a way to allow automatic processing of it; it must be properly encoded. Scanned images of text or tables are not suitable. Data is not considered accessible if it cannot be inspected in raw form, downloaded and imported into other tools. While having data in PDF form is better than not having the information at all, it is inconsiderate to make users have to enter information by hand when this is not how the government itself stores the data.

4.4.5 ACCESS MUST BE NON-DISCRIMINATORY

Data should be available to anyone regardless of the identity of the person. This partly means the data must be free, in order to ensure that more than a limited pool of people have access to it. Data must be made available to the widest range of users for a variety of purposes.

4.4.6 DATA MUST BE LEGALLY USABLE

Data should not be subject to any copyright, patent, trademark or trade secret regulation. Reasonable privacy, security and privilege restrictions may be allowed, but people should not be afraid to use data due to cumbersome and confusing legal restrictions.

4.4.7 COMPLIANCE MUST BE REVIEWABLE

A contact person must be designated to respond to people trying to use the data, and this person would respond to complaints about the City violating its transparency principles. An administrative or judicial court could have the jurisdiction to review whether the agency has applied these principles appropriately.

4.4.8 THREE LAWS OF OPEN DATA

David Eaves sums it up well by saying that people want data they can find, play with, and share (2009). If data can't be indexed by search engines and found by users, it is not usefully available. If it not available in an open and machine-readable format, a person can hardly use it. Third, if the legal framework does not allow the data to be repurposed, it does not allow for innovation.

4.5 NEED FOR SIMPLE, BASIC GOVERNMENT

Finally, transparency thrives on simplicity. Tim Koelkebeck has worked to increase transparency within his department at the Pentagon and says, "Our steady march toward larger, more complex government means that transparency will be an ongoing challenge" (2010, p. 276).

Koelkebeck suggests that to the average citizen, unloading government information to a Web

portal should not seem that difficult. But he claims the reality is that within departments and agencies themselves, people do not have easy access to information about their own operations and decisions. If government is to be transparent to the public, it needs to be "more transparent to itself." (2010, p. 274)

Fewer layers of government make it less easy to hide corruption, and staff within smaller governments will themselves have a better picture of what is going on. Smaller governments are less threatened by the principles of transparency. A municipal government that is focused on limited tasks has fewer expectations from the public to live up to.

A municipal government with limitations is less likely to be lobbied by certain interest groups, since the government is unable to give them an advantage. A limited government is a practical solution to the problem found with publishing the names of those whom one meets with in one's office. If a politician does not carry the power to cater to a special interest group, there is no point in lobbying the politician during a lunch break.

Finally, the cost barriers that governments face when being transparent would be minimized if they had less they needed to publish.

5. CONCLUSION

Advances in technology mean citizens should no longer need to engage in tedious FOI processes to obtain information about the governments that they elect to serve them. The City of Calgary can move past transparency being an abstract concept that people praise but do not define and give it meaning by putting transparency into practice. This could mean automatically publishing data and information online that is not subject to regulations for privacy and safety purposes.

In a democracy, the burden of proof should be on those who want to restrict access to government information.

The principle that government – not just its laws and policies, but the reasons and processes of decisions that generated those policies and the flows of money that fund their implementation – should be open seems not just unobjectionable, but an essential component of democratic government. Without that freedom of information, citizens cannot hold their government accountable, evaluate officials' claims, and hold them responsible when they veer too far from the tether of democracy (Fung and Weil, 2010, p. 106).

Governments apparently want to see an increase in public participation in politics and city development. What a government can actively do to get the public engaged is open up its data and let citizens use it. The benefits have already been realized by Calgarians and by other cities.

Citizens, politicians, and government staff should continuously push for government to be more open and transparent. People should use the available information to keep governments accountable and to assist governments in finding ways to improve their communities.



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UPCOMING PAPERS

The Manning Foundation is building intellectual capital for municipal governance in five streams of public policy enquiry. Each stream will include a series of public policy papers designed to stimulate new thought about the role of municipal government in society. Manning Foundation research papers are placed in the public domain via the Foundation's website and are available for review, debate, criticism and support by Canadians regardless of their political affiliation.

1. ORGANIC CITIES

An enquiry into how cities grow and what role government should play in regulating growth and providing infrastructure, with the goals of economic efficiency and liveability. Much of the debate around municipal development is based around what urban forms are desirable, with sprawlers and smart growthers alike arguing that land-use regulation and infrastructure provision should favour their 'optimal' urban form.

The Organic Cities project takes a different perspective: that what is important is not the urban form that emerges, but the processes that are in place, particularly the role of government. On this view, it is more important that the market is left free to serve consumer demand, with the important constraints being property rights and the real costs of infrastructure provision rather than land-use regulations.

Upcoming papers include enquiries into the economics of consultation processes so in vogue at city halls across the country and the effects of future advances in vehicle technology.

2. APPROPRIATE ACTIVITIES

An enquiry into the optimal role of government, with a positive analysis of what municipal government currently does and a normative analysis of what roles government is best equipped to fill. These roles broadly divide into an ownership role, a regulatory role, and an expenditure role each of which can be over or under played. This stream builds on concepts such as market failure, public goods and subsidiarity to identify which activities municipal government does or does not have a comparative advantage over other levels of government.

Upcoming papers include enquiries into the proper role of municipal government as a regulator and as a distributor of wealth.

3. CITIZEN SOVEREIGNTY

An enquiry into how well citizens can hold government to account, including monitoring of its activities and protecting their natural rights. This stream investigates standards of municipal accounting and performance reporting, open government, public safety and intergenerational equity. It considers concepts such as open government and open data, and property rights.

Future papers in this series include enquiries into the quality of performance reporting, intergenerational equity with respect to municipal government and open data projects.

4. THE OPEN SOCIETY

Open societies share power among a range of different institutions, unlike closed societies where it is vested in just one. The Open Society is an enquiry into the role of different institutions in the city, including the church, charities and associations. This stream has a historical element, it considers how these different elements have interacted in the past and may do so in the future.

Upcoming papers include an account of the role of civil society in building Calgary.

5. MUNICIPAL ISSUE PAPERS

This stream covers basic elements of public policy, including an introduction to the role of government at municipal level, briefings on areas of municipal policy and issue papers framed in terms of values, facts and ideas of conservatism applied to municipal policy. Particularly salient policy areas include public safety, mobility and affordability.

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