

MICHELLE WU *for* BOSTON

CITY COUNCILOR AT-LARGE

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BOSTON CITY COUNCILOR MICHELLE WU FILES OPEN DATA ORDINANCE

BOSTON – Michelle Wu, Boston City Councilor At-Large, today filed an open data ordinance to be proposed at the April 9th meeting of the Boston City Council.

Following up on Wu’s 50 Ideas for Boston Families from the campaign trail (“Idea #41: Leverage data using hackathons and availability of sanitized information”), the proposed ordinance would require Boston’s city agencies and departments to make data available online using open standards developed in collaboration with the public, promoting opportunities for civic innovation.

“Government today should center on making data-driven decisions and inviting in the public to collaborate around new ideas and solutions,” said Wu. “The goal of this ordinance is greater transparency, access, and innovation. We need a proactive, not a reactive, approach to information accessibility and open government.”

An open data ordinance would codify open government policies and create consistency among Boston’s city departments by developing uniform technical standards. It would institutionalize a culture of open government while simultaneously requiring city departments to balance transparency with privacy.

According to the Sunlight Foundation, 21 cities, three states, and six counties have passed open data laws. The City of Boston maintains a data portal to make certain datasets accessible to the public at data.cityofboston.gov but does not currently have a formal requirement to make data available beyond federal Freedom of Information Act obligations. A municipal open data ordinance would mandate that agencies and departments across the board contribute to these publicly available datasets in accordance with technical standards that ensure privacy and public safety. Boston currently has 46 datasets available on its portal; New York City, which passed an open data law in 2012, has over 1,100 datasets at data.cityofnewyork.us.

Wu cited San Francisco and New York City as municipalities where open data laws have been particularly effective. In San Francisco, the open data ordinance has provided opportunities to develop innovative partnerships with citizens and companies, e.g. partnering with Yelp, a business review website, to display the City’s publicly available health inspection scores on each restaurant’s Yelp profile. New York City’s open data law required soliciting public input in developing technical standards, and the city continues to host regular competitions and challenges to invite public analysis and participation in developing new civic innovation tools.

“Boston is a world-class city full of energy and talent,” said Wu. “In addition to promoting open government, making information available to the fullest extent possible will help leverage Boston’s energy and talent for civic innovation. From public hackathons to breaking down silos between city departments, putting more data online can help us govern smarter for residents in every neighborhood.”

As Chair of the Committee on Small Business, Entrepreneurship and Innovation, and Chair of the Committee on Arts and Culture, Wu has prioritized strengthening Boston’s innovation economy, creative economy, and neighborhood small businesses.

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