

Andrea Reimer: Vancouver and “Open Data, Open Standards, Open Source”

By Tara Robertson and Carla Graebner.

Andrea Reimer, Vancouver City Councillor and Director of the Wilderness Committee, spoke enthusiastically about Vancouver's Open City Initiative at this year's B.C. Freedom of Information and Privacy Association Annual General Meeting in September.

Reimer is a passionate advocate for democracy and civic engagement. In her opening remarks, she argued that if citizens don't have access to information then they are not able to thoughtfully engage in policy discussions. Her presentation slides started with the statement "citizens can be involved, active, empowered." Having access to information in a meaningful format is necessary for this to happen.

Vancouver to “think like the web”

Reimer partnered with David Eaves, (<http://eaves.ca>) policy specialist, and Tim Wilson, GIS guru, to imagine a city that thinks like the Web. In May 2009 a motion was drafted, debated, and subsequently passed by the City of Vancouver directing “City Staff to begin sharing the data and information the city collects, to share this data in open standards and to place open source on an equal footing with proprietary software” (<http://thinkliketheweb.org/>). Since then, other cities such as Calgary and Toronto have been investigating similar initiatives. See Michael Geist's “Open Government? Vancouver Leads” in *TheTyee.ca* August 4, 2009. (<http://thetyee.ca/Mediacheck/2009/08/04/VancouverLeads/>)

During the Q&A that followed, Reimer mentioned the Vancouver School Board's decision to use open source software, which will result in estimated savings of one million dollars. Someone from the audience asked if the VSB had publicized this, and Reimer said that while they were very good at educating, they weren't very good at marketing their successes and innovations. Sound familiar?

Some of the open data / open source websites Reimer mentioned include:

- appsfordemocracy.org: a place for US web developers to engage and create applications with open data
- vantrash.ca: a local application built using City of Vancouver data, to request an email reminder the night before your garbage/recycling pickup
- fixmystreet.ca: a forum to discuss municipal issues for several Canadian cities

At the end of the evening, Reimer stated that she “does not see the logic in charging people for data that was collected with tax dollars.” Anyone who supports open scholarship and open government should stand up and cheer.

It was nice to see a handful of other librarians and archivists there. Access to information, data standards, and information/data mashups are things that we have some expertise in. Hopefully the City will include us to help further these initiatives.

Vancouver's open data forums

And, if anyone is interested in participating with Open Vancouver, check out Vancouver Data, a discussion group “about and users of open civic and government data in the Metro Vancouver area” <http://groups.google.ca/group/vancouver-data/> or the Vancouver Open Data Wiki: https://www.socialtext.net/vandata/index.cgi?vancouveropenopen_data_wiki.

Tara Robertson is the Systems and Technical Services Librarian at Emily Carr University. She likes open source software, open government, and a nice cup of tea.

Carla Graebner is a Liaison Librarian at Simon Fraser University. She has always been an information and privacy geek. Tea is good, too.