

# Cambridge Open Data Ordinance

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City Clerk Agenda

To:City Council <CityCouncil@CambridgeMA.GOV>;

Cc:Lopez, Donna <dlopez@cambridgema.gov>;

Dear Mayor Maher, Vice Mayor Benzan and City Councillors,

I'm pleased to see a draft Open Data Ordinance presented to the Cambridge City Council. City data is a valuable resource. The data already released to the Open Data portal is useful in many ways.

As the City Manager anticipates in his summary, the City and the public will make use of City data "to develop new analyses [and] insights" and to create "innovative business and services solutions". It is difficult to predict what particular data or data sets might lead to these outcomes. Therefore I would like the ordinance to clearly state that data should be "open by default", that there is a presumption that open data is useful and restrictions are for cause.

An earlier draft of the ordinance said, "It shall be the policy of the City of Cambridge that, limited only by statutory requirements of privacy, confidentiality and security, all [data] created, collected, acquired, or curated by the City be openly accessible." Please add such a strong statement in the current draft.

Some specific suggestions:

Definitions: B. 1. Please include narrative text in this list. For example, the minutes to meetings are a valuable resource when provided in Machine Readable form.

Definitions: B. 2. This section is unnecessarily restrictive, please consider removing it.

Definitions: F. 1. This seems to say that if the City is not required to disclose the data, then it is protected. The earlier draft defines protected data as "any data set or portion thereof to which a city agency may legitimately deny access." This is consistent with a policy of "open by default".

Data Accessibility: This section sets out criteria by which City staff will determine whether data should be Open Data. Again, this is contrary to a policy of "open by default" and presumes that City staff can know what will be useful. Because one purpose of open data is to foster innovation, new ideas and insights, it is not realistic to expect anyone to anticipate the uses of a data set. The earlier draft gives criteria similar to these as a guide to prioritizing the release of data, rather than deciding whether it should be open. Please consider that formulation for this section.

Again, thank you for considering this important ordinance.

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