

Lopez, Donna

From: John Hawkinson [jhawk@MIT.EDU]
Sent: Saturday, March 02, 2013 11:20 PM
To: City Council; Lopez, Donna
Subject: In support of O-8: RSS feed feature (for 3/4/13)

To The Honorable, The City Council:

Councillor vanBeuzekom's Order O-8 is clearly correct to require the City to [get with it] and support RSS -- a standardized way of allowing the public to find out what is new on the City's websites -- and you should pass it with flying colors.

A less obvious benefit is that when you get down to it, an RSS feed is really just a list of links -- URLs -- along with descriptions and times they have changed. That has an important but subtle implication.

The City Council's current website has the execrable property that URLs do not persist. A link to the list of Policy Orders for a given week is not a "durable URL." You cannot save it and come back to it, or email it to a friend, or cite it formally. It may not work a few minutes later, much less weeks or decades later, as it should. A link to an individual policy order prior to adoption also often does not work after adoption.

See Sir Tim Berner's-Lee seminal 1998 essay on this topic, "Cool URIs don't change," <http://www.w3.org/Provider/Style/URI.html>. It is as true now as it was then, if not more so.

When an RSS feed of the Council Agenda is available, this will necessarily change, because an RSS feed is just a list of URLs. That means there will necessarily be URLs for portions of the Council Agenda that are durable. That can be linked to. That promote discussion and communication about the Council Agenda among the citizenry.

I can hardly wait.

These are basic building blocks that make things work. It's unfortunate the Council needs to look "under the hood" to make them happen, but now that you are, please pass the order.

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