

Council releases constituent services data, revealing patterns



Mark-Viverito. (Official NYC Council Photo / William Alatrisme)

By MIRANDA NEUBAUER 5:07 a.m. | Mar. 8, 2016

The City Council last week released to the open data portal [constituent services data](#) from the CouncilStat platform used by many Council District Offices.

City Council Speaker Melissa Mark Viverito highlighted the release Saturday during her appearance at Beta NYC's School of Data event at Civic Hall, as did members of the Council's Digital Strategy Team during a subsequent session.

The release is the latest effort of the Speaker's "Council 2.0." [technology plan](#), which has also included the launch of a "[Council Labs](#)" site to pilot new methods of digital engagement.

At Saturday's event, audience members [heard from](#) Andy Cochran, who led the development of the site, as well as Joyce Li, technology projects manager, and Julia Fredenburg, the director at the Council overseeing the CouncilStat system.

MORE ON POLITICO

- DOE adds detail to capital plan, including new pre-K seats
- City Council to once again take on pedestrian plazas
- Thompson criticizes rollout of new summons plan in Manhattan

Illustrating the goal of making the Council more accessible, the presentation included a video of Mark-Viverito and her staff walking through the city asking average New Yorkers whether they knew who the speaker was and what the City Council does.

The new data is updated daily and encompasses anonymized records of the variety of constituent cases that Council staff enter and handle on a regular basis and when the cases are closed.

Council staff cautioned that different councilmembers use the system in different ways

MOST POPULAR

- 1 City Hall pitches East New York rezoning plan to skeptical City Council
- 2 City plans reforms to custodial oversight system
- 3 James and Crown Heights residents rally against alleged tenant harassment
- 4 Labor-tied councilwoman and union foe tangle over wage bill
- 5 City shares heavily redacted document related to \$2M Uber study

and with different frequency, so that the data may not always reflect the full work of a particular Council office or be comparable across offices.

The Council prepared for the release by inviting technologists who were members of Civic Hall to explore an early version of the data at the end of January from the offices of Council Members Margaret Chin and Ritchie Torres.

Even as Council staff were giving their presentation at that event, two technologists from mapping platform CartoDB, Jeff Ferzoco, New York City business developer, and data scientist Stuart Lynn, had already created a visualization showing cases over time, indicating for example an increase in finance inquiries during tax filing time. The data also illustrated how Chin, with her high profile as the first Asian-American woman in the Council, often receives more out-of-district inquiries.

In another [visualization](#), they illustrated the types of cases by zip code.

"You can see here down by Chelsea there's a large number of financial-based complaints, and then in Chinatown there's a lot more transportation, and housing and general welfare, and then up in the Bronx people are like just complaining about everything," Lynn said.

During the session, technologists had the chance to provide feedback on how to handle spam entries and human error, how it could complement 311 data analysis and how to clarify whether a case is a question, a complaint or support for or opposition to specific legislation.

"I hadn't seen data at the City Council level before and it's interesting to see ... how they handle it compared to a large automated system like 311," Ferzoco told POLITICO New York. "One of the more interesting things I thought ... was looking at how one city council person is handling the complaints or questions, comments of another city council member, and to understand why that's happening is probably one of the better things that's going to come out of this."

"With a bigger dataset, with all the different Council districts coming in, you'll start to see New York emerging and you can understand the different dynamics between different Council districts," Ferzoco said.

He said he would like to see more detail in the data.

"There's always the fine line you have to stay on between too much information so you could individually identify people and enough information to see some actionable data work," he said. "If we went just a little bit farther with the data ... it might exponentially help."

Eve Ahearn, an employee at a public data company, said as a native New Yorker she had long been interested in working with city data.

"I do a lot of stuff at work with government data, but I don't often get to meet people working within government who are releasing that data," she said.

"I didn't know anything about the City Council, I'm not a native New Yorker, I didn't know what the shape of it was," said Lou Huang, a user interface engineer at the company Mapzen. "For agencies to kind of come out and talk to people and say we want to get the word out ... on data that we're releasing even if we don't know what the data is

going to be used for yet, it's really positive to be part of that conversation. Let's say you find two Council districts that are roughly the same demographically, you enact one policy change in one place, does it change the nature of the calls that are coming in?"

MORE: [CITY HALL](#) [BETANYC](#) [CARTODB](#) [CIVIC HALL](#) [COUNCILSTAT](#) [DATA](#) [MARGARET CHIN](#) [NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL](#) [OPEN DATA](#) [RITCHIE TORRES](#) [TECH](#)

Author: **MIRANDA NEUBAUER**

MORE IN CITY HALL

DOE adds detail to capital plan, including new pre-K seats

MORE FROM POLITICO



DOE adds detail to capital plan, including new pre-K seats



City Council to once again take on pedestrian plazas



Thompson criticizes rollout of new summons plan in Manhattan



De Blasio's Cities for Action files immigration amicus brief in Supreme Court

[ABOUT US](#)

[EVENTS](#)

[ADVERTISE](#)

[CONTACT](#)

[PRIVACY POLICY](#)

[TERMS AND CONDITIONS](#)