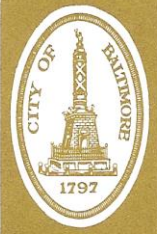


FROM	NAME & TITLE	Justin Elaszcz, Chief Data Officer	CITY of BALTIMORE MEMO	
	AGENCY NAME & ADDRESS	Office of the Mayor 100 Holliday Street Baltimore, MD 21202		
	SUBJECT	City Council Resolution 21-0081R - CODEMAP and Decision Making		

DATE: October 11, 2022

TO The Honorable President and Members of the Baltimore City Council c/o
Natawna Austin, Executive Secretary

Vice President Middleton, Members of the Economic and Community Development Committee,

I appreciate your interest and questions regarding the City’s use of data and for highlighting DHCD’s excellent CoDeMap. CoDeMap is an example of how City operations and our residents benefit from effective use of data and I’m happy to share a bit more about what CoDeMap demonstrates for the City with regard to policy and decision-making tools built with data. Indeed, [CoDeMap was singled out in this article](#) as an example of how we achieved What Works Cities Silver Certification from Bloomberg Philanthropies, making us a leading City in improving our residents’ lives through data.

First and foremost, CoDeMap is an example of what we can build when policy subject matter experts, data gurus, non-profits, and residents identify a problem-area or need and use their collective ingenuity to build something new and understand complex issues like housing. All of these groups rely on CoDeMap to make decisions and understand their community. Whether it’s identifying opportunities for equitable development, understanding the history of a particular building or lot, or using a multi-agency approach to addressing nuisance properties, open data tools like CoDeMap provide a single source of truth so that all stakeholders build a common understanding of the real world. In a time where we find the truth increasingly in question, it is all the more imperative that we find ways of agreeing on facts. Simply publishing “raw” data on Open Baltimore, while important, is not sufficient for interpreting and understanding, and CoDeMap serves as a guidepost for future open data products.

Second, CoDeMap demonstrates a core data governance principle that enables data science and deeper insights about our world, and that is the ability to connect disparate datasets - a principle called “data interoperability.” By layering datasets from multiple data sources and work streams, we enrich our understanding of both operations and outcomes - outcomes like equity, public safety, and sustainability - and add color to what was previously only visible in black and white. This is only possible through rigorous standardization and a commitment to data quality and we thank DHCD for demonstrating how important these aspects of data management are. This is exactly what is meant by “treating data as an asset” and our Citywide data governance work includes the development of new data standards toward this end.

Finally and crucially, tools like this are worthless when they sit on a shelf and DHCD time and again demonstrates that CoDeMap is a tool and not a trophy. At least twice a week, I personally witness DHCD leaders sharing their screen during a call and pulling up CoDeMap. Each week, a group of City agencies meets to identify locations with an abundance of 311 service requests for a multi-pronged inspection and investigation approach. In each of those meetings, CoDeMap is used live on screen to further understand the history of the location and any other enforcement actions that have preceded the group’s attention and to anticipate what further enforcement may be needed. This is what being data-driven looks like in practice and as I’m sure you’ll hear from DHCD themselves it’s just one example of how CoDeMap is used.

We continue to grow our capacity to leverage our data. We are piloting a new City training program, beginning with a course in “Foundations in Data Literacy” so that our front-line workers, supervisors, and administrators are not left behind in the data revolution. The Data Fellows program in the Mayor’s Office of Performance & Innovation has grown our internal capacity through recruiting and hiring data analysts into our agencies. And key partnerships with universities and foundations - such as the Center for Government Excellence at Johns Hopkins University and the new Bloomberg City Data Alliance, Data Science for Social Good at Carnegie Mellon University, the Harvard Government Performance Lab for procurement reform, and Morgan State and University of Baltimore for ARPA program evaluation and UB’s Data Science Corps program - have greatly expanded our capacity and we continue to build, iterate, and learn.

I regret that I’m unable to respond to your inquiries in person, but am happy to report I’ll be representing Baltimore and our data strategy at CityLab in Amsterdam, Netherlands with an audience of City leaders from across the world assembled by Bloomberg Philanthropies and the Aspen Institute. Let me reiterate that data are a public trust - a resource to be both protected and harnessed for the benefit of all - and am eager to collaborate with you, the committee, and the rest of City Council towards those ends.

Regards,

Justin Elszasz
Chief Data Officer

Cc: Natawna Austin, Executive Secretary, City Council
Jennifer Coates, Senior Legislative Policy Analyst, Council Services
Natasha Mehu, Director, Mayor’s Office of Government Relations
Nina Themelis, Deputy Director, Mayor’s Office of Government Relations
Matt Stegman, Director, Fiscal & Legislative Services, Office of the City Council President
Nikki Thompson, Director, Legislative Affairs, Office of the City Council President