

**Testimony of Michael Flowers – Chief Analytics and Open Platform Officer –  
before the New York City Council – Committee on Technology**

**November 20, 2013**

Good afternoon. My name is Michael Flowers. I am the Chief Analytics and Open Platform Officer for the City of New York. In my role as the Chief Open Platform Officer, I am responsible for the implementation of Local Law 11, the New York City Open Data Law. Here with me is my Chief-of-Staff Nicholas O'Brien, Deputy Commissioner for Application Development at the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications ("DoITT") Donald Sunderland, and DoITT's General Counsel Charles Fraser. My office, the Mayor's Office of Data Analytics, works with DoITT to fulfill the requirements of the Open Data Law.

The Open Data Law was signed by Mayor Michael Bloomberg in March of 2012. The law was the product of a collaborative effort including the City's technology community, the nonprofit sector, the Council, City agencies, and the Mayor's Office. The Mayor has referred to the law as "the most ambitious and comprehensive open data legislation in the country." It has served as the basis for a number of other policies and initiatives throughout the country and has the full support of the administration.

I'm here today to testify on the progress of the implementation of the Open Data Law and highlight some of the successes we've had since the law took effect.

In April, Mayor Bloomberg and Chief Information and Innovation Officer Rahul Merchant formally appointed me Chief Open Platform Officer. Since that time, my team has focused relentlessly on delivering high-value data to New Yorkers. In July, the Department of City Planning released one of the most sought after datasets, PLUTO, which contains land use and geographic data at the tax lot level. In October, we released ACRIS Property Records and Parking Ticket Data from the Department of Finance. We have also focused on automating data sets to ensure that the published data are always up-to-date.

The primary vehicle for delivering data to New Yorkers is the Open Data Portal accessible at [nyc.gov/data](http://nyc.gov/data). We currently have over 1,100 unique sets available, up from 350 in 2011. 59 of those sets have been fully automated and new automations are coming online every month. In September, we released the inaugural New York City Open Data Plan, which catalogues over 460 unreleased datasets covered under the law and their planned release dates. Earlier today, we launched the Beta version of the Open Data Dashboard to provide insight into the progress of publishing the datasets included in the Open Data Plan.

Currently we are in the process of reviewing the lists submitted by mayoral agencies pursuant to the Open Data Plan to ensure that all qualifying data is included, that it is released at the earliest possible date, and that no private data is inadvertently listed. The annual update to the Open Data Plan will be released to the Council on July 15 of 2014.

In addition to these activities, which are mandated under the law, we are undertaking numerous initiatives beyond what is required by the law to increase transparency and facilitate the use of Open Data to provide meaningful insight.

In May, we launched the New York City Developer Portal. The Developer Portal is designed to provide data to a more technical audience for the purpose of creating commercial grade applications. The Developer Portal includes Application Programming Interfaces or APIs from 311, DOT, DOE, HPD, the Comptroller, and DCP. This enables developers to build applications that integrate directly with high-value public data.

In June, we announced the winners of the 4<sup>th</sup> annual New York City BigApps competition. The competition, hosted by DoITT and the Economic Development Corporation, is designed to encourage creation of online and mobile applications that make the data we release more accessible to New Yorkers and to jump start new businesses built on top of Open Data. Since 2009, NYC BigApps has helped launch nearly 300 new applications.

In September, we updated the NYC Open Data portal to improve the user experience and to help New Yorkers navigate the massive amount of data available. All datasets are categorized for easy browsing and are fully searchable. We provide background information on featured datasets to increase awareness of the high value datasets on the portal. We are currently featuring the newly released Parking Ticket data. Information about how to deal with parking tickets is one of the most common information requests to 311; this data will provide New Yorkers with greater access and ability to address their tickets. We are also using the Open Data Portal to show visualizations built with public data. These visualizations make the information contained in the data more accessible and understandable as users seek to understand their City.

We are working with agencies on an ongoing basis to enhance the public's ability to access, consume, map, and visualize New York City's data. By leveraging the City's GIS expertise, we have enabled users to create different types of maps of more than 165 datasets through the Open Data portal, including hurricane evacuation zones, wifi hotspot locations, parks, and building footprints.

There are many high-value datasets that are generated by vendors for delivery under contract to the City. We believe that, to the greatest extent possible, this data should be released as Open Data. DoITT aggressively negotiates for the intellectual property rights on all data created, generated or maintained by the City's contractors and whenever possible works to provide public access to that data.

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We are already seeing the positive impact of the City's Open Data efforts. For example, the Department of Education is working with Pediacities, a former NYC BigApps winner and successful startup built on NYC Open Data, to launch a set of public APIs (data integration tools). Previously, middle school students applying to high school had to slog through a phone book-sized catalogue or navigate a very basic search page to get information on DOE's nearly 700 high school programs. For next year's application process, students will be able to access this information through nationally recognized mobile and online

applications, including some of the same applications that high school seniors across the nation use to apply to college.

We are also starting to develop proofs-of-concept around utilizing the Open Data Portal for agency operational needs. For example the Taxi & Limousine Commission is directing fleet owners to the automatically refreshed list of Licensed Taxi Drivers to verify that their driver's licenses are current. Our hope is that by using the portal to provide information to the public and other agencies, the City can save significant costs in new IT projects to achieve the same ends.

One of the benefits of Open Data we are working to quantify is the improvement in fulfilling FOIL requests. During the month of October, ECB received two FOIL requests that they were able to meet by directing the requestors to the Open Data portal. This not only makes it easier for the agency to respond to requests, it also provides faster, easier, and cheaper access to the data, potentially reducing the need for the public to submit lengthy FOIL requests to gain access to information.

Another data set that was previously only available via a FOIL request or for a fee is PLUTO and MapPLUTO, a mashup of land use and geographic data from a range of City agencies. This data has been downloaded more than 579 times since it was released at the end of July. In the year prior to the release they had only been downloaded 141 times.

In the coming months we are focusing on releasing automated feeds of newly available data including Season Flu Vaccination Locations, Farmers Markets, Office of Emergency Management Incidents and Notifications, and Office of Management and Budget Revenue, Expense and Capital Funds data. In parallel we are working to automate existing datasets from the Department of Housing Preservation and Development, the Department of Transportation, and the Department of Environmental Protection, just to mention a few.

We are also focusing on measuring the economic benefit of Open Data. We are tracking aggregate usage and have begun to catalogue the applications built on top of the data; this is the first step in our effort to rigorously quantify the economic impact of Open Data. These benefits come in many forms, ranging from agency efficiencies and cost avoidance to the creation of new jobs and businesses made possible by the release of this data. We are confident that this analysis will demonstrate that the City's investment in Open Data makes economic sense and look forward to presenting the result of this effort the next time we have the opportunity to testify.

I would like to thank the Council Technology Committee for providing me the opportunity to testify today and we are happy to answer any questions you may have.