

Open Data Review Board

COMMITTEE MEETING

~AGENDA~

Tuesday, December 3, 2024

5:30PM

Ackermann Room (& Zoom)

Call of the Meeting

The Open Data Review Board (ODRB) advises the City Manager on rules and standards for implementation of an Open Data policy, including a means by which to determine the data or datasets that are appropriate for public accessibility and a timeline for policy implementation. During this meeting, the ODRB will discuss how Cambridge might use open data to further the City's strategic initiatives.

Welcome & Introductions

- Introducing our guest speaker, Doug Beeferman.

Doug Beeferman is a computer scientist and software engineer with a lifelong dedication to creating tools for knowledge discovery. After earning computer science degrees from the University of Illinois and Carnegie Mellon University in the 1990s, he spent 20 years in industry at Lycos, Google, and the machine learning startup Sift before leaving corporate life in 2015. Since then, he has worked as a research programmer at the MIT Center for Constructive Communication and the Plural Connections Group at Northeastern University, focusing on making sense of large-scale conversational data for social scientists and educators. An enthusiast of reference tools, lexicography, and word games, Doug has run Datamuse, a small software company specializing in web-based dictionary and thesaurus applications, since 2000.

(We will defer other updates and agenda items until after our guest speaker's presentation.)

Guest Presentation

Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic, city council and school board meetings have been recorded and made available online more frequently, providing a rich data source for journalists, policymakers, and researchers amidst the decline of local news media. This talk introduces CivicSearch (<https://civicsearch.org>), a search engine and alerting platform built on the LocalView (<https://localview.net>) transcript corpus. CivicSearch uses natural language processing to analyze transcripts from over 650 cities and towns in the US and Canada, clustering conversations by subject, identifying key issues, and synthesizing findings with large language model-based summarization. Users can search or monitor keywords, topics, or locations mentioned in meetings to track discussions relevant to their communities. Journalists and researchers have applied CivicSearch to studies on chronic absenteeism, drug policy, and racial extremism, demonstrating its utility for exploring government activity and local policymaking.

Other Agenda Items

- New and pending datasets
- Other metrics of data portal health and growth
- Open Data Newsletter: fourth issue later this week
- Public trainings: first virtual class scheduled this month

- Teen outreach: CRLS, CCSC, buildingways
- What Works Cities: very close to being able to announce 2024 status. 2025 WWC working group.
- Strategic plan: FY2026-29 Kickoff
- Speakers/Topics for future ODRB meetings

Open Discussion

- All

Public Comment

Adjournment