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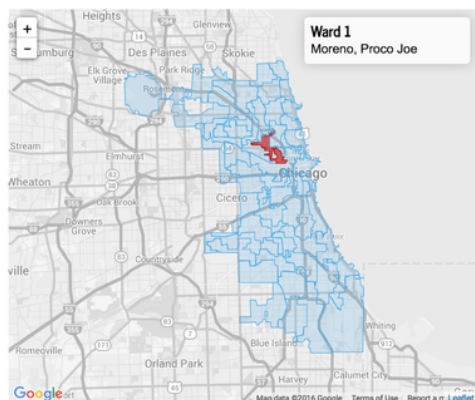
OpenGov Voices: Demystifying Chicago politics with Councilmatic

by guest author Derek Eder   🦊   JAN. 25, 2016, 12:35 P.M.

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In June 2013, I announced the launch of Chicago Councilmatic, a civic app under the Open City banner that helps anyone search, browse and subscribe to Chicago City Council legislation.

Since then, Chicago Councilmatic has consistently been one of our most popular projects. The City Council is always up to something, and before Councilmatic existed, getting information about it was pretty hard.

Now, thanks to the support of the Sunlight Foundation, I am proud to announce that DataMade is launching a brand-new version of Chicago Councilmatic powered by Open Civic Data!

New features in Councilmatic

Over the last two and a half years, we've learned quite a lot about Chicago City Council, and have turned that into new features:

- **Who's my alderman, anyway?** Many Chicagoans don't know what ward they're in, let alone who their alderman is. This simple information is essential if you want to engage with City

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Council, so we made it really easy to find out, either by searching your address or browsing a neat-o interactive map.

- **Committees are the key:** In Chicago, controversial ordinances are rarely voted down on the Council floor. Instead, they are held to languish in committee and die a slow, quiet death. You can now see exactly what that Finance Committee has been up to, and see the graveyard of legislation that never saw the light of day.

- **Public meetings:** Knowing when City Council meets is important. Knowing when the Zoning Committee is voting on your ordinance is even more important. You can now see every past and upcoming committee and City Council meeting, and the stated agenda for each.

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- **Timeliness:** City Council meets a about once a month, and when they do, it's a flurry of activity. With the new Councilmatic, we cranked up the updates and refresh our data *every day* instead of once a week.

- **Fast access on any device:** Councilmatic now has a brand new and lightning fast interface — and it looks so amazing on your smartphone.

What should we add next?

DataMade is committed to maintaining and improving the new Chicago Councilmatic. There's still a lot more we plan to do with it, including email alerts, visualizing flows of legislation and measuring councilmembers' performance.

To get updates as we add them, join our email list. If you have any suggestions on features we should add, let us know by emailing info@datamade.us or filing a new GitHub issue

Today Chicago and New York, tomorrow the world!

We've designed Councilmatic to be easily re-deployable in new cities by building it on top of the Open Civic Data standard. We've already brought it to New York City and are actively spreading it to other cities!

If you're interested in bringing Councilmatic to your city, sent us an email at info@councilmatic.org! Until then, go forth and help us keep an eye on what our elected officials are up to!

Derek Eder is the founder of DataMade, a civic technology company. We build open source technology using open data to empower journalists, researchers, governments and advocacy organizations. Since its founding in June 2012, DataMade has successfully launched dozens civic technology applications including data merging tools for journalists, powerful geospatial open data platforms for researchers, citizen access websites to help scale up meaningful municipal policy and powerful web visualizations to improve government budget transparency.

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