

## City of Vancouver Launches OpenData Web Site

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In May 2009, Vancouver City Council passed a motion that embraces the principals of open data, open standards, and open source. As a result of the Open3 motion (so called because it covers open data, open standards, and open source), City staff began to put together a site to accommodate the free downloading of data.

While not a long document, it represents a significant policy direction for the City, and its core directive is seen in this excerpt:

“THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED THAT the City of Vancouver endorses the principles of:

- - Open and Accessible Data – the City of Vancouver will freely share with citizens, businesses and other jurisdictions the greatest amount of data possible while respecting privacy and security concerns;
  - Open Standards - the City of Vancouver will move as quickly as possible to adopt prevailing open standards for data, documents, maps, and other formats of media;
  - Open Source Software – the City of Vancouver, when replacing existing software or considering new applications, will place open source software on an equal footing with commercial systems during procurement cycles.”

The entire motion can be seen [here](#).

The City of Vancouver is not the first government to make data freely available (see for example [www.data.gov](http://www.data.gov), San Francisco, Nanaimo BC, and Washington DC with Toronto and New York coming soon). The City of Kamloops has made GIS data [available for free](#) for some time. However the City is one of the first, if not the first, to pass a formal motion to promote the principals of open data, open standards, and open source. The City is looking to be at the forefront of this new movement to make governments more transparent and to empower citizens to be more informed and to join in the process of providing services.

While the primary focus of this article is to focus on open data, it is worth mentioning that going forward, the City will look to do more with open standards (while not completely forsaking many of the “de facto” standards already in use) and will consider open source software where appropriate. It is unlikely that there will be any wholesale change to open source software as the business case for doing so may not be there and because in many cases, there are no relevant open source applications. That said, the City is certainly looking at various open source components to work with our MapGuide web GIS environment.

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City Council Motion: Open Data, Open Standards and Open Source (PDF) 22 KB

**Take our Survey**  
Help decide which VanMap layers should be made available first.

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**Connect with the Community**  
Community developers have created a wiki and discussion group to share application ideas and discuss datasets.  
Vancouver Open Data Wiki  
Discussion Group

Please note: These community sites are not affiliated with the City of Vancouver.

**Vancouver's Open Data Catalogue - Beta Version**

As part of its commitment to enhancing citizen engagement, fostering digital innovation and improving service delivery, the City of Vancouver is taking bold steps to provide more of its data to the public. This open data website supports City Council's motion on Open Data, Open Standards and Open Source ([read the full Council resolution](#) - 22 KB).

By freely sharing its data in accessible formats — while respecting privacy and security concerns — Vancouver is joining many government agencies in moving to harness the energy and involvement of citizens, community-based organizations and private businesses in everything from creative community problem-solving to the development of new service delivery ideas and solutions.

As a first step, we are focusing on providing our geospatial data — data used to build [VanMap](#). Over time, this data catalogue will continue to grow as we add more types of data in a greater variety of formats. Your use of the data available from this site is governed by the City's [Terms of Use](#) and by downloading the data, you are agreeing to be bound by these [Terms of Use](#).

*The home page for the OpenData site focuses on simplicity of use and data access.*

## GIS Data Catalog

On the data front, the City has licensed its GIS data for years with formal licensing agreements and fee structures as well as provisions for making it available for free to certain clients. In recent years, the proportion of clients receiving data for free has increased along with proposals being made to move to a free dissemination model.

City staff began to put together a site to accommodate the free downloading of data. Initially the focus was almost entirely on data already available for viewing in [VanMap](#) because of our longstanding interest in moving in this direction. Also important is the fact that some the hurdles to making data available had already been passed because this data is publicly available in VanMap.

To bring the web site to fruition, several issues had to be addressed including:

- Decisions were required regarding what data should be made available in what formats given limited time and resources
- The web site had to be designed and the content created
- Decisions were required on what type of feedback mechanisms would be used.
- A Terms of Use statement had to be created that achieved complete protection for the City while not restricting the use of the data.

Name	CSV/ XLS	DWG	KML	SHP	ECW	MI SID
<b>C</b>						
<a href="#">Community Centres</a>	✓		✓			
<a href="#">Contour</a>				✓		
<b>D</b>						
<a href="#">Drinking fountains</a>	✓					
<b>F</b>						
<a href="#">Facet grid boundaries</a>			✓	✓		
<a href="#">Fire Halls</a>	✓		✓			
<b>G</b>						
<a href="#">Garbage collection schedule zones</a>				✓		
<b>L</b>						
<a href="#">Land (cadastral)</a>				✓		
<a href="#">Libraries</a>	✓		✓			
<a href="#">Local area boundary data</a>			✓	✓		
<b>M</b>						
<a href="#">Municipal Election Results</a>	✓					
<b>O</b>						
<a href="#">Orthophoto imagery</a>					✓	✓
<b>P</b>						
<a href="#">Parks</a>	✓					
<b>S</b>						
<a href="#">Schools</a>	✓					

The data catalogue provides a listing of the data items and formats that are available.

To address the data and format issues, City staff attended the [Open Web Vancouver](#) conference, drew on what was already being provided as standard data packages, and talked with members of the open source programming community in Vancouver. The community (not the City) started both a [discussion forum](#) and a [wiki](#) to broaden the awareness of the initiative and to encourage the development of applications based on City data. These activities yielded an initial list of data items along with many more than the public would like to see.

The web site and content were put together by IT's web design and architecture team in consultation with the GIS Team. The objectives were to provide a clear and easy to use site that would not discourage anyone from accessing and using the City's data.

### Feedback and Participation

We incorporated two feedback mechanisms at launch time. One was a survey that listed all of the layers in VanMap and asked people to identify the ten layers that were of most interest. The survey also included a free form question to identify other types of data that were of interest. The other mechanism provided a form for comments which came in as an e-mail.

One of the biggest challenges was creating a terms of use statement that was acceptable to the City to ensure the City was adequately protected while not unduly restricting usage of the data. The City's Law Department examined some of the terms of use statements from organizations such as Creative Commons as well as those used by other governments pursuing open data. However in the final analysis, Law developed its own terms of use statement that clearly protects the City while not restricting the use of the data (other than that the use must be for legal purposes). Users are allowed to redistribute the data.

The City launched its [open data web site](#) in beta on September 15. While there was no press release, between the blogs, emails, tweets, and professional networks, word spread very quickly. The reaction to the motion, the concept, and the web site has been very positive despite the fact that at this time, the data is limited (there are about 50 data types, although many are bundled in packages) and the formats are limited as well. The community is starting to develop applications including an application called [Van Trash](#) where you can register to have reminders sent to you the day before your garbage is due to be picked up.

As we move forward, we plan to substantially expand the data that is available through the site as well as the formats in which it is available. These changes won't happen overnight, but we hope to move steadily forward.

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