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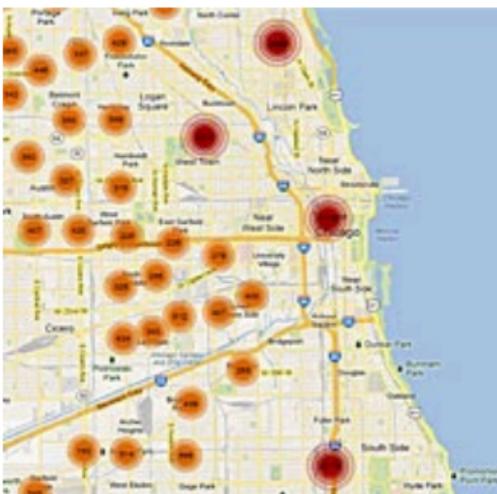
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For the Record

What's next for Chicago's open data strategy?

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Chicago's open data strategy has published unprecedented amounts of public information and solidified the city's standing within the **Government 2.0** movement in recent years, which leads to the natural question: "What's next?"

On Tuesday, some of the city's key information brokers discussed that question in the context of economic development during the American Planning Association's **national conference**, going on this week at the Hyatt Regency.

The upshot: Local governments need to get beyond basic data dumps by hashing out better formats for high-demand public records. Meanwhile, there are early efforts underway to get suburbs more involved in sharing basic information such as meeting agendas and land-use inventories.

As hosts of the conference, Chicago planners were ready to brag about the city's accomplishments:

— **City** and **County** data portals stocked with records from crime to building permits to restaurant inspections

— **Microsites** for researching growth industries and workforce supply in the region

— **Organizations** that bring together municipal bureaucrats and civic-minded developers to build apps around newly available data

"In the past year, I'm hearing more about chatter about this as an economic development engine," said city Chief Information Office Brett Goldstein. "Because if I have this platform out there and . . . a county piece and the feds have data.gov, that's a lot of information that's being given to people. Think of all the things you can build on top of that."

Therein lies the challenge. How do citizens, businesses and planners dig through that information and find what they really

need?

To that end, the Smart Chicago Collaborative has launched **Civic Users Testing Group**, which pays Chicago residents $20 to test and provide feedback on applications produced by local civic hackers.

On April 26, coinciding with **Big Data Week** in Chicago, Cook County will host a roundtable discussion with suburban municipal leaders and technology developers about the challenges and opportunities of publishing local public data online. "Our first goal is to start the conversation and start the collaboration," said Sebastian James, deputy director of new media for the county.

The goal is to create a regional data repository where local governments throughout the region can share and access structured information.

"We're just getting to that point," but there are technical hurdles, explained Andrew Williams-Clark, a regional planner for the **Chicago Metropolitan Agency for Planning**. "The first step for us is we're essentially trying become a one-stop shpop for planners in the region who need data ona variety of subjects. So not just the census, but environmental data, public health data."

CMAP is starting a registry to document what's available. The next step is a familiar one: convincing elected officials to shake up their bureaucracies and publish their data online.