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Website provides new information about council members' focus PRO



A woman displays the website on her iPad. (callnyc.org)

By MIRANDA NEUBAUER 5:18 a.m. | Mar. 14, 2016

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A new website aims to make it possible to explore the work of the City Council through data it recently released for the first time, realized in the form of a website with the name "Call NYC" that highlights the Council's top constituent issues.

As part of Speaker Melissa Mark-Viverito's [Council 2.0 strategy](#), the Council recently released the [data](#) on constituent services from the CouncilStat system regularly used by Council members, though staff have cautioned that different Council offices use the system in different ways and with different frequency.

The new data excited Jamie Burkart, a Brooklyn-based artist with a community software and community organizing background who had never previously built a civic technology project, when he attended a Council hackathon event at Civic Hall in January ahead of the data release, which included discussions about the relationship between CouncilStat and 311 data.

The data indicated to him that the major category with the most cases is housing, while the number one sub-category for cases is U.S. citizenship.

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"This is not just getting a pothole filled, this is going to be a relationship that a case manager has with this resident in mind," he said.

After the full data-set was released two weeks

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ago, he decided to create a project to be ready for Beta NYC's School of Data event marking the anniversary of the city's open data law a few days later. "It had to be something that wasn't too complicated ... this is a really fast turn-around project," he said.

He said that based on the data, the top Council member dealing with the top citizenship issue is [Councilman Mathieu Eugene](#).

"His top service categories are U.S. citizenship, immigration, literary services for immigrants, visas, green cards, affordable housing," he said.

He said he used only entries that included a borough to eliminate queries from outside New York or that were spam. The site will also account for the newest councilman, Rafael Salamanca, who was sworn recently.

"The person who has more cases in a year than anyone else is [Majority Leader] [Jimmy Van Bramer](#)," Burkart noted, though he noted that there is more work happening in district offices than the data may reflect. "Doing a lot of casework is a sign of a vibrant district office that is actively engaged with its constituents. ... I want city council members who are providing excellent service to go viral," he added, a goal he hopes to achieve by drawing on his software-developer skills to optimize the site for sharing on social media and search engine optimization, so that the site could come up for people searching queries such as "eviction help."

Long prior to the data release, Van Bramer had received some attention for his annual [pie chart overview of his constituent services](#).

Burkart said he has also been thinking of the site in conversations with neighbors and friends. One elderly neighbor has trouble with the uneven older-style sidewalks that can also be slippery in winter. On his iPad Burkart was able to bring up the phone number of the council member most active when it comes to service for sidewalks, which the data indicates is Councilman [Alan Maisel](#). But in talking with his friends, he said he also found people wary of making a phone call, preferring email instead.

That encouraged him to update the site to add Twitter contacts for all members that had them. While he noted that Maisel did not use Twitter, it would be possible to post a message to the council member with the second most sidewalk cases, [David Greenfield](#).

"This is a convenient way to start a conversation and start to build that relationship where eventually people are [more] comfortable with the intimacy of a phone call," Burkart said.

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