

Oakland Public Ethics Commission Embraces Rise in Sunshine

March 10 – 16 is Sunshine Week, a time to promote transparency in government to ensure that the public can understand what its government is doing and how. In honor of this nationally recognized week, the Oakland Public Ethics Commission congratulates City staff and the community for shifting the momentum here in Oakland and making way for significant progress in opening up City government. Here are a few of the most notable achievements:

- City staff launched a new Open Data Platform where sets of data are made public on a central City website for direct, self-serve access by citizens (<https://data.oaklandnet.com>).
- Local community technologists formed OpenOakland, a group that meets weekly to collaborate with City staff to integrate open civic web technologies in government.
- The Public Ethics Commission joined City staff and other partners to sponsor CityCamp Oakland, hosted by OpenOakland, to discuss technology and open government with City and community members.
- City leaders drew in three Code for America fellows (not an easy feat!) who arrived in February to assess needs and work on specific technology projects and applications for the City, potentially including open government changes.
- City Council issued first approval of a local law to require electronic reporting of campaign information, making it easier to understand and search political payments.
- City staff created EngageOakland, an online public forum to engage a broad spectrum of participation around key City issues (www.engageoakland.com).

These are just a handful of the recent collaborative efforts that show action and make this an exciting time for the City to open up government and engage with citizens to enhance our effectiveness. More work is needed, however, to make Oakland a Sunshine leader.

With the wave of enthusiasm around technology, open government and civic engagement comes a new era for the City of Oakland Public Ethics Commission, a seven-member volunteer board charged with overseeing compliance with Sunshine (open meetings and public records) and other government integrity-related laws. The Commission was reduced to one full-time staff due to budget reductions in 2011 but held its first-ever retreat last Monday to strategize how to focus its limited staff resources for the greatest effect. Under new leadership, the Commission is retooling how it ensures compliance with laws such as the Sunshine Ordinance through prevention, enforcement and collaboration with City staff, leaders and community partners. This new approach recognizes that lasting results in transparency and accountability are achieved not through enforcement alone, but through a comprehensive strategy that aligns all points in the administration of City government – including clear policies and process, effective management and provision of staff resources, technology that facilitates the process, and an understanding of citizen expectations.

This year, improving access to public records is one of the Public Ethics Commission's top priorities. The Commission recently outlined an ideal framework to guide the City in advancing accessibility of Oakland public records and will hold a subcommittee meeting on this issue on Monday, March 18, at 5:30 p.m. at City Hall. Find out more at www.oaklandnet.com/pec.

Again, hats off to our innovative City staff, community partners, and our growing momentum for greater Sunshine throughout Oakland City government.

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