



WHAT'S INSIDE:	<u>Page</u>
<u>Information:</u>	
December 15 – Charlotte’s Open Data Portal Launch.....	2
Adjustment to Operating Hours for Charlotte Mecklenburg Government Center Lobby and Old City Hall Drive-up Pay Stations	3
Fire Department Grant Applications.....	3-4

INFORMATION:

December 15 – Charlotte’s Open Data Portal Launch

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In mid-December, the City will launch the Charlotte Open Data Portal. The Open Data Portal is a website for discovery, access, download and use of publicly-available, non-restricted open data maintained by City departments for business purposes.

The term “open data” refers to public data that can be freely used, reused and redistributed by anyone. Open data is provided in machine-readable formats—meaning that in addition to being able to view the data in the website’s tables, maps and charts, a user may also connect to the data and consume or use it directly in a software application. Possible benefits of open data range from internal process efficiencies offered by outside data users, greater governmental transparency and trust, and business growth in the community.

Initially, the Charlotte Open Data Portal will focus on geographic information system data such as police district boundaries, City roadway projects, adopted future land use areas, streets, and general reference information, as well as frequently requested data such as City salaries. As the Open Data Portal is extended over time, a rich array of departmental data will be available to citizens, researchers, City partners and software developers. The Open Data Portal website is based on the new Esri ArcGIS for Open Data software.

In addition to the launch of the Open Data Portal, Citygram, a software application, will also become available to demonstrate the value of open data. Citygram, developed through Charlotte’s Code for America Fellowship program, enables citizens to subscribe to automatic non-emergency event notifications by delineating an area of interest via a map (e.g., home, work, etc.) for each type of event. The Citygram application will be maintained and delivered by the Code for Charlotte Brigade, a local volunteer group that promotes government-to-citizen engagement with the use of technology. Charlotte’s Code for America Fellowship was made possible by the Knight Foundation, which has also sponsored Code for Charlotte Brigade events.

A media event for the Charlotte Open Data Portal launch will be held on December 15 at 1:30 p.m. in the CMGC CH-14. Invitations to City Council, City executives, media representatives and others will be sent on Thursday December 4.

Adjustment to Operating Hours for Charlotte Mecklenburg Government Center Lobby and Old City Hall Drive-up Pay Stations

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City Finance collects water, sewer and storm water payments at the Charlotte-Mecklenburg Government Center (CMGC) Lobby and Old City Hall Drive-up Pay Stations. Staff at the CMGC Lobby also sell transit passes and collect for loans, liens and citations. The current hours of operation are 8:00 a.m. – 6:00 p.m., Monday – Friday.

Due to the declining volume of transactions processed between 5:00 – 6:00 p.m. (typically averaging 7 compared to an average of 18 per hour between 8:00 – 5:00 pm), these locations will begin closing at 5 p.m. effective February 2, 2015. This change also brings the CMGC Lobby and Old City Hall Drive-up locations operating hours into alignment with the West Service Center – the City’s highest volume payment center.

The majority of transactions from 5:00 – 6:00 p.m. are for water, sewer and storm water accounts, and transit pass sales. There are a variety of other payment options still available to customers. Water, sewer and storm water customers can mail in payments, use the drop boxes at CMGC, or visit any of the 133 authorized Western Union payment locations (including BI-LO, Fifth Third Bank, Food Lion, Harris Teeter, Rite Aid, and Woodforest National Bank) in Mecklenburg County. Speedpay is available online or by phone to pay by debit/credit cards. Customers can also set up recurring bank draft through the City, use the Citizen Web Portal, or access online banking. Transit customers can purchase passes from the Uptown Transit Center and online. All electronic payment options are available to customers 24/7 for their convenience.

Staff will communicate this new closing time to customers over the next two months by posting signage at the Charlotte Mecklenburg Government Center Lobby and Old City Hall Drive-up Pay Stations. A bill message will also be included for water, sewer and storm water customers.

Fire Department Grant Applications

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The Charlotte Fire Department is applying for two grants from the FY2015 Assistance to Firefighters Grant Project: 1) purchase of additional turnout gear, 2) funding for a regional radio project. The Assistance to Firefighters Grant Project is a Federal Emergency Management Agency grant program that provides “financial assistance directly to fire departments and nonaffiliated Emergency Management Services organizations to enhance their capabilities with respect to fire and fire-related hazards.” The application deadline for the FY2015 Assistance to Firefighters Grant Project is December 5, 2014. If the City is the successful recipient of either grant, acceptance of the grant will be included on a future Council Business Agenda.

Turnout Gear Grant Application

The Fire Department is applying for a \$1,275,000 grant to purchase turnout gear. Turnout gear reduces the chemical exposure that firefighters experience while on the job. Per the Assistance to Firefighters Grant Project requirements, the Charlotte Fire Department would provide a 15% match (\$225,000) from the existing allocation for turnout gear included in the Fire Department's current operating budget. The grant award would allow the Fire Department to purchase an additional 850 suits.

Regional Radio Project Grant Application

The Fire Department is applying for a \$2,353,994 grant for a regional radio project. The regional project is a collaborative effort to ensure connectivity between dispatchers and other public safety agencies. The grant award will be shared by the City of Charlotte and Town of Mooresville (\$1,506,556 will go to Charlotte and \$847,438 to Mooresville; 64% and 36%, respectively). Grant funds would be used to purchase equipment to expand the existing radio network to areas within the region where coverage is currently spotty or non-existent. This expansion would give public safety agencies the ability to roam seamlessly throughout most of the region's Urban Area Security Initiative region.

Since this application is regional, the match requirement is based off of a federal formula that will require a match of \$307,042 for the regional radio project. The match will be funded based on the proportion of the grant award that Charlotte and Mooresville will receive. If the application is successful, the City's portion of the match (\$196,014) will be funded with existing allocations within the department's current radio communications capital funds.