

# The 4 pillars of Open Government

## Transparency

Most people think Open Government means transparency, but it requires more. Yet, access to public information and an ability to monitor the workings of government are essential in order to have Open Government.

Pittsburgh has an Open Data ordinance that provides access to public data sets. Those who are technically capable can now use the data to improve government and help the general public. But more is needed, as transparency also means being able to attend meetings, review records, and continuously monitor the governing and decision making processes.

### ***The Open Government Amendment:***

- requires unified information standards be applied across the municipality
- ensures free public access is readily possible via technologies in general use
- eliminates loop holes and practices that hide information from the public
- increases access to “public” meetings through the use of modern technologies

## Notification

Being able to get information isn't helpful if you're not aware you need to know something, or if you find out too late. Current notification isn't adequate and doesn't utilize the possibilities of today's technologies.

You need ***timely notification*** about matters that may affect your concerns before decisions are made, and you need time to act before they take effect.

### ***The Open Government Amendment:***

- increases both the items that require public notice and the various methods of notification
- ensures there's adequate time to make informed public comment and for you to act to protect your interests
- establishes a personalized notification process where you can register what you wish to be notified about whenever it's first discussed
- requires re-notification whenever new information becomes available that affects consideration of the matter involved

## Public Participation

Knowing in time to act is of little use if you can't interact effectively with the government. We need a better means for interacting with and bringing matters to the attention of public officials in order to ensure they're addressed.

### ***The Open Government Amendment:***

- provides a new framework and tools for ***pro-active public participation*** across the entire municipality, including public authorities, etc.
- establishes a ***Citizen Advisory Panel*** (CAP) which virtually anybody without a conflict of interests can join anytime
- enhances deliberation and discussion among those with different perspectives
- legislation and administrative actions are presented to the CAP, explained, and questions answered before their approval
- citizens can work on proposals and require Council and the administration to attend their presentation
- offers a better means to educate and inform the public about City affairs

## Accountability

As public officials often find it convenient when the public is uninformed, independent oversight of open government requirements is essential. Having a people's advocate in the form of an *Ombudsman* was to have been part of the original City Charter but was removed at the last minute. Public participation needs independent support to be its most effective.

### ***The Open Government Amendment:***

- sets forth procedures for enforcement of Open Government requirements
- creates an ***independent Open Gov't Office*** (OGO) which has a non-partisan, elected Director who serves a 4 year term
- OGO has oversight of Open Gov't provisions, administers the PA Right To Know Law for the City, etc.
- OGO acts as Ombudsman – taking complaints, investigating, reporting its recommendations, and assisting residents in their dealings with the City.
- OGO is responsible for providing the support needed for public participation

## Status Quo vs. Open Government

### Currently

### Under the Amendment

- |  |   |  |
|--|---|--|
| ✗ Pittsburgh's Open Data Ordinance is a start but more still needs to be made accessible   | → | ✓ Makes more usable information available online & through the local library   |
| ✗ Many meetings can be virtually unattendable because of time, location, or unseen notices   | → | ✓ All meetings which are "public" by law must be webcast with public comment online  |
| ✗ Public notice is given for limited items and often buried in the legal notices   | → | ✓ More public notice; all notices posted online; notice sent to individuals who request it   |
| ✗ Administrative matters often put into effect without public knowledge or input   | → | ✓ Advance notice of administrative matters put online and sent to those who request it   |
| ✗ Proposed legislation often hidden behind obscure or misleading titles and "captions"   | → | ✓ All legislation must be explained & citizen questions answered before it is introduced   |
| ✗ Claim of "proprietary information" often used to hide information from the public  | → | ✓ Eliminates numerous loopholes and makes it extremely difficult to hide information   |
| ✗ Information often unavailable for hearings   | → | ✓ Full disclosure of information when hearings are first scheduled and advertised  |
| ✗ Public comment limited to 3 minutes  | → | ✓ Full organized presentations possible  |
| ✗ Council hearings and public comment can be poorly attended by Council members  | → | ✓ A quorum (majority) of Council must attend its hearings, comment, presentations to it, etc.                                      |
| ✗ No effective means for proactive public participation in the City's governance   | → | ✓ A public participation body is established to facilitate active citizen involvement  |
| ✗ Practically impossible for individuals and citizen groups to uncover back room deals and/or disclose what's really going on          | → | ✓ Strong framework for citizen access to the inside workings of City government; ability to review matters and inform the public   |
| ✗ New candidates for public office come from the party machine; incumbent politicians buy favor using their office as an election tool | → | ✓ Average citizens can learn how government operates, prove their proficiency with the issues, and build support to run for office |
| ✗ Large campaign contributors and politically connected individuals get special access; citizen input often gets short shrift          | → | ✓ Council and the administration are held accountable and must give their full attention to hear and consider citizen input        |

OpenPittsburgh.Org

(412) 532-8338

## Open Government equals

## Better Government!

### 2 Referendum Ballot Questions: \*

Should Pittsburgh's Charter be amended to delete Article 6: Community Advisory Boards (abolished, Dec. 31, 2000) and substitute **Article 6: Open Government**, providing greater disclosure of City finances, public subsidies for real estate speculation, and activities of public officials and lobbyists; requiring public information, notices, and meetings be Internet accessible; setting uniform standards for information processing and handling throughout the City; creating a selectable notification process; and protecting and enhancing the public dissemination of information?

Should Pittsburgh's City Charter be amended creating an independent **Open Government Office**, with a nonpartisan elected Director serving 4-year terms, that: oversees open government requirements and practices; acts as Ombudsman, investigating citizen complaints, ethical matters, etc.; handles Right To Know inquiries; and is responsible for an open membership public participation body, to which pending legislative and administrative actions must be explained and through which citizens can develop and provide information and comment before final approval?

\* A print copy of the full amendment is available upon request. The full text is also online at: [OpenPgh.Org](http://OpenPgh.Org)

Get involved at:

paid for by  
 **OpenPittsburgh.Org**  
 (412) 532-8338

### Transparency

→ Know more about what's going on in your community

### Notification

→ Be told before the City does anything affecting you or your interests

### Public Participation

→ Have City officials hear your concerns before decisions are made

### Accountability

→ Hold gov't responsible between each election



# Pittsburgh's Open Government Referendum