

## New Housing Data Enables San Francisco Neighborhood Health App

Jessica Renee Napier | July 1, 2013



San Francisco is once again proving that it's a pioneer in the open data movement. According to city officials, this week city residents will be able to download a new, free mobile app called Neighborhood Score. Created by civic startup [Appallicious](#), the app allows users to view the health of every neighborhood in the city, via a civic data-powered rating system.

Neighborhood Score utilizes 23 open data sets, collected from federal, state and local agencies, as well as private data feeds. The application is broken up into seven different elements, and within each element are three to four health indicators. Each indicator receives a score between one and five, with five being the most desirable. The application then compiles the data into a 100-point rating score. Through the app, residents can see how their neighborhoods rank on public safety, school quality, crime rates, air quality, walkability and access to public transportation, to name a few.

"I would really like to see people use this and actually create change and make the points go up," said Yo Yoshida, Appallicious' CEO. "If your neighborhood score is low, I'd like to see a city supervisor say that we're going to try to make a specific indicator increase to a set number by the end of the year."

The app is a collaboration among Mayor Edwin Lee's Office, the San Francisco Department of Public Health (SFDPH) and Appallicious. The project received funding from nonprofits and a small amount from SFDPH. Neighborhood Score is built off a

new housing open data feed, the Home Facts Data Standard, that provides housing information for San Francisco.

Although Neighborhood Score is the first app built from the feed, this city has been working on making this data available for a several years.

“In 2007, SFDPH developed a community-based indicator system with 100 different indicators,” said Cyndy Comerford, the department’s planning and fiscal policy manager for the Environmental Health Section, and the project manager for the city’s involvement in Neighborhood Score. “But the system is difficult for people to use and to synthesize the information. We want a simplified version of this product and one that will display the geographic inequity in San Francisco.”

From a public health perspective, one of the goals is to raise citizen awareness about what elements make a healthy community.

“My hope is that this application advances health,” Comerford said, “and encourages participation in decision-making.”

Neighborhood Score lends itself to such decision-making both from the ground up and the top down, she said.

“Legislators typically go into a meeting with piles and piles of data on different spreadsheets,” Yoshida said. “We’re hoping that the legislative level can use the application to put resources where needed. Once you expose these strengths and weaknesses, that’s when things start being fixed.”

Future generations of this application may include a feedback loop either to 311 or other city agencies, giving citizens a way to engage directly with policy makers and to advocate for healthy living. However, with so many different agencies providing data to the application, Comerford said that it’s going to take innovation to incorporate an engagement function.

From a developer’s view, Yoshida said that such a utility is not far off.

“Because the city already has an Open311 infrastructure, they are receptive to such solutions for this application,” he said. “Engagement tools will be here in the very near future.”

When Lee announced Neighborhood Score at the 81st annual U.S. Conference of Mayors last month, many other cities indicated interest in creating a similar app. Now that Appalicious has created the platform, Yoshida explained, the application is more scalable, allowing the company to make it available to other cities for less money.

“Government can innovate in ways that they have not been able to in the past,” Yoshida said. “They are becoming an innovative tank rather than a bureaucratic tank.”

Neighborhood Score is currently being reviewed with Apple, and developers predict that it will be available to the public this week.