

Palo Alto, Calif.'s New CIO to Bring Business Expertise to Role

Brian Heaton | November 3, 2011



Jonathan Reichental has been named Palo Alto, Calif.'s new CIO by city manager James Keene. Currently the CIO for O'Reilly Media, a publisher of technology and innovation books and resources, Reichental will begin his new position on Dec. 13.

According to a statement from the city, Reichental — who also served as director of IT Innovation for PricewaterhouseCoopers, an audit, assurance and tax advisory company, for 14 years — was selected from a pool of 147 applicants looking to be Palo Alto's tech czar.

"Jonathan was the clear frontrunner in our recruitment," Keene said in the statement.

"He brings a combination of creative and entrepreneurial drive and skills and a commitment to taking city government to the forefront of public technology and innovation, befitting Palo Alto, the heartbeat of Silicon Valley."

What Palo Alto's new CIO doesn't bring to the table, however, is experience working in local government.

In an interview with Government Technology, Reichental was confident his skills would translate well in the public arena. He said that priorities such as being innovative and having an agenda that takes advantage of new technology and alternative ways of tackling problems are consistent approaches used in both the public and private sectors.

Reichental added that while he was confident his 20-plus years of technology and business experience will serve him well in Palo Alto, he also needs to find a way to implement that knowledge in what is for him, a different, highly visible and political environment. Particularly in a city that has some of the most tech-savvy residents in the nation.

"I realize there's a gap, [but] I'm a quick learner, so my belief is with the help of my colleagues and my team, I can get up to speed in the areas I don't yet have experience with," Reichental said. "But the deep part of what they needed was an IT leader that could bring a business class set of skills to the table and apply them in that public sector context."

Transitory Issues

But will Reichental's business acumen be challenged by potentially shorter purse strings and a need to be fully transparent?

While he'll preside over an annual combined operating and capital budget of approximately \$14 million, Reichental said that in his current role with O'Reilly Media, every decision he's made in regard to expenditures in the last few months is published and open, so the transition to doing it in the public space shouldn't be all that difficult.

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Although Reichental said it's a little premature to talk about his initial projects with Palo Alto, he admitted there is some work to do around understanding and figuring out the right IT governance for the city. That first step, he said, is critical so decisions can be made judiciously about investments and who Palo Alto partners with from the vendor community.

But ultimately, he stressed a lot of time during his first few months will be spent listening to what others have to say about the state of Palo Alto's IT strategy and infrastructure.

"I know that's a bit of a cop-out in terms of answering, but it's the truth," Reichental said. "I want to listen to a lot of people and really understand what we need to do and where we need to prioritize."

One of those groups Reichental is sure to be speaking with is his own staff. He'll be leading a team of 30 people and feels it's critical to shape the core of that IT group so that it can deliver on strategy items as the city works on new projects.

"My view has always been that success comes through talent," Reichental said. "You can kind of figure out technology, ultimately. But you have to have the right people motivated, energized and focused on the right thing."

<http://www.govtech.com/e-government/Palo-Alto-Califs-New-CIO-to-Bring-Business-Expertise-to-Role.html>