

After a Lengthy National Search, Philadelphia Names a Permanent CIO

Zack Quaintance | September 10, 2018



Philadelphia has named Interim CIO Mark Wheeler as the permanent denizen of that job, following a national search that ultimately ended with a look inward, the city announced today in a press release.

Wheeler has served as interim CIO since the January dismissal of his predecessor, [Charles Brennan](#). Prior to that, Wheeler served as deputy CIO as well as chief geographic information officer. In those positions he led teams of analysts, developers and Web designers, which is experience likely to serve him well in his new role. Wheeler first came to City Hall in Philadelphia in 2010 as a planner for the City Planning Commission.



In a conversation with *Government Technology*, Wheeler said that his background in planning gives him a unique perspective with which to lead the Office of Information Technology (OIT). Essentially, he has been a customer of OIT in the past, collaborating with technologists to meet departmental and community needs, and he has intimate knowledge of what it's like to be on the other side of local government innovation and tech work.

“One of the things I realized early on when I came over to OIT from planning, is I was one of the users,” Wheeler said. “I was one of the constituents who needed to benefit from open data, more dynamic and easy-to-use analysis tools, and better data integration. I often reference my experiences, and I have a number of contacts across departments that I can tap and say, ‘Can you help us evaluate your approach to this?’”

In discussing the department's future, Wheeler stressed an ongoing and increased commitment to modern practices such as user-centered design, user-centered research, and more agile work on everything from development to procurement — the type used for years by the private sector but still elusive for government.

Wheeler noted that such work is a heavy lift, requiring a measured and pragmatic approach. Establishing more [agile methods of procurement](#) is also something OIT hopes to facilitate by building on the previous work done by the office of the chief administrative officer.

“It's going to take us time to ramp up to that,” Wheeler said. “ There's a lot of learning we need to do.

Wheeler said the structure of Philadelphia is such that another key priority for him as CIO is collaborating with other agencies doing adjacent work, including the city's [Office of Open Data and Digital Transformation](#), as well as [Philadelphia's GovLab](#).

In announcing Wheeler's new role, the city cited a list of his accomplishments during his time as chief geographic information officer, including reinvigorating Philadelphia's GIS operations and helping to foster collaboration, location-based analysis and data sharing among city staff. The city also noted that Wheeler has initiated public tools to

foster better access to property-related data; access to years of imagery and maps via [Atlas](#) and [OpenMaps](#); and that through Wheeler's leadership, the city now has its first reliable inventory of [vacant buildings and lots](#).

"During his tenure with the city, Mark Wheeler has proven himself to be an insightful and enterprising technologist," said Chief Administrative Officer Christine Derenick-Lopez in the city's press release. "I'm confident that he is the perfect choice to lead OIT's two-fold mandate: upgrading and improving the IT systems that empower city departments, while at the same time ensuring that Philadelphia remains a leader in municipal innovation to improve services to residents."

<http://www.govtech.com/people/After-a-Lengthy-National-Search-Philadelphia-Names-a-Permanent-CIO.html>