

TEN INNOVATIONS THAT REIMAGINE CITY SERVICES

Boston's Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics

Compiled and Edited by Alex Lawrence

Ash Center Summer Fellow, Harvard Kennedy School 2013

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Alex Lawrence served as a 2013 Ash Center Fellow for the Boston Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics. Alex is candidate for a 2014 Master's in Public Policy from the Harvard Kennedy School.

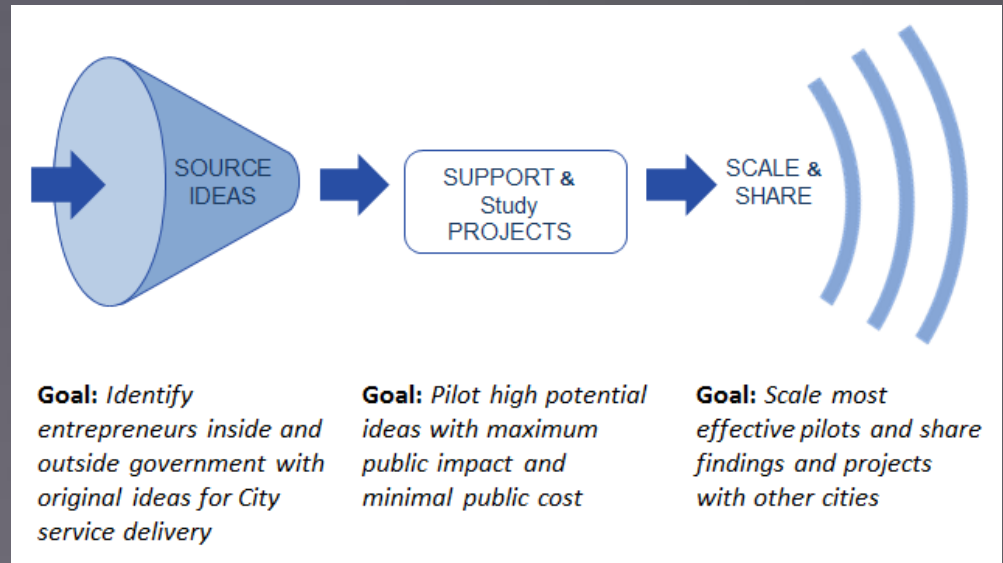
A native of Brookline Massachusetts, Alex has been working to provide access to resources for residents of the Greater Boston area since her high school days. After graduating from Wesleyan University with a degree in sociology, Alex worked at Action for Boston Community Development (ABCD), a city-wide anti-poverty organization, eventually running the organizations' site in Mission Hill.

After four years at ABCD, Alex left to advance her policy, leadership, and quantitative skills at HKS, and continues to advance her goals of working in the field of social and urban policy to improve the lives of low-income city residents. After her experience with the Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics, Alex believes that municipal government might be the best way to achieve this goal.

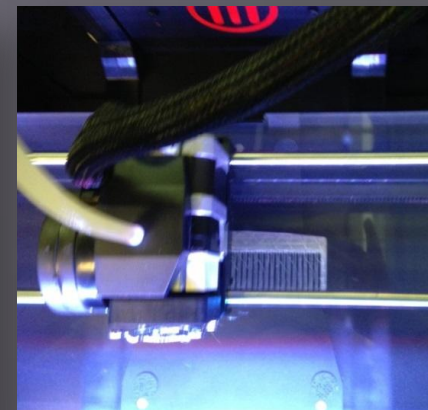


ABOUT MONUM

The Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics (MONUM) pilots experiments that offer the potential to radically improve the quality of city services. To design, conduct, and evaluate pilot projects in these areas, MONUM builds partnerships between constituents, academics, entrepreneurs, nonprofits, and city staff. Many other cities have already worked to model their innovation teams after the MONUM office.



Pictured top-right is a visual of MONUM's Project Pipeline that illustrates how projects are sourced, supported, and scaled by the department. Bottom-right are pictures of MONUM staff exploring the MakerBot 3D Printer and brainstorming possible uses for interactive constituent engagement.



1) THE BUMP SUMMER POLICY FELLOWS

Working alongside the Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics, The Boston Urban Mechanics Program (BUMP) Policy Fellowship is an eight-week internship for graduate students in the city of Boston interested in working in public service. Fellows work in a cohort, generating and implementing creative and thoughtful new policies and programs to benefit the city of Boston. In addition to their projects, fellows learn about the mission and work of city departments through weekly presentations and panels by cabinet chiefs, department heads, and senior staff. These programs enable the city to bring innovative, new ideas to municipal government and truly inspire participants to see the power of local government. The projects described in this presentation come primarily from MONUM and the BUMP fellows.

Most of the 2013 Summer Fellows are pictured top-right visiting with Mayor Thomas Menino, and bottom-right on their trip to Camp Harborview with the Fellowship and Internship Director, Patricia Boyle-McKenna.



2) CITIZENS CONNECT AND COMMONWEALTH CONNECT



Co-Chairs of the Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics, Nigel Jacob and Chris Osgood (pictured left), were named Public Officials of the Year 2011 by *Governing* Magazine. Their national recognition has been, in part, due to the incredible success of their application Citizens Connect, which engages residents in the process of maintaining of their own city neighborhoods by allowing them to report public issues directly from their smartphones.

Since its early release in January 2013, over four thousand service requests have been submitted and nearly 3,400 service requests have been completed.

This award-winning application has been replicated and modeled by many other cities throughout Massachusetts and across the country. Based on Citizens Connect, Commonwealth Connect brought the application to 54 other municipalities across the state (and counting).



3) CAMP HARBORVIEW

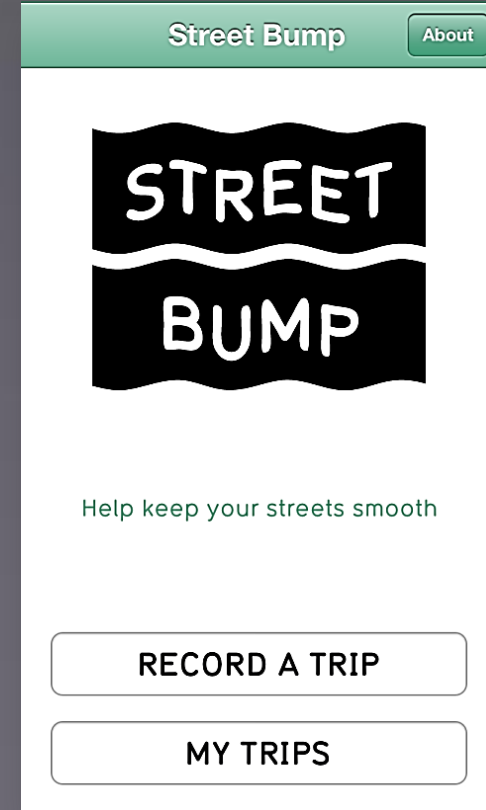


Solar panels. A stunning rock climbing wall. An Olympics-size swimming pool. Views of the Boston skyline. Animation classes. A yoga studio. An urban garden. Did your summer camp have that?

These are just a few of the opportunities that kids have at Camp Harborview. Funded privately, in partnership with the city of Boston and the Boys & Girls Clubs of Boston, Camp Harborview offers 800 children ages 11 to 14 living in Boston's at-risk neighborhoods the opportunity to leave the city during the day and participate in a four-week summer camp program. Tuition for one camper is just \$5 per four week session.

This model city program combines technology, education, and good plain fun to enable Boston's at-risk youth to have the summer experiences they never thought they could.

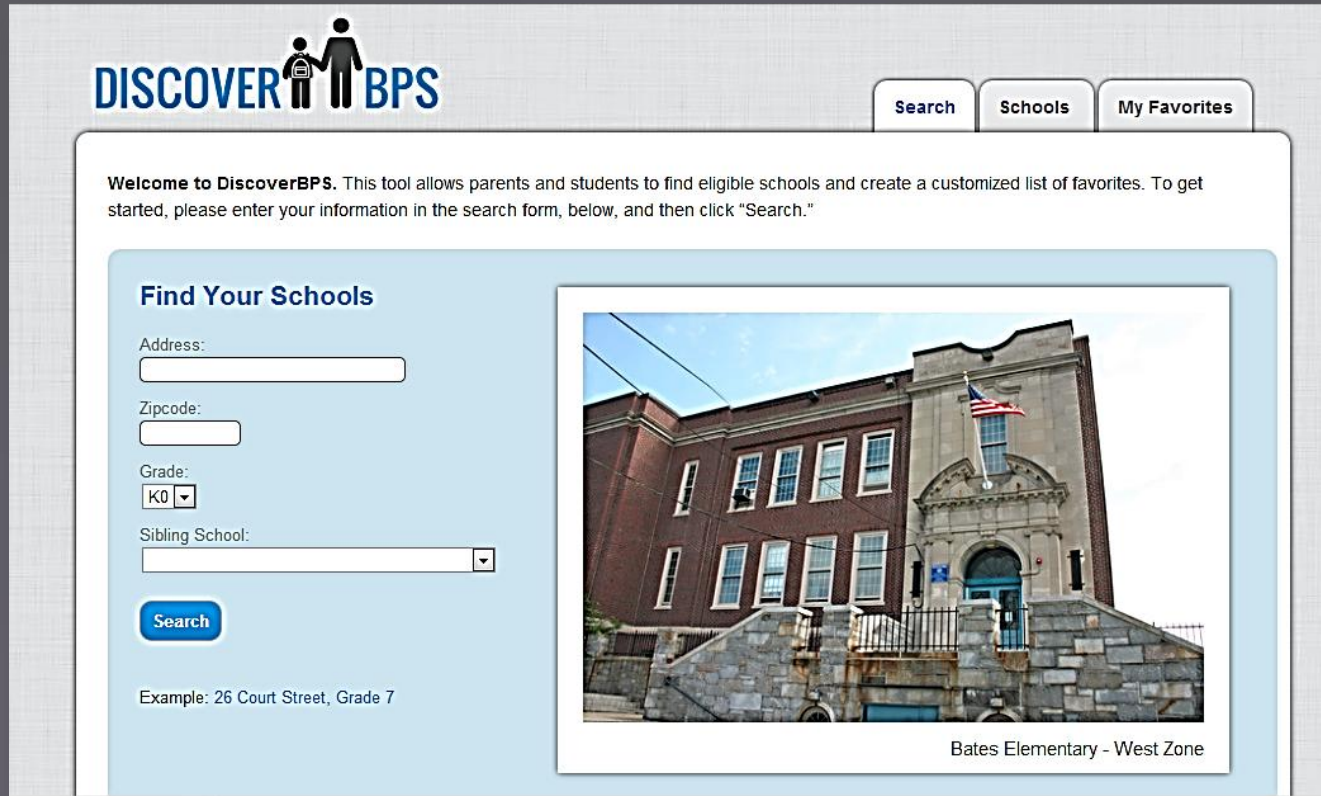
4) STREET BUMP



James Solomon, Harvard Kennedy School MPP, former Ash Center Fellow, and director of Boston's Street Bump program (pictured above), has been hitting the streets of East Boston to beta test the city's newest mobile application.

Street Bump is an app that helps residents improve their neighborhood streets. As they drive, the mobile app collects data about the smoothness of the ride. That data can provide the city with real-time information it uses to fix problems and plan long-term investments. The app is available for download, but is still undergoing testing and improvements.

5) DISCOVER BPS



The screenshot shows the Discover BPS web application interface. At the top left is the logo "DISCOVER BPS" with a stylized icon of a child and an adult. To the right are three navigation buttons: "Search", "Schools", and "My Favorites". Below the navigation is a welcome message: "Welcome to DiscoverBPS. This tool allows parents and students to find eligible schools and create a customized list of favorites. To get started, please enter your information in the search form, below, and then click 'Search.'"

The main content area is titled "Find Your Schools" and contains a search form with the following fields:

- Address:
- Zipcode:
- Grade:
- Sibling School:

Below the form is a blue "Search" button. An example text reads: "Example: 26 Court Street, Grade 7".

To the right of the form is a photograph of a brick school building with a stone staircase leading to a blue door. An American flag is flying in front of the building. Below the photo is the caption: "Bates Elementary - West Zone".

This Web application, developed by MONUM in partnership with Code for America, helps Boston Public School (BPS) parents navigate the options of the myriad public schools available to their children.

Inspired by Websites that help you find the best travel options, Discover BPS incorporates tools to help you map, "favorite," and find more details on schools throughout the city. The platform was piloted in the 2011-2012 school year.

6) HERO SQUARES

Interactive placards that display biographical information about fallen service members are being installed on existing Hero Square street signs. These will allow the public to access associated online content by scanning the QR code on the signs with their smartphones.

This project hopes to transform the public's experience with the 1,285 Hero Square street signs currently posted throughout the city. The project was coordinated this summer by BUMP Fellow Greg Johnson.

Mayor Thomas M. Menino, along with City Councilor Tito Jackson and the family of Sergeant Alberto D. Montrond in Roxbury—who was killed in the line of duty in Afghanistan—met in Dorchester to unveil a new project: “Boston’s History of Heroes.”



7) “CITY HALL TO GO” TRUCK



Inspired by food trucks, the mobile City Hall truck serves city residents where they live, work, and play, without having to come to City Hall. “City Hall To Go” has been making stops all through Boston’s neighborhoods and offers a menu of city services directly to constituents right out of the truck.

The truck has also made appearances at special events, block parties, and street festivals, and can provide seasonal services per resident’s request.



CITY HALL TO GO menu

MAYOR THOMAS M. MENINO

This Vehicle Does Not Take Cash Payments.

 car <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pay a Parking Ticket• Dispute a Parking Ticket• Request a Residential Parking Permit• Renew a Residential Parking Permit• Request a Handicap Parking Space• Sign up for Street Cleaning Alerts• Sign up for Snow Alerts• Order a Meter Card• Pay Excise Taxes	 family <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Get an e-Library Card• Request a Birth Certificate• Request a Death Certificate• Request a Marriage Certificate• Register to Vote
 home <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Get Recycling Bin Stickers• Pay Property Taxes• Request a Certificate of Residency	 pets <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Get a Dog License  plus <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Ask a Question• Submit a Service Request• Seasonal Services

 All requests for official documents will be processed promptly. Birth, marriage, death, and residency certificates, parking permits and meter cards will be mailed.

8) ADOPT-A-TREE



Urban trees provide many aesthetic, environmental, and public health benefits to cities. While Boston is working to increase its tree canopy by planting over 1,000 trees a year, these newly planted trees have a difficult time getting established in the tough urban environment.

The Adopt-a-Tree program aims to engage citizens in caring for these young trees through community partnerships, creative use of technology, and participation incentives. When residents sign up to Adopt-A-Tree, they commit to caring for the tree by watering weekly and tending to the tree pit. For their efforts, adopters receive an Adoption Sign to place in the tree pit.

Pictured left is BUMP Fellow Marcy Ostberg who worked to get the program off the ground the summer.

9) GIRLS MAKE THE CITY



This summer, Mayor Menino, along with BUMP fellows Laurel Donaldson and Mariko Davidson, launched a new, free event for the young women of Boston called “Girls MAKE the City,” an interactive science and technology festival for girls age 12-14. The event was designed to help engage women in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM).

“Girls MAKE the City” connected 70 middle school girls with female role models in unconventional STEM fields, and inspired them through hands-on workshops related to technology and innovation.

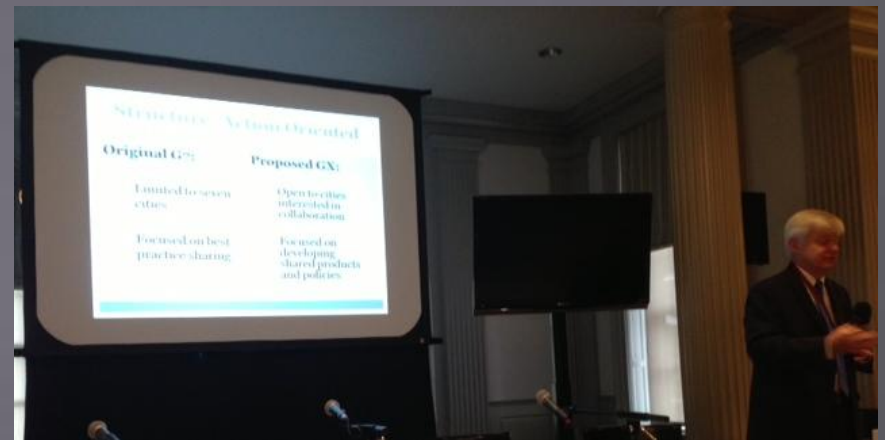
Photos above were taken at “Girls MAKE the City,” which took place on August 23, 2013, in Boston’s Innovation District.

10) THE GX

Under the leadership of Bill Oates, Chief Information Officer for the city of Boston and the Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics, Boston is working to relaunch a technology partnership between big-city municipal government leaders.

The GX represents an opportunity for municipal technology and innovation leaders to support collaboration between cities, improve technological infrastructure, and ultimately better serve residents. This partnership will not only enable members to share information and best practices but also to join forces on projects which can help cities jointly utilize technology to solve community problems. Ash Center and BUMP Fellow Alex Lawrence worked to get the partnership off the ground this summer.

In these photos, Bill Oates garners the support and partnership of several other cities at an Urban Policy Advisory Group (UPAG) conference at Harvard Kennedy School.



LOOKING AHEAD:

Extending MONUM's Scope to Social Problems

While participating in various pilot projects with the Mayor's Office of New Urban Mechanics, I witnessed how civic innovation can improve the quality and efficiency of city services and enrich the interaction between citizens and government. MONUM employs a model not commonly seen in government. It is able to take risks and pilot creative projects before scaling them in a way that enhances the scope of what government can do.

Civic technology holds the power to make society more equitable. It has the ability to reach individuals not often engaged in governmental decision-making, and can transform the way constituents communicate with government. Yet, while MONUM's projects address complex city problems, few directly tackle issues of inequality and access to public resources for those typically excluded from them.

Perhaps innovation is more easily applied to city operations such as public works than to social challenges such as inequality and poverty. However, city government initiatives like MONUM are well-placed to extend their efforts in innovation and civic technology to tackling society's more entrenched social problems. Innovation departments like MONUM could look into how civic technology can provide access to other resources (such as food pantries) or create honest dialogue (on topics such as race and social inequality). There is great potential in this work, and I hope that what lies ahead is a movement of expanding municipal innovation towards the goal of creating social equity.