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PAWLOWSKI UNVEILS QUICK REPORTER MOBILE APP

The City of Allentown is closer toward establishing a 311 System with today's introduction of the "Allentown 311 Quick Reporter" mobile app.

Mayor Ed Pawlowski and city Chief Information Officer Matthew Leibert introduced the app at a morning news conference in City Council Chambers. The mobile 311 app is another step toward establishing a 311 Center at the city's 911 Communications Center site on W. Fairmount Street.

The Commonwealth of Pennsylvania has mandated that, as of June 2019, the city 911 system is to be decommissioned with the receipt and dispatch of emergency calls transferred to Lehigh County's 911 system. That transition is currently the subject of meetings between the city and the county.

The transfer of 911 (Emergency Call Handling) frees-up applicable city facilities, related equipment and other human and financial resources creating an opportunity to significantly improve customer (citizen) services and more fully develop inner and intra departmental efficiencies through a Customer Relations Management (CRM) / 311 (Non-Emergency Call Handling) system.

"This system will enable city government to become more responsive," said Pawlowski. "New technologies are being developed all the time that enable us to work smarter. This app will help us do that."

A 311 system is not just a computer system but, a system comprised of people, processes, technology and data. The “Allentown 311 Quick Reporter” is one of the pieces of the puzzle and the official/published name of the app that is available today as a free app in the Apple app store & the Google Play store by searching for “Allentown 311.”

According to Leibert, “The “Allentown 311 Quick Reporter” is a crowdsourcing app. Crowdsourcing apps are an innovative category of apps that enable a process in which individuals or organizations (in this case “Allentown”) contribute information from a large group of unknown individuals (“the crowd”). We are leveraging the collective power of our city of 118,000 to become active participants in their local government.”

Citizens are able to quickly report problems or observations through the application. The reports are delivered to city staff through the city’s GIS mapping system. Staff members have access to an Operations Map & dashboard where reports can be reviewed and assigned to the appropriate part of the agency.

The app is an extension of the city’s GIS which stores records of parcels, addresses, roads, boundaries and just about anything the city is required to manage. Now, the city staff will manage these citizen observations within the same mapping system giving immediate context to where & what type of incidents are occurring.

The 311 system will make city government more responsive and accountable to Allentown citizens and is cost effective. The app was developed with in-house resources and support from the city’s GIS vendor, ESRI. ESRI delivered these new capabilities this summer as part of bi-annual software support and maintenance. The ability for GIS staff to develop apps and deliver map based dashboards to staff and the public is an excellent opportunity for the city to work smarter and be more transparent. Eventually the city will be able to push the data collected back out to the citizenry through the city’s open data portal, opendata.allentownpa.gov and our mapping portal maps.allentownpa.gov.

Leibert explained that there are more than 50 types of observations that can be submitted. Once the app is launched on a user’s device, you see a home screen with two options, New & Drafts. Choose New, and you are presented with a Disclaimer screen with some information about true emergencies and the city’s hours of operation. On the Select Report Type screen you choose a report type. Next you provide location information. You can use the “target” button on the map and the app will use the GPS of your device to zoom the map to your location. Optionally, you can search for an address and also zoom to a location of the map. On the Add Photo screen, you have

the option of taking a new picture or choosing one from your device's camera roll. Up to six pictures can be added. On the details screen, you can enter a short descriptive text, choose if you would like follow-up on your issue, and optionally provide contact information. At this point, you can "Submit" or Save your quick report. In the event that you lose network connectivity during the process, saving your report will put in your "drafts" folder on the home screen.

"The app allows the user to report issues quickly and efficiently," Pawlowski said. "The sooner we get the information, the faster we can work on a solution."