

GUEST COLUMN

Tech the Halls!

By Regina Whitley

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Listening to the transition team presentations for mayor-elect Jim Strickland on Dec. 16, I was struck by the common thread of technology as a solution recommended to improve city of Memphis government:

Metrics and accountability: To measure and communicate the effectiveness of Memphis government, the team recommended reaching out to the private sector to draw on the talents of the information technology departments of our leading companies, such as FedEx, to gain insight on the use of big data and analytics. The foundation is in place with the new MEMFacts Public Dashboard to position Memphis as a Smart City harnessing technology to drive results.

Financial responsibility: To create financial transparency, the team suggests an electronic dashboard to publish a simplified budget that will keep Memphis informed on the annual plans and associated spending for the city. Visualization software used by industry today has made complex data a quick read for broad organizations. Fiscal Focus Pittsburgh, a new financial data platform, provides the public, city officials and the media unprecedented access to city budget data. Memphis can do this, too.

Community: This team proposed that Strickland implement a collaborative style of government to provide town hall and online meetings, and to use collaboration tools in connecting with the citizens of Memphis. Attracting and retaining a creative class will require the new administration to reach out through technology channels and social media.

Poverty: The TechHire grant led by the Workforce Investment Network (WIN) is

bringing together Memphis organizations to gain federal funding to provide practical technology training for software development and certifications in IT. This training is designed to help citizens gain new skills for immediate employment in the IT sector, where middle-class jobs with long-term career potential remain unfilled in the Memphis market.

Youth: The team's strong recommendation is to provide Internet connectivity, computer devices and appropriate learning tools within our community centers to engage Memphis youth. Keeping young Memphians focused on educational activities for digital literacy will reduce crime and improve high-school graduation rates for our underprivileged youth.

Crime and public safety: Improving public safety in Memphis is reliant on the efficiency of our 911 call centers. Memphis has been awarded an IBM Smart City Challenge Grant and will benefit from a team of experts who will provide solutions to improve this critical resource. The recommended education of the community on alternate 311 services also highlighted the use of technology to improve city service delivery.

City planning: A central map for city planning using advanced mapping technology was highly recommended as a way to gain a common view for transportation, utilities, housing and development. Memphis Light, Gas and Water Division, Memphis Housing Authority and the city of Memphis have strong IT organizations that could collaborate to achieve this goal.

Minority business development: Carolyn Hardy, the team presenter and newly named chairwoman for the Greater Memphis Chamber, achieved success as the plant manager of the local Smuckers facility. Her professional path as an IT leader and software developer laid the foundation for her subsequent success as an entrepreneur and serves as a model for the opportunity to strengthen the IT skills within our community.

The incorporation of technology through dashboards driven by data and analytics, centralized mapping, Internet connectivity, IT training and enhanced 911 and 311 services will go a long way to deliver a 21st-century service environment for Memphis.

Engaging the IT talent in Memphis through our technology providers, IT leadership in business and our educational sector as partners will help mayor-elect Strickland and his administration usher in a new day at City Hall to achieve these goals.

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