Silicon Florist

Covering the blossoming startup industry in Portland, Oregon, and the Silicon Forest

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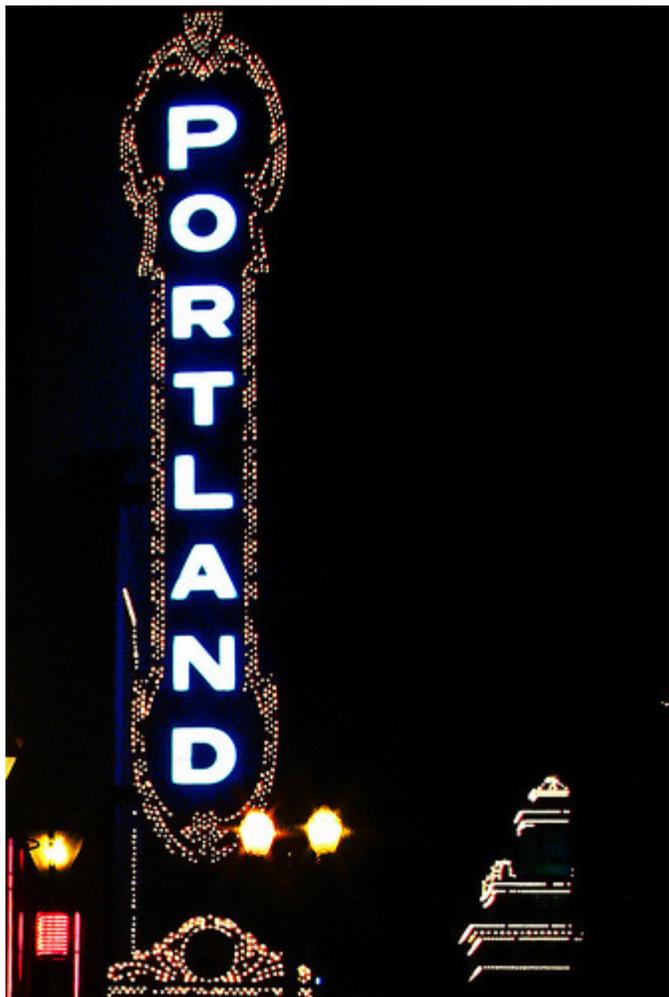- Archive
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May 19th, 2009

Portland Mayor Sam Adams talks open source, mobile, coworking, and the startup environment

- by Rick Turoczy
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Last Sunday, a group of folks representing the Portland open source, mobile, and coworking community got the chance to sit down and chat with Portland Mayor Sam Adams. Among those in attendance were Rubyist and Calagator lead Audrey Eschright, CubeSpace's David Komisky, Software Association of Oregon Interim President Scott Kveton, the Mayor's Economic Development Policy Advisor Skip Newberry, CubeSpace's Eva Schweber, General Counsel at Extreme Arts & Sciences J-P Voilleque, and Small Society's Raven Zachary.

Eva has a great recap of how the meeting played out, including insight on the topics we covered from telecommuting to open source to mobile. **[UPDATE]** And Skip Newberry from the Mayor's Office has posted his recap, as well. So I wanted to take a different tact. I wanted to find out how the attendees perceived the meeting and the Mayor's willingness to engage this group in conversation.

Here's what they had to say.

Overall, the group was both impressed and pleased that the Mayor took the time to sit down with this constituency. But more importantly, that he took the time to listen.

"I was very pleasantly surprised by his level of authenticity," said Zachary. "He was a good listener. I always judge a politician by how good of a listener they are. And he scores high in my book."

Throughout the conversation, one thing came through loud and clear: the potential for the startup community.

"It was great to meet with Sam Adams and hear that the city is really trying to find a way to differentiate itself," said Kveton. "He's clearly working to find a balance that leverages our existing strengths. Portland

couldn't be in better hands."

"I feel like he really was looking for expert advice," said Zachary. "He didn't have any problem with looking outside government for advice on technology. And there are probably some really smart tech people in municipal government."

But it wasn't all Kumbaya. The conversation also highlighted that were definite areas of learning for the City.

"For me, the most interesting thing was hearing how much of a shift is required for outside organizations to understand the indie tech economy," said Eschright. "I'm so embedded in this way of doing things that it just seems obvious that many of us are working in small flexible teams, not just at big companies like Intel. But for the City of Portland right now, it's something they need help figuring out, and in particular need to start tracking/measuring so we're a part of the economic policy too."

"For me, the key takeaway was that the city needs hooks to explain and articulate what the Portland tech community has to offer *already*," said J-P. "Telling the story of what's happening now is a bigger issue—and one that's been neglected."

And obviously, there are areas where the Portland startup community is being less than helpful to the city.

"Where do we go to find this community?" the Mayor asked at several points during the conversation.

At one point, a feeble "Twitter?" was the reply. And that simply won't work.

"Twitter doesn't count," J-P said. "It needs to be more than a phone book but less than a union, and we won't know what the structure should be until we figure out who's in it."

A solid start

In my opinion, this was a great beginning to a much longer conversation. Given the get-it-all-out-there opportunity, the group had to engage in very much of a "show up and throw up" level of dialogue. So we got a lot out on the table. But we didn't get the chance to discuss anything in depth.

Unfortunately, this rush to raise topics left some falling by the wayside, like telecommunications infrastructure. On the upside it also enabled us to broach other topics like the city being more open with data.

Long story short, it was an excellent start to a conversation that I hope to see continue. It was an honor to be included, and I'd encourage the Mayor to continue holding these conversations—just as he has with this group and the folks over at Nedspace, among others. And, of course, I would be remiss if I didn't thank Eva and the Mayor's Office for bringing the group together to begin the dialogue—and to the participants for providing their feedback on the meeting

It seems that the rest of the group is eager to see where this goes, as well.

"I would love to see the City of Portland mandate open source/open data for their own work, and start creating incentives for local businesses to think this way too," said Eschright. "I think there are a lot of ways our tech community could collaborate with local government toward resources we all need, so I'm interested to see where this goes."

Here's hoping the Mayor and his staff felt the same way.

(Image courtesy Misserion. Used under Creative Commons.)

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4 Responses to "Portland Mayor Sam Adams talks open source, mobile, coworking, and the startup environment"

1. *Nancy King* says:
   May 19, 2009 at 12:57 pm

   My thoughts: the PDX start up and technology scene is both collaborative and fragmented. There is no one place where the big, small, mobile, open source, hardware, software, people consistently come together. OEN, SAO AeA have long been the go-to organizations that public officials communicate with. If they stay in touch with the big employers, the hot new start ups and these organizations, they've done their part. Too much effort not enough reward to do anything else.

   We all know the true scene is not packaged nicely and the Mayor seems to know it too.

   The thought that the Mayor gets this is a big step. Now, it's up to those who have felt they have no voice to make it real EASY on the Mayor's office (and other leaders) to understand the priorities . The more inclusive the group the better.

   Good public servants, know what they don't know. Time for those who have remained quiet, feeling that public involvement isn't necessary to help educate an obviously interested Mayor. He needs to know what will truly put Portland on the map. Public/private partnership can be a powerful thing if it's done well.

   Having just finished a search for an Arts org doing a somewhat similar thing, it's both exciting and it's daunting. I encourage those that were apart of this conversation to embrace the opportunity to execute. That's the opportunity you were just handed.

2. *Marshall* says:
   May 20, 2009 at 3:28 pm

   Where do we go to find the community? Barcamp! RIght?

3. *Rick Turoczy* says:
   May 20, 2009 at 3:35 pm

   @Marshall Well, yes. Unfortunately that answer continues with "… and 50 other events that attract different folks." :)

4. *Nelking* says:
   May 20, 2009 at 7:28 pm

   Would you say it's sort of fragmented and difficult to organize? It's the nature of PDX I'm afraid…

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- [7th Planet Picture Show at Mt Tabor Theater & Pub](#)
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- Dec 15
- [Portland Java User Group at Oracle](#)
- Dec 16
- [Portland X-Link 2009 Networking and Food Drive Party at Paddy's Bar & Grill](#)
- [pdxmindshare networking event at Paddy's at Paddy's Bar & Grill](#)
- Dec 17

- Portland Ten/NedSpace Annual Christmas Potluck at NedSpace Old Town
- IxDA Portland: Design Jam Session at About Us
- SAOpdx: Building Applications for Mobile Devices at Portland State University
- Dec 18
- 30 hour day at Portland Incubator Experiment (PIE)
- Jan 6
- Wiki Wednesday at AboutUs offices
- iPhone programming for the absolute beginner. at TBD
- CHIFOO Meeting: Confessions of a Public Speaker with Scott Berkun at White Stag Building
- Jan 7
- Digital Journalism Social Hour at Rose & Thistle Pub
- Jan 13
- Portland WaveWednesday at AboutUs offices
- Jan 20
- Lunch 2.0 at Extensis at Extensis
- See more events

Of interest

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Silicon Florist is blog about the Silicon Forest (a tech corridor comprised of Portland, Oregon, and the surrounding areas) startups, blogs, and events that fly below the RADAR. Silicon Florist is written by Rick Turoczy. You can connect with me on: Twitter, Facebook, or LinkedIn. Rest assured, tips, news submissions, and press releases are welcome and encouraged. Please feel free to submit them to siliconflorist@gmail.com or feel free to share your Silicon Forest based project with me.

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