Boston's PropTech Voice

December 4: PR Deep Dive with Katie Sullivan and Cameron Sperance

Right after Thanksgiving, we'll be back at coUrbanize! They'll be hosting us at the WeWork location, 33 Arch Street, 17th floor. As always, please RSVP by email to Chuck Tanowitz no less than 24 hours in advance so we can make sure all names are with building security. The meeting starts promptly at 8am and goes until 9:30am.

This month we'll welcome Cameron Sperance of BisNow and Katie Sullivan of Boylston Properties to discuss marketing and PR strategies in commercial real estate and proptech. How do you integrate strategies to make an impact in the market? How do you position yourself for press coverage? What does it take to get, and keep, the attention of the media? How can proptech companies reach real estate audiences and tell meaningful stories? We'll answer that.

Cameron recently wrote about efforts to increase inclusion and participation by the LGBTQ+ community in the real estate space. As part of Boston Built Tech's mission to drive and showcase diversity in proptech, we'll take a look at some of the key LGBTQ+ issues within the real estate and property tech community. It looks to be a fascinating discussion and we hope you can join us.

Add to Calendar

Tolemi gives governments the power to change how they work

There was a point in [Tolemi's](#) presentation at HqO's new world headquarters that offered a new look at Boston's housing crisis. By pulling data from different sources, including zoning, permitting, building and assessing databases, Tolemi CEO Andrew Kieve showed which neighborhoods were built out well below available Floor Area Ratios (FAR). For those not familiar with zoning, FAR is a measure by which a builder (or homeowner) determines how big a structure can be on any given property. When combined with restrictions governing issues like setbacks and height, it provides a buildable area in which you can put up a building.

The fact that several neighborhoods in Boston, including places like Longwood, Fenway and East Boston, are built significantly under what current zoning allows means that, without changing a thing at the city level, there is room for more housing. It also offers a very clear, data-driven indication as to the role that zoning plays in what actually gets built.

Tolemi does what a lot of big data companies claim to do; they take data from different silos and allow those in decision making positions to ask questions and make better decisions. In their case the people they're hoping are those in municipal governments. In Boston, for example, municipal-owned properties can belong to any one of 17 different agencies, so even getting an understanding of the city's assets takes a lot of effort. All this is to achieve their core mission: to help local governments build more sustainable communities using data to support evidence-based decisions.

Take the city of Las Vegas, in which the mayor wanted to get police calls down by 5%. An analysis found that most police calls were related, in some way, to abandoned properties. The problem? The city only has a list of 152 properties, far lower than those they knew existed. By looking at that small list, Tolemi created a predictive model that dove deep into the notes field in police case files. By looking at the city's property database, Tolemi identified a large list of properties that were likely to be vacant, then handed that list over to code enforcement for targeted inspection. After a few months, the city had a complete list of vacant properties, and an ability to identify new ones in real time. The result is a targeted, proactive monitoring of vacant properties that greatly reduces inbound police calls. In the end, it's a cheaper process.

This also allows the city of Las Vegas to find owners on those vacant properties and look for opportunities to match those with developers and investors that may want them, a win-win.

The opportunity, as it stands now, is to help governments operate more efficiently and more safely thanks to data. But Kieve sees a bigger opportunity in helping cities identify properties in need of development, then connecting those developers with those opportunities. He also sees an opportunity to change how development

"It seems to me that [developers] are operating in back rooms, and knowing someone who does something," Kieve says. He wants to change that dynamic by giving developers the chance to use data to uncover opportunities, then connect with owners proactively.

Besides the business challenges in front of Tolemi, they also have some core data challenges, the biggest of which is data consistency. No two municipalities collect the same data in the same way, making it nearly impossible to create a one-size-fits-most solution. Some data doesn't even exist, like rental data for long-term renters (i.e.: not AirBnb). This means that cities like Boston, which have a high number of renters, have no core data on the average rents or even how long the average person has been in their housing.

Stray notes:

- Tolemi is three years old and already counts 15 Massachusetts municipalities and 26 New York State municipalities among its clients. Other clients around the country include the cities of Houston, New Orleans, Louisville, Las Vegas, and Long Beach, Calif.
- Everything is map-based. While getting the data out of the various systems is a big first hurdle, nearly everything maps to a location. This allows Tolemi to use maps as the basic system, with workflow tools sitting on top of that.
- IT is the sales blockage. While in most sales situations others in decision-making roles understand the value that Tolemi brings to the table, a key challenge lies in the IT departments. That's where most of the data is kept, but the people there tend to believe they can build this kind of tool themselves. The problem is, they can't, at least not with any efficiency.
- They lack marketing. Tolemi has, to date, taken no outside funding and is trying to grow through sales alone. They have a basic "land and expand" strategy that is about first getting into a municipality and then expanding their capabilities. Pricing is annualized, starting at $50k and going up to $125k depending on the deployment. They have a 50% up-front implementation cost.

HqO is developing the software layer for the built world, giving commercial real estate owners a command center to unify all of their technology and data, enabling them to provide a premium experience for users of their space.

I lead the go-to-market team at HqO, and I love my job! I don't hear too many people say that anymore and for a long time, I was someone who couldn't say it either - not anymore. Until I joined HqO.

some of them are jaw-droppingly inspiring.

Together, we are reshaping an industry with technology. It doesn't get much better.

Boston Built Tech News

coUrbanzie Connects New Jersey Residents and Developers

As Nutley, NJ looks at [some key developments in the city](#), coUrbanize is being used to connect planners and developers with the residents to get a better sense of what they want to see. [The new site](#) launched earlier this month and asks residents like "If you had 5,000,000 to improve Nutley, how would you spend it?" and "What is your favorite place in the area outside of Nutley to visit?"

Workbar to launch in San Francisco

Boston-based Workbar announced that it [plans to open its first offices outside of the Boston metro area](#), and chose San Francisco as its first market. [The new location](#), the company's 10th, is expected to open in January.

This is part of a partnership with fabbit, a Japanese co-working brand.

"We have spent 10 years perfecting our coworking model, and we are excited to partner with fabbit to bring a productive, innovative workspace to a city that has so many of the same qualities that we love about Boston," said Workbar CEO Sarah Travers said. "Our members are excited to welcome a new city into our community and to have such a breathtaking space to work from when they are in San Francisco."

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Building Engines Acquires Synlio

Synlio manages the RFP process from beginning to end, from creation and management to vendor communications and comparisons. The deal comes on the heels of Building Engines receiving an injection of private equity funding to support its growth via a build, partner and acquire growth strategy.

Synlio is the third acquisition Building Engines has completed as part of the company's platform growth strategy. Building Engines acquired RDM in May 2019 and AwareManager in May 2018.

What we're reading

WeWork, WeWork, WeWork

Following the WeWork news can get exhausting, so we're not going to focus too much on it. The company faces major layoffs, but also its rivals are starting to benefit from the company's epic collapse. Adam Neumann himself could be facing legal troubles, as the New York Attorney General is starting to look at the company too.

The big series in Boston

The big thing that everyone is talking about comes from the Boston Globe, which is doing a series of the city's transportation crisis called Seeing Red. If you haven't read it, you need to stop what you're doing and read it now. Transportation is so much the big story that Boston Magazine asked a bunch of experts their thoughts on the solution to our traffic crisis.

Upcoming Events

For a solid list of events, check out the listing from Osorno Capital.

BisNow Awards: The Next Generation of CRE Leaders
This is Bisnow's first-ever Bisnow Boston Awards event. This will honor the rising leaders in Boston and bring awareness to their incredible work.
December 12, 2019
7:30 AM - 11:00 AM
Fenway Park
Register here