BLOCKCHAIN AND DIGITAL IDENTITY

DigitalTown civic identity

The City of Austin asked what blockchain could do for people without housing. Frank led DigitalTown's entry, a working wallet-based identity built in a weekend, the only working solution in the field, and the city built its MyPass digital identity effort on it.

2018	1	2nd	MyPass
Austin Mayor's Blockchain Challenge	Weekend from brief to working MVP	Place, with the only working solution	The city identity program built on it

THE PROBLEM THE BRIEF DESCRIBED

A person without stable housing frequently has no stable address, no reliable place to keep documents, and no way to prove to the next agency what the last agency already verified. Every intake starts over.

The identity that would let services coordinate is the thing the person is least able to carry. Paper gets lost, stolen or soaked. A file in one agency's system is useful to that agency and nobody else.

In July 2018 the Austin Mayor's Blockchain Challenge put that problem to teams under a brief of blockchain for the homeless. Frank led DigitalTown's entry, an MVP branded Austin.City. It placed second, and it was the only working solution presented.

WHAT WE BUILT

- **A wallet the person holds,** with the identity living in it rather than in any one agency's system.
- **Verified attributes they can present selectively,** so a service provider gets what it needs to make a decision without receiving an entire file.
- **A ledger record of what was issued and when,** so a second provider can rely on a first provider's verification without a phone call. That is the part that ends the repeated intake.
- **The civic layer the platform already had,** binding a city, its services and its residents together, so the identity had somewhere to be used.

HOW TWO DAYS PRODUCED SOMETHING THAT RAN

The entry was a working application, not a slide. It was built on the DigitalTown platform application as a core component rather than from nothing, which is the only reason a weekend was enough. Frank was an executive at DigitalTown at the time, and the wallet and digital identity work he led there is what made that component reusable at all.

The platform work was broader than the hackathon. The wallet was the mechanism for civic transactions generally, and identity was the layer everything else hung from, including single sign-on across the platform's properties. The hackathon took a piece of that and pointed it at one hard problem under a clock.

The same conviction seeded Jellybean afterwards: a person should hold their own identity and data, grant access on purpose, and share in the value created from it.

WHAT THIS IS TODAY

The City of Austin carried the work forward into MyPass, its digital identity effort for people experiencing homelessness, and into its entry for the Bloomberg Philanthropies Mayors Challenge. The MVP itself is a preserved artifact, not a live service, and DigitalTown no longer operates. We present it as history and as evidence of a capability.

WHAT IT PROVES

Self-sovereign identity has been a slide in a thousand decks. This one ran, against a real civic problem, on a weekend clock, and a city chose to build on it. It is also the record that we are comfortable on the civic side of technology, where the buyer is a city and the requirements arrive as a challenge brief.

WHAT WE CAN START ON

Digital identity and credential presentation where the holder is the person, not the institution. A civic or public-sector pilot that has to demonstrate something real inside one budget cycle. Or an honest assessment of whether a blockchain belongs in your product at all.

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