

The Lichtensteig Declaration on Living Cities and AI

Draft v0.5 for public review

Artificial intelligence is changing not only what cities can do, but what cities are. Its consequences will depend not on technology alone, but on the choices we make together.

A city is a living system: people, communities, businesses, institutions, infrastructure and the natural world, now joined by increasingly capable AI systems. Its government is one voice among many. Cities are also part of a living planet. Human flourishing depends on the health of the living systems that sustain it, and the test of any arrangement of people and AI is whether it helps both to thrive. This is what we mean by human- and planet-centred AI.

AI can create a substantial dividend of time, attention, resources and new capabilities across the city: in government, in businesses, in communities and in people's daily lives. It can also absorb resources, intensify workloads or carry its benefits elsewhere. How this dividend is created, distributed and reinvested will help determine whether cities become more capable of shaping their own futures, or more dependent, divided and fragile. Inaction is not a neutral option. Neither is uncritical acceleration.

We believe the deepest promise of AI for cities lies beyond faster services. It is the possibility of expanding their collective intelligence and capacity to act: to hear more of themselves, understand shared challenges, coordinate better and learn faster, while people keep authority, responsibility and the right to say no. Any city, large or small, can take this path. None has to take it alone.

There is no single model of the city after AI, and much of what lies ahead is still unknown. We therefore commit to shared principles, and to discovering together how they can best be met.

TEN PRINCIPLES

1



Choose the future together.

AI is a matter for the whole city, not an IT project. It is led at the highest level of political and civic leadership and shaped together with all of the city's voices: government, business, civil society, residents, young people and those who build AI. This calls for leaders who think in systems, work across sectors and steward the long term.

2



Strengthen the city's collective intelligence.

AI helps cities hear more of their voices, above all those least heard today; understand their shared challenges; bring different perspectives together; and coordinate collective action. This includes understanding the condition of the natural systems on which urban life depends. Technology strengthens participation and cooperation; it does not replace them.

3



Learn to flourish within a living planet.

Cities are part of the living systems that sustain them, and are still learning how to thrive with them. We use AI to understand our ecological relationships better, to protect and regenerate ecosystems, and to shape urban development that strengthens both human and planetary flourishing. We take responsibility for the energy, water, materials and land that AI itself requires.

4



Grow human capability.

As AI becomes more capable, we deliberately develop the human capacities needed for wise collective choices: judgement, creativity, empathy, cooperation and responsibility. Cities invest in lifelong learning, and some things they deliberately choose not to automate.

5



Reinvest the AI dividend, and share it widely.

Public institutions reinvest the time, attention and resources AI frees in people's capabilities, prevention, care, participation and the regeneration of nature, and they decide how transparently, with the city's voices. Across the city, businesses, institutions and communities work together so that the benefits of AI are widely shared rather than simply cashed out or captured elsewhere.

6



Put long-term health before optimisation.

Efficiency gains never override fundamental rights, ecological limits or long-term viability. We consider how improvements in one part affect the health of the whole city and of the larger living systems it belongs to, and we make trade-offs openly and responsibly.

7



Decide close to people; honour local identity.

Decisions are taken as close to the people affected as competence allows, while public institutions retain the authority the common good requires. Each city finds a path that fits its own culture, history and needs.

8



Keep the city in charge of its intelligence.

Cities preserve local agency over the data, knowledge and AI capabilities that shape urban life. People and organisations hold appropriate rights over their data and can move it to another provider. Public-interest data is stewarded for the common good, and open standards protect cities from dependence on any single provider.

9



Make AI answerable to people.

Every AI system used in the city has an identifiable owner who is accountable for it, and is open about whose interests it serves. AI that acts on someone's behalf serves that person's interests, not those of its provider. Decisions that affect people can be explained, reviewed and challenged, with effective correction and remedy. Public AI systems are listed openly.

10



Evolve together, expanding freedom.

Cities experiment, share what works and what fails, and revise these principles as evidence grows. We favour AI that expands people's opportunities and freedom over AI that restricts them, and we never use AI to manipulate people covertly.

HOW THIS DECLARATION WORKS

This is a living document. Every version is published, with each change and the reasons for it, including any dissent. These principles are commitments. How best to meet them remains an open question. Practical approaches, including rules for how AI agents should behave in cities, will be developed as hypotheses and tested in real pilots before anything is proposed as a standard. Signatories pursue these principles within their own mandates and legal contexts, and in the ways that fit their circumstances.

The Declaration is shaped in the open. From 31 October 2026, World Cities Day to 12 December 2026, participants of the AI for Cities Global Summit review it voice by voice. Version 1.0 opens for signature on 12 December, in Lichtensteig and online.

JOIN

There are three ways to take part, each building on the last:

- **Endorse.** Support the Declaration and share your view, as a person, an organisation or a city.
- **Learn together.** Join the shared learning process: dialogue, exchange of experience, research and leadership development.
- **Experiment.** Run a pilot or practical initiative in your own field, whether in AI systems, leadership, community life or ecological regeneration, and share what you learn, including what did not work.

We are not only asking cities to adopt AI responsibly. We invite them to discover, together, what a more intelligent, capable and life-enhancing city can become.



READ, ENDORSE AND JOIN ONLINE

hub.aiforcities.earth/declaration

