CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

        Of the

COMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY

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                March 02, 2015
                Start: 10:17 a.m.
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HELD AT: 250 Broadway– Committee Rm, 16th Fl.

B E F O R E:

                JAMES VACCA
                Chairperson

 COUNCIL MEMBERS:
                ANNABEL PALMA
                DAVID G. GREENFIELD
                MARK S. WEPRIN
                STEVEN MATTEO

1

2   [gavel]

3   CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Good morning. My

4 name is James Vacca and I'm Chair of the Committee

5 on Technology. Today we're here to discuss

6 Notifying New York City and other notification

7 technologies. Notifying New York City is operated

8 out of the Office of Emergency Management with the

9 support from the Department of Information

10 Technology and Telecommunications. The severe

11 weather event that our city has experienced in

12 recent memory such as snowstorms and hurricanes

13 reinforce the need for an efficient citywide

14 notification system that can reach as many people

15 as possible in a timely manner. This committee will

16 be examining the utility of the city's notification

17 systems, ways in which they can be improved and

18 promoted to reach more New Yorkers and how their

19 capabilities may be expanded further. Notifying New

20 York City began as a pilot program in 2007 and a

21 community in my district was one of the first to be

22 able to test this emergency notification

23 technology. So I've been familiar with this

24 initiative for some time. The purpose is a simple

25 one. Residents of New York City can register for

emergency alerts concerning announcements or event

happening in their neighborhoods. These alerts may

be submitted via a email or text message or phone.

Alternately one may follow Notify New York City's

twitter page to pursue alerts freely. Users who opt

into notifications may receive messages in the

following category. Emergency alerts, significant

event notifications, public health notifications,

public school closing, delay advisories,

unscheduled parking rule suspensions, major mass

transit disruptions, and major traffic disruptions.

According to the most recent statistics there are

236,150 subscribers to Notify New York City. Nearly

half of which are the program's twitter followers.

Notify New York City was designed so that users

could easily select the types of notifications

tailored to their interest and geography. As a long

time Notify New York City enrollee I can attest

that not all the alerts had been necessary,

necessarily relevant to my area of the Bronx which

leads me to believe that this may be happening to

others as well. Especially during emergencies it is

crucial that alerts be pushed to the people who

most need the information. Furthermore the alerts

should be in a form that is understandable to

everyone. The accessibility of this service to non-

English speakers and people with disabilities is

important. I hope you discuss the administration's

plans to improve response times and enhance

language access in the future. In addition to

notify NYC there are several other government

notification systems. Wireless Emergency Alerts are

the text messages accompanied by very loud sounds

transmitted to all mobile phones in a given area

for significant emergencies. Advanced warning

system is another notification system meant to

alert organization who work with people with

disability. Finally there is CorpNet which is

designed to provide notifications to businesses

when there are significant incidents nearby. The

latitude notification systems; Advanced Warning and

CorpNet are likely not very well known to New

Yorkers. And it is unclear what the distinctions

are between those two systems and Notify New York

City. This committee hopes to gain some insight

into these systems enrollment and how alerts are

tailored to each program. Finally the committee

will examine how the city's notification system can

1

2 be expanded to include other types of non-emergency

3 alerts in order to increase civic engagement. I

4 look forward to a lively discussion. And with that

5 I want to introduce my colleagues over here to my

6 right, Council Member Steve Matteo and Council

7 Member Mark Weprin. And we'll introduce our first

8 panel; Henry Jackson New York City Emergency

9 Management and Benjamin Krakauer, okay, New York

10 City Emergency Management as well. I have to swear

11 you in. I have to notify you about that right now.

12 Do you swear or affirm to tell the truth, the whole

13 truth, and nothing but the truth in your testimony

14 before this committee and to respond honestly to

15 council member questions? Okay. I thought so but I

16 do it anyway. Okay who would like to go first?

17 BEN KRAKAUER: Is it on? Good morning

18 I'm Ben Krakauer the Director of Watch Command for

19 New York City Emergency Management. I'm joined here

20 today by Henry Jackson Deputy Commissioner for

21 Technology. We're happy to be here today to update

22 you on the Notify NYC program which is now entering

23 its eighth year of service to New York City. We

24 have learned many lessons over the last eight

25 years, strengthened our protocols, redesigned our

website to make registering an managing accounts

simpler, increase enrollment, and reduce the time

it takes to get a message out to the public after

an incident occurs. I will also take a few minutes

to discuss the steps we have taken to ensure that

Notify NYC is resilient and accessible to all

residents even during the most trying of times and

provide a high level roadmap for where we want to

take the program in the future. As you know the New

York City Emergency Management Mission is to plan

and prepare for emergencies to educate the public

about preparedness, to coordinate the city's

response in recovery operations and to collect and

disseminate critical information to key

stakeholders and the public during emergencies.

Notify NYC is just one of the many tools we use to

provide information to the public. During an

emergency we work with, with Merisoft to issue

media releases, update social media, provide

information to 3-1-1, send messaging to our

corporate partners through CorpNet and to our

special needs partners through the advanced warning

system and to all elected officials through emails

and conference calls spearheaded by our

intergovernmental affairs unit. Notify NYC began as

a pilot program in 2007 following the tragic

Deutsche Bank fire on Liberty Street and was

designed to provide city residents, businesses, and

visitors with near real time information about

emergency activity and possible disruptions in

their communities. The program went citywide in

2009 and now has almost 300 thousand subscribers.

We advertise Notify NYC through a variety of

outlets; on bus shelters, through social media, on

Pandora, greater New York events, newsletters,

through elected officials, and other means.

Registration is free and open to anyone. We provide

information through landline telephones, mobile

phones, instant message, and on social media

including twitter and our RSS feed. We take into

account sensitivities about sharing personal

information with the government and therefore we do

not require subscribers to provide us with their

name or address. Instead they're able to provide an

intersection near their home, place of business, or

where members of their family live. Having access

to a computer in order to register is also not

required. Registration is available by calling 3-1-

1. Since the program's beginning in 2007 Notify NYC

has sent out more than 5,000 separate messages

distributed via more than 145 million emails,

almost 45 million text messages, and more than

three and a half million telephone calls. All

subscribers are automatically enrolled in the

emergency alert group which are messages that

direct them to take protective action such as

evacuate an area for any reason. Subscribers are

also able to choose additional notification

features targeted their area or areas of interest

and tailored to the category of messages they wish

to receive such as significant events like large

fires, major mass transit disruptions, major road

closures, public health notifications, Department

of Education school closure or delay advisories,

and emergency suspensions of alternate side parking

rules. For those who recreate in or around the

city' various waterways individuals may also

register for combined sewer overflow advisories.

While we encourage every New Yorker to register for

the Notify NYC system we know that not everyone

will. For the most serious emergencies such as an

area evacuation ahead of a hurricane or an order to

stay off the road during a major snow storm New

York City Emergency Management can send out

wireless emergency alerts, we call them WEAs which

are messages that you get on your phone that you

never signed up for. These alerts are accompanied

by a loud tone and vibration. Additionally the

National Weather Service and the National Center

for Missing and Exploited Children are the other

entities in our region permitted to send out WEAs

for severe weather events and amber alerts

respectively. You've likely received some of these

messages on your phone during the last few years.

We piloted this technology from the federal

government and during Hurricane Sandy became the

first local or state government in the country to

utilize it. We've sent out four WEAs since the

technology became available to the city, three

during Hurricane Sandy and one ahead of the

potentially historic blizzard that was forecasted

in January. The objective of the Notify NYC program

is to get important information out to the public.

In this regard we view the information as the

critical commodity. And they're happy to have

messages rebroadcast by other entities so it can

reach the broadest possible audience. While only

those subscribed to the system receive messages it

has a multiplier effect that we encourage. Messages

are rebroadcast through the media, elected

officials, businesses, and even subscribers

themselves. New York City Emergency Management

working with our partner agencies such as the

Department of Information Technology and

Telecommunications, City Hall, NYPD, FDNY, the

Department of Health and Mental Hygiene, the

Department of Buildings, the Department of

Education, and others has developed a series of

messaging procedures and protocols that governs

which messages are sent out to whom and when. For

example one of our triggers is a 3 alarm Fire and

anytime that FDNY transmits a 3 alarm fire a

message to the local area will be broadcast from

Notify NYC. Similarly when the Federal Aviation

Administration notifies us about a military flyover

or a low flying aircraft a Notify NYC message will

be issued. Operationally the Notify NYC program is

embedded within Watch Command, a 24/7 unit that

consistent with our role in the citywide incident

management system or CIMS is charged with

coordinating emergency activity in New York City and disseminating critical information. The program is staffed by an exceptional team of public warning specialists who are trained to identify trigger incidents, both those within protocol and those that rely upon their discretion and expertise and building relevant message for release. In Emergency Management we learn from a response to past incidents and Notify NYC is also careful to incorporate changes and best practices into procedures. Beginning in January of 2012 we began studying the time frames for each step in the messaging process and realized that creating message templates and streamline the approval process would reduce the trigger to message time. Since, since implementing those changes our issuance time is consistently between seven and nine minutes after an incident occurs down for more than 15 minutes before we began the study. In 2014 almost 30 percent of our messages were sent out within five minutes or less and almost 75 percent were sent out in 10 minutes or less. The collection review of user feedback informed a comprehensive upgrade of the Notify NYC website and registration

system in 2014. The new and improved website is

mobile optimized so you can register from your

smartphone or tablet and added additional messaging

categories so subscribers can tailor their messages

as much as possible. It also added do not disturb

and vacation settings options and incorporates

accessible design features that make registration

by people with visual disabilities easier. More

recently we began delivering many of our messages

in American sign language with audio and subtitles.

We have mechanisms in place for message

translation. If an incident occurs in the area

where the population speaks a language other than

English. We first did this in Spanish with the many

messages that were issued following the East Harlem

building explosion in March of 2014 and are

prepared to do so again when necessary.

Unfortunately real time or machine translation

technology is not solid enough yet for us to offer

every one of our messages in other languages. We

hope that the technology develops to allow us to do

this more regularly. Resiliency is an important

part of any critical system and New York City

Emergency Management working closely with DoITT and

our third party vendor has taken a series of

proactive measures to ensure that Notify NYC system

is always available. With respect to Notify NYC's

registration system we work with DoITT to build an

exact replica of our primary system at their

disaster recovery site, Site B, where information

is synchronized every 15 minutes. We've tested the

backup server environment and can report that it is

just as robust as our primary environment. We plan

on regular testing going forward. Similarly our

notification vendors contract requires that they

maintain the delivery services at two separate data

centers on opposite sides of the country. At any

time our vendor plans down time of their system for

maintenance we're notified and we maintain an open

conference line with them so that they can send

messages out on our behalf if we're unable to

access the system. Lastly in the event our primary

vendor is unable to deliver our messages we synch

our data with a second vendor every 24 hours. We

will utilize this contingency vendors to send the

messages out to our subscribers. We believe that

these multiple levels of redundancy are critical to

ensuring that the city is able to communicate with

our citizens. It's important to note however that

delivery of Notify NYC messages is reliant on a

multitude of technologies that we do not have

control over such as email vendors and telephone

carriers. When we become aware of problems with

these systems we do make contact to the vendors and

ask that they expedite system recovery. In closing

we feel strongly and are proud that we have built

a world class emergency public notification system

that keeps New York City informed. But we're not

done. We're exploring new and innovative ways of

informing the public through location based

technologies such as mobile applications and

registration by text message. In the near future we

will adopt a commonly accepted IT format for all of

our messages that will allow anyone who wants to

redistribute our messages or integrate our content

into an app of their own to do so seamlessly. We're

also working with the Department of Parks and

Recreation to integrate beach advisories into our

new system so that beach goers can be alerted to

areas that are closed prior to making the trip.

Finally to reiterate a key point we need to

continue to grow the number of participants in the

program and we'd appreciate your help in

encouraging your constituents to sign up for Notify

NYC. We thank you for your interest and continued

support of our program and we're happy to answer

any of your questions.

CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Thank you. Why, why

is the enrollment so low in Notify New York city?

It's been eight years about and we only have 237

thousand people. Why, why is it so low?

BEN KRAKAUER: And so it's actually,

it's a little bit higher now. It's just shy of 300

thousand. We actually picked up almost 16 thousand

registrants ahead of that forecasted blizzard a few

weeks ago. But we, we think that some of the

barriers to registration were the process that the

people have to go through. They have to go to the

website, they have to accept a confirmation email

which is why we've seen a, you know much more rapid

growth with twitter. But this is, this is an, an

unfortunate problem with notification systems

around the country where people are interested in

the information but they don't, they don't sign up

for the systems which is why we encourage

2   technologies like wireless emergency alerts that

3   don't require enrollment.

4   CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Do you have a

5   Facebook page?

6   BEN KRAKAUER: We do.

7   CHAIRPERSON VACCA: I'm on Notify New

8   York City and I get alerts about somebody missing

9   in Coney Island and things like that. How do we

10   more frame it? How do we get it more specific to

11   people in local neighborhoods? Why would I be

12   getting something like that?

13   BEN KRAKAUER: So those, those, those

14   messages are silver alerts which were, which were

15   implemented following some city council legislation

16   and we issue those messages citywide. So we,

17   because you know people are very mobile, they could

18   end up on a subway, they could end up on a train,

19   or on a bus and end up in a different part of th4e

20   city.

21   HENRY JACKSON: [off mic] That was a

22   requirement of legislation that we were… notify the

23   whole city. [on mic] that was the requirement of

24   the legislation that we notify the whole city.

25

2   CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Okay. What is the

3   difficulty with the language issue? Why haven't we

4   been able to get out, notify New York City and

5   other languages of, besides English. You know part

6   of it is our need to get it out quickly and we

7   don't have internal resources to do spontaneous

8   translations.

9   HENRY JACKSON: So as Ben mentioned we

10   did last year try some template messages for the

11   job up in Harlem and it worked but it, you know we

12   want to get the information out as quickly as

13   possible and you know that's our, our main goal

14   and, but we're looking at different ways of, of

15   incorporating languages.

16   CHAIRPERSON VACCA: But there must be

17   people in your agency who speak Spanish or Spanish

18   or Chinese or Russian… there's no one who speaks

19   those languages?

20   HENRY JACKSON: They have to be sitting

21   in that desk at that moment right. So that desk is,

22   is, is staffed around the clock and, and there's

23   one person whose responsibility it is to get that

24   message out and so we're looking how to do it but

25   it would increase our staffing size if we, if we

could cover all those languages. And the technology

isn't quite there. You know the technology, and

it's really important to be precise and accurate

about these alerts. So you know sometimes as has

been mentioned this translation software doesn't

get it quite right and you know that's a matter of

the technology maturing until, until we're at a

place where we're comfortable that we're issuing

really accurate information.

CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Have you found a

need for people to have an opportunity to respond

to the emails they get, ask a clarification, ask a

question, because right now there's no vehicle for

a give and take. It's only an announcement they

get. There's no vehicle for someone to ask a

question and get a response.

BEN KRAKAUER: Right so there… [cross-

talk] answer your question two ways. As far as real

time emergencies we don't have enough staff in

place to respond to lots of inquiries but we do, we

do respond to every customer service inquiry that

comes in. So people who have issues with their

account, they have questions about getting set up,

2   changing their group, changing their registration,

3   we respond to every single one of those.

4   CHAIRPERSON VACCA: But you don't

5   respond to inquiries relative to the issue on hand?

6   HENRY JACKSON: Not in real time.

7   BEN KRAKAUER: Not in real time.

8   CHAIRPERSON VACCA: No? How many people

9   do you have in your unit?

10   BEN KRAKAUER: There are six full time

11 employees dedicated to sending out public warning

12 messages. One on duty 24 hours a day 7 days a week.

13   CHAIRPERSON VACCA: That doesn't seem

14 adequate to me at all. We're sending out warning

15 systems, an agency has six people?

16   HENRY JACKSON: That's so we can ensure

17 someone's in that seat with that primary

18 responsibility and six is the number we need to

19 cover 24/7.

20   CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Did you start out

21 with six?

22   HENRY JACKSON: We did start out with

23 six.

24   BEN KRAKAUER: Five, five.

25   HENRY JACKSON: Five.

CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Five.

BEN KRAKAUER: Yeah.

CHAIRPERSON VACCA: So how can we expand this? You need more personnel. Can, can you direct people from other parts of the agency to expand this. I, I think Notify New York City has great potential but I just don't see that it's been prioritized.

HENRY JACKSON: It's certainly a top priority of our agency. And as, as Ben mentioned we've spent a lot of time trying to get this right. And, and we have a very rigorous training program. Because we want people to be, you know there's an economy of words there that you have to get the message out in as few characters as possible but how to be relevant. So we can't just grab somebody. We actually put them through multi-week training programs so that they understand what they are supposed to do and know how do it quickly and accurately. So it is a top priority of this agency. It's probably one of our biggest public facing operations. And you know we put the resources we can to it.

CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Well most of your

people, most of the people participating in Notify

New York City do so through Twitter?

HENRY JACKSON: That is growing. It

certainly you know as we started you know from the

pilot we started with the registration system. When

Twitter became viable, you know reliable enough

and, and fast enough to send things out we started

going to Twitter. And obviously… You know one of

the things we think that keep people from signing

up is we want their address or their intersection

or you know their cell phone number. If you go to

Twitter you don't have to give us anything and you

get everything. That's the tradeoff is you get

everything that we send out in the Bronx, in

Queens, in Staten Island. With Notify NYC you get

to tailor your experience a little bit. So you can

say I only want the stuff in my community district

or in my zip code. So you know but with twitter it

should be interactive. Shouldn't you have someone

that's responding and clarifying. I mean twitter,

you send out a message, you may have a hundred

thousand people tweeting about it and you have no

capacity to do anything but send the message?

1

2   BEN KRAKAUER: So I don't want you to

3 think we're not looking at that feedback, we're not

4 looking at that real time information. When people

5 tweet back to us and tell us things that are going

6 on we certainly take, take awareness of that. But

7 with, with one person on the warning desk we're not

8 equipped to respond to hundreds of inquiries in the

9 middle of a major emergency. I wanted to get to the

10 disabled for a second. If you're a visually

11 impaired person what's your option to become

12 enrolled in Notify New York City. Is there a verbal

13 option or tell me about that.

14   BEN KRAKAUER: Right so there's a, a

15 couple things. The, the new website does meet

16 accessibility standards so the buttons are very

17 large. It's, it can be, you know the document

18 shrinks and stacks so you can use it on different

19 types of assistive devices and then if you're not

20 comfortable or not able to register on, through the

21 website you can call 3-1-1 and register by, through

22 them.

23   CHAIRPERSON VACCA: But the website

24 doesn't meet ADA unless there's a verbal component

25

2   to the website. Then is there an audio component to

3   the website?

4   BEN KRAKAUER: Not to the website.

5   [cross-talk]

6   HENRY JACKSON: Typically, typically…

7   [cross-talk]

8   CHAIRPERSON VACCA: So, so then, so

9   then… [cross-talk]

10   HENRY JACKSON: …you'd have a reader on

11   your computer that you were accessing the website

12   with if you were somebody who needed…

13   CHAIRPERSON VACCA: …a reader. But no

14   but if you're totally blind you need something of

15   an audio nature.

16   HENRY JACKSON: Right, a reader which

17   would speak to you, which would speak to you which

18   would… [cross-talk]

19   CHAIRPERSON VACCA: …that?

20   HENRY JACKSON: That's a piece of

21   software that goes on computers that typically…

22   [cross-talk]

23   CHAIRPERSON VACCA: …typically a blind

24   person would have.

25   HENRY JACKSON: Yes.

2   CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Okay. But they can

3   also call 3-1-1 and register through the phone

4   call.

5   HENRY JACKSON: That's correct.

6   CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Through 3-1-1?

7   HENRY JACKSON: Yeah.

8   CHAIRPERSON VACCA: But then when they

9   receive the message how would they receive it?

10   HENRY JACKSON: They could get it from

11   VOIP, on voice, text, email, and again if they had

12   the readers on their phone or on the computer they

13   could read text or the phone call, we still send

14   phone calls with voice and so they could get those.

15   CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Is it possible for a

16   person to get both a, an email and a phone call? Do

17   people get both?

18   HENRY JACKSON: People, people can

19   register for both. We, we send out less phone calls

20   because even though people register for them they,

21   they typically write in and tell us that we're

22   making too many phone calls. The, the find, they'd

23   rather get an email or a text message so that's

24   where we put the majority of our effort.

25

CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Have questions?

Councilman Weprin.

COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: If you're tire

I'll ask some questions. I'm just curious how they,

how does, what's the protocol with how this

happens? You have someone sitting at that desk by

themselves. How will they notify what qualifies to

go out as an alert, what do they make, do they have

any say in that themselves or they have to be told

what to put out there?

BEN KRAKAUER: Sure. So there's two

broad categories. There's alerts which are when

we're asking people to take a protective action;

you know tornado warning, shelter in play, stay

away from windows and the… issues and the

evacuation warning we want you to evacuate this

area by this time. So those are, there's obviously

vetted through Percy hall for the press however a

fire chief on the scene can also you know utilize

their fire operation center. There's a protocol

established with the public safety agencies. So

they say I need to evacuate this four block area.

And this happened during Sandy on 57th Street when

the crane was dangling. They gave us boundaries. We

crafted an alert message for them. It was approve

by the incident commander on scene. And then we

send it to the affected zip codes.

COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: So who crafts

that message?

BEN KRAKAUER: The public warning

specialist.

COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: Right. And then

they send it to the person who's on that desk,

that… [cross-talk]

BEN KRAKAUER: Public warning

specialist… [cross-talk]

COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: One of those six

people?

BEN KRAKAUER: Correct.

COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: So they

themselves sitting there at the desk have to craft

the message based on what they're told directly

from the fire… [cross-talk] department?

BEN KRAKAUER: From the fire department,

from the police department…

COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: Goes directly to

that person sitting at the desk, one of those six

people?

1

2   BEN KRAKAUER: It typically goes through

3   either our coordinator on scene or the Fire

4   Department Operation Center in the case of fire.

5   COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: Right. And then

6   they go to them, and does anyone edit them or…

7   BEN KRAKAUER: It goes, it goes through

8   an approval process. They will take the relevant

9   information, they'll craft it, it will go back to

10   the fire department to make sure it's accurate and

11   consistent with what they want to issue. And then

12   we'll hit send.

13   COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: Going to back to

14   Chair Vacca's questions about regional issues. So

15   the East Harlem gas explosion… went to that region.

16   That only went to people over there in that, in

17   that, in that zip code or did it go to, if I

18   applied for anywhere I would have gotten that as

19   well or how does that work?

20   BEN KRAKAUER: So if you were following

21   us on Twitter you certainly would have gotten that.

22   If you were, I believe those messages went to

23   Manhattan North. So anywhere in Manhattan North and

24   96th Street got those messages.

25

Cg1

COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: And, and I don't remember what I, you know I've been on it since the beginning. And this came about, I know we had talked about having schools do these and Mayor Bloomberg at the time said oh we're going to do a notification. It wasn't exactly what we had in mind but more of a city wide thing. So if I, am I, am I, I don't remember how I registered but if I register for anything going on in the city because I want to know what's happening in Jimmy Vacca's district. And who knows I might go to city island to have dinner and I want to know what's happening on City Island. So if I put everywhere I wouldn't have gotten the notification on East Harlem even though I might conceivably have been there?

BEN KRAKAUER: So we, there's not any registration option to receive every email, every text message for the entire city. You're, you're able to request up to five different locations but your, your point is well taken and it's one of the, one of the challenges with these notification systems is we have our, we're a mobile society. So if you register for where you work and where you live and where your kids go to school but you

happen to be in a different zip code, a different

part of the city to, when an emergency happens

you're not going to get the message. Now for large

emergencies thinking some of the aviation incidents

that have happened, very very large fires including

the most recent one the Williamsburg, as that fire

progressed the public warning specialists are given

discretion to expand the notification area to make

sure that people are, are getting the message. So

we, we give, we give the people who are doing this

every day the discretion based on the emergency to

expand the area that gets notified.

COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: Let me ask a

question about schools. It, are schools run

completely separately from, from you guys that they

have their own notification system or do you work

directly with schools. Because I saw the beef with

the way schools operate. I know my own daughter's

school… we'll get emails from the school directly

but often they don't put some of the things I'd

like to know about they may not know about an

emergency themselves in the area.

BEN KRAKAUER: So we do do some school

messaging at the request of the Department of

Education? Obviously any type of citywide school

closure would go out through Notify. And then we

have an established protocol with the Department of

Education's School Emergency Information Center. So

anytime a school does an unscheduled relocation,

you know the heat goes out, the electricity goes

out they notify us and we send out a message to the

enrollees in that school.

COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: A beef we had,

it's with the Department of Mental Health so it

wouldn't necessarily be you guys but we had someone

escape from a psychiatric thing, a dangerous person

escape and there were three schools in that area

and they had no idea that this guy was out there.

And we, afterwards said you know it would have been

nice to send a notice to those schools and make

sure the schools knew. There was no requirement so

that may be different legislation. But do you deal

with state agencies and other agencies in any way

that, I mean that seemed like a notification that

could have gone out just to let the schools know

that either keep the kids in the school until we

apprehend this person or you know let the parents

know that there, there may be an issue because you

know god forbid something else escalated we would

have no idea.

BEN KRAKAUER: Right. So our involvement

with state agencies really is along the MTA, Mass

Transit disruptions, you know if there, if there

Roosevelt Island tram is, if they are doing like a

fire department or police department exercise on

the tram that have caused some public concern we'll

do messaging for that. We also broadcast New York

state missing vulnerable adult messages which is

very similar to the silver alert legislation

locally that the state did. So if it, if we get a

missing vulnerable adult we'll, we'll put that out

as well.

COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: I get it and if,

if the subways are closed you'll get a 15 minute

warning and we can send that out. Just joking. Just

last question I, I, there is the, the fear of the

boy who cried wolf a little bit because I know

you're now mandated thanks to us in part. I know we

passed the silver alert, now they've expanded it,

that you start sending out a, a lot of messages

that don't affect us you know and individuals they

start to ignore those messages. Is that a,

something that's discussed or, or worried about at

all by people?

HENRY JACKSON: Yes we, we discuss that

a lot.

BEN KRAKAUER: Yeah we're always

concerned about warning fatigue and you'll, you'll

note that in most of the silver alert messages that

go out we actually put silver alert right in the

subject line now. Because it is, it is honestly

feedback that we get from our customers that, you

know there are a lot of silver alerts that go out…

COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: And, and it's

expanded. I don't even know, I can't even follow

it. We've been expanding those silver alerts to

mentally ill as well as, as others. I know the

Amber Alert was the first one done, that's state

wide and it needs to be done. But I'm just curious

what other groups have been added to that?

BEN KRAKAUER: I know it's, it's silver

alerts which are individuals who are in imminent

danger and who have you know a cognitive, cognitive

impairment, Alzheimer's, dementia, missing senior

notifications or anyone over the age of 65 who have

gone missing and then missing vulnerable adults is

2   kind of a hybrid of the two, the state, the state's

3   program.

4   COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: Okay. Alright.

5   Alright Mr. Vacca.

6   CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Do you coordinate

7   with the MTA because I don't remember getting many

8   messages about trains that are not running and…

9   COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: We do. We, we

10   get, we get every one of the MTA alerts that come

11   in. We're, you know we're constantly interacting

12   with the rail control center anytime there's a

13   disruption. They have their own alert system so we

14   limit our messages to what we define as major mass

15   transit disruptions when an entire line goes down

16   or when there's not you know acceptable

17   alternatives like nearby busses or other train

18   wraps.

19   CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Do you have a

20   community outreach person that does work in the

21   community or do you work with community boards. How

22   are you trying to get the message out?

23   BEN KRAKAUER: Mm-hmm, we do. WE have

24   our Department of External Affairs which is run by

25   a Deputy Commissioner Ferrell who's here. They do

2 more than a thousand ready New York presentations a

3 year in the community where they highlight a number

4 of our preparedness programs including notifying

5 West C.

6   CHAIRPERSON VACCA: I would think maybe

7 the community boards should be called in and we can

8 try to work with them and have them do outreach

9 through their civic associations, mailing lists,

10 emails, and things like that.

11   BEN KRAKAUER: We're…

12   CHAIRPERSON VACCA: …want to schedule

13 the meeting borough by borough with the community

14 boards.

15   BEN KRAKAUER: Happy to do it.

16   CHAIRPERSON VACCA: I wanted to ask you

17 about how many subscriber organizations are there

18 for the CorpNet and advanced warning systems.

19   BEN KRAKAUER: For advanced warning

20 system I think it's 15 hundred, about 15 hundred

21 organizations and for CorpNet…

22   HENRY JACKSON: About a thousand.

23   BEN KRAKAUER: About a thousand.

24   CHAIRPERSON VACCA: And how many of the

25 notifications sent to CorpNet or the advanced

warning system are unique, not sent by New York

City, Notify New York City. Are they, how many are,

are most of them separate from what you would send

or, or, or the same? [cross-talk] State your name

please.

CHRISTINA FERREL: I'm Christina

Ferrell, Deputy Commissioner for External Affairs.

So Notify NYC is a public program meaning anyone,

anyone in the world can sign up for it. CorpNet and

Advanced Warning System are subscriber based where

you have to show you know they're for a certain

population so except for example CorpNet you have

to be a business. And you send that you have to

have a business email. You can't sign up with Gmail

or Yahoo or something like that. And we except you.

We have a public private unit under me that we

accept to see that you're using it for legitimate

business purposes they actually receive many many

notifications. They're part of our all call system.

So they, they, we can write a specific message to

them but usually they're on a mailing list for all

the pages that are coming out. So it's much more

granular, it's much more detailed, and it's

citywide. So if you're running a business in

Manhattan, you're a law firm or something you're

still receiving everything when the… or when

something happens in Rockaway. Advanced Warning

System is run through our human services division.

That's for caregivers like visiting nurse service

or catholic charities, groups like that that

provide services and that is based specifically on

events. So like in advance of the, of snowstorms or

things like that we'll send out information for

them so they can work with their clients.

CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Why can't this all

be folded into Notify New York City.

CHRISTINA FERREL: Because this, the

information that we send out through CorpNet is

somewhat privileged in that it's, you know more,

more detailed and it's not really for the general

public. It's for people that are security directors

or people running specific things. It also would be

over, overkill. And like you said you can receive a

lot of messages. If you receive too many that don't

apply to you you're going to start to ignore them.

And then that, our system won't be effective. For

Advanced Warning System it, it's for caregivers so

it's specific information like if there's a storm

2   coming visiting nurse or meals on wheels, if it's

3   over the weekend they would want to provide extra

4   meals, provide things like that. So it, it's really

5   getting into the service provision and, and helping

6   them is our emergency partners.

7   CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Thank you. No

8   further questions. I'll call up our panel. We're

9   going to have Noel, Noel come up, Noel Delgado and

10 Derk Kelly. Mr. Kelly you want to start?

11   DERK KELLY: Chairman Vacca and

12 Committee. Thank you for giving us the honor to

13 present our vision for the future of municipal

14 notification tools. Good morning. My name is Derk

15 Kelly. I'm the code maintainer of City Graham NYC,

16 a service which uses open data feeds to send real

17 time weekly notifications to use as about issues

18 that are relative to that. An open source project

19 develops by Code for America for any city. There

20 are currently five operating services; New York

21 Charlotte, Lexington, San Francisco, and Seattle.

22 City Graham is a lightweight flexible code pace. It

23 is simpleton understand and could easily be self-

24 hosted and maintained by other city across America

25 and the world. We aim to prove City Graham NYC as a

2   successful example of this by providing

3   notifications from sources such as 3-1-1 and Vision

4   Zero. City Grahams at NYC already benefits from the

5   open data provided by the city of New York. There

6   are many opportunities in the state of that were

7   encouraging civic minded builders to investigate

8   and publish with us. Subscribers of city graham

9   services opt into either the weeks or daily SMS

10   notifications. To date there are 388 total

11   subscriptions. Of those 309 are email and 79 SMS.

12   There is currently no real time data 3-1-1 or zero,

13   vision zero data available to subscribers. Feedback

14   from users is that SMS notifications provide less

15   value than email subscriptions as the information

16   is usually days old by the time they receive it.

17   The city of New York is leading the nation in its

18   open data initiatives. The resources being provided

19   are inspiring people across the city to build

20   services which help others. However the full

21   potential of City Graham NYC and other such

22   services cannot be reached until the data sources

23   we're subscribing to are able to provide real time

24   event notifications. I'm excited to think of the

25   future of open data in New York City. It appears

that the foundations have been well built, the

general public has been significantly engaged in

efforts to consume and interpret this information.

We now need to aim at reducing latency in recording

the data. Thank you. Derk Kelly.

NOEL DELGADO: Thank you. Great, thanks

Derk. Thanks Council Member and, excuse me, I'm

always nervous at these things, Chairman Vacca and

the Committee. I have prepared notes which you

scolded me last time for reading too long from so I

will just kind of riff off of here. So first of all

I, I want to point out four particular businesses

that use the city's open data and, and it's kind of

offensive to hear that CorpNet is set aside only

for special interest for the fact that we have

small businesses in the city that are building

notification systems. One of them is Site Comply,

the other one is Mind My Business which is in the

audience today reevaluate and commune. And they're

all trying to tackle different elements of real

time notification. And they're pointing out site

compliance about primarily Department of Building

notifications Mind my Business is synthesizing

everything that you can think of within the city's

open data portal which seems to be kind of almost

in parallel with CorpNet reevaluate is a really

great opportunity to actually take a look at kind

of like your quality of life around your apartment

and communions about public meetings. And most of

these businesses and through kind of our

understanding of you know the systems that are out

there. The quality of the data is only as good as

the quality of the data that's put into it. And a

number of times we're finding ourselves that we

have, we're fighting this battle of bad data,

garbage in garbage out. And it is a constant

battle. And what we started to see is that there

are a number of systems that just allow for

freeform data to be entered. I think you alluded to

this very eloquently in the complaints that notify

NYC has kind of these codes that are baked into the

twitter and it's sometimes hard to read or it's

sometimes hard to read or it's hard to distill you

know what is WB versus EB you know when it talking

about the, the different freeways, what side is

shut down. But ultimately when we're thinking about

prioritizing and fixing the data infrastructure we

need to be thinking about and fixing those

particular tools. We see the crash data… 3-1-1, the

MTA service alerts, and the city record as four

potential opportunities for improving the garbage

in, garbage in garbage out type of frame work. We

love Notify NYC as a general platform but we really

really really… I can't say this anymore, think that

they need to be providing a link to the city's open

data portal. All of the Notify NYC alerts are open

and available to the general public. That's exactly

what the city's open data portal is for. If it,

they could just simply pipe out that information to

the city's open data portal we would be able to

start developing it and using it and incorporating

it within our applications. We would be able to

provide a better located, location based

notification tools. I think we can augment the

city's Notify NYC, there are cities that are out

there like Seattle where they put their 9-1-1

system into the city's open data portal so it's,

it's not unheard of to have critical, mission

critical notification data going into the city's

open data portal and allowing the general public to

use it. We really want broadly the city's open data

portal if you want to capitalize on the opportunity

that exists it needs investment. It needs

investment within… and it needs investment within

the city's, within DoITT to help agencies like

Notify NYC provide unified data that enables them

to improve data services. And, and lastly I just

want to call out that there are a number of data

improvement suggestions that I have included in

this. One thing that we discovered at the weekend

before last's hack-a-thon is the fact that the MTA

service alerts are an example of, of garbage in

garbage out. I use that roughly and I don't mean to

insult the hard work of, of government workers. But

the way that that data is manually entered provides

a disservice to anyone who's trying to use that

from a, a technical perspective. And so we've

included at the end of our suggestions kind of a

way that you can be going to the, to the MTA and

ask them to improve the service alerts. This is

something that's new and something that we're

definitely wanting to, to fight for. And last year

you, Chairman Vacca you introduced with Ben Kallos

the open maps bill which would once again open up

all of the data that exists within the currently

existing city maps. And we ask for that to be

reintroduced so that way we can have access to it.

So that's a brief summary of what I've given you.

CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Any questions?

Councilman?

COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: Yeah I, I just

want to be clear on this idea that you want the

alerts set out, go directly to the open data

portal. I am a big believer in the open data portal

for most government things including this but I

don't understand why, what's the big benefit to

doing that since this is not, you know usually very

often government information not secreted but it,

no one knows what's going on, they want to look at

what's going on. Here's something that they're

trying to notify people. I don't see how it would

work and how is it, who will it benefit?

NOEL DELGADO: Sure. So the, the concept

is, what you're seeing when you see it through

Twitter, Facebook, and everything else, those text

messages, that's human breed-able data right. So

that's you, your eyes, your brain is able to

understand it. But we need something that's

equivalent for computers and we call that machine

readable data. And what the data portal provides is

that kind of version of the data. And so through 3-

1-1 whether it's crash data, all the data sets that

are in there are designed to be read by computers

and they're primarily, because the city's open data

portal, not to get too technical here but because

the city's open data portal provides what's called

an API we're able to just access the, one computer

can say to the data portal show me all relevant

alerts within a certain zip code, show me all

relevant alerts within a certain borough. And we

don't have that right now with notify. We have that

with 3-1-1 and we find that to be one of the

greatest things ever which is what we've

incorporated into City Graham. We have that with

Crash Data. But if, if we want to incorporate it

and, and we want to put it into our small

businesses and we want to put into our community

notification tools like Chairman Vacca was asking

about for community boards we can build those tools

but we need that data to be in a machine readable

format. And it's, their testimony said that they

are doing that but it takes a little bit of a

conversation with the city's hackers, the end users

to get that exact format in the… structure. And so

we want it…

COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: And, and who…

because it sound to me like you know the, the

previous panel you know they'd like to do as much

as they can. It's just a matter of resources and

technology and making sure that everything is

according to… you don't want to make a mistake on

translations. You don't want to you know have

something misconstrued. So who… in your mind whose

decision is it to make? Because I assume if I

brought those guys back up here they'd say yeah

we'd love to do that but you know we need help, we

need someone, we need money, we need resources, we

need that from higher up I would guess. I'm not

sure, I don't know, maybe I'm wrong.

Noel Delgado: Well so resources are

always a conversation to, to be had. We're working

with DCAS right now to put the city record into

machine readable format. You get the city record

every single day, you know how complex that can be.

We're having, we've had an ongoing conversation of

how do we distill this into a machine readable

format. It goes into a database right? There's a

2   workflow that already exists. And so how do we work

3   with them to say this is what we want the machine

4   readable format to look like.

5   COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: Right. And I, I

6   mean this is certainly easier than the city record.

7   I assume there's no reason they wouldn't want to do

8   this right? I don't…

9   [background comments]

10   COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: I don't know if

11   Chair Vacca is going to allow such audience

12   participation but I, I have, being that you've been

13   mentioned come on up. We bring 'em back up Jimmy?

14   If you don't mind come back up. We're all friends

15   here.

16   HENRY JACKSON: It's Henry…

17   COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: Okay.

18   HENRY JACKSON: …Jackson again from,

19   from OEM. And so as we said in our, in our, our

20   testimony we are working to do exactly that through

21   the CAP protocol. So CAP is a calm and alerting

22   protocol, creates a standard for all systems to

23   ingest that sort of information, lays out the

24   fields and how they're coming. And we are pretty

25   close to getting that because you're right when we

get the message out it's as good as gold, we want

to go everywhere and anywhere.

COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: Right.

HENRY JACKSON: And the CAP protocol

will let anybody ingest it and do whatever they

want with it.

COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: …respond to that

before they walk away?

HENRY JACKSON: CAP.

CHAIRPERSON VACCA: I mean I don't… yeah

how, how… [cross-talk]

COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: Chair Vacca and

I understand everything that you're talking about

of course so…

[background comments]

COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: Yeah. No, no, I

don't, I don't think it's an argument… [cross-talk]

[background comments]

COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: My, my, I mean

my only, my only questions to, to notify our, our,

which I think is by the way a great great program,

I love it is how long does it take to get into CAP

and can we have a conversation so that we as the

end users we can ensure that the, that you know

2   like what we want to see is going to come out of

3   it?

4   [background comments]

5   HENRY JACKSON: …do some research and

6   ask because, because there's like 100 thousand

7   people who want to injected and I can't talk to

8   every one of them. That's why there's a standard.

9   It's like email, email system… [cross-talk] It's an

10   open standard. All you have to do is look it up.

11   It's under oasis and it's called CAP and lots and

12   lots of systems are beginning to ingest CAP as a

13   way to do exactly that.

14   [background comments]

15   DERK KELLY: I think there's great value

16   though in taking that CAP format and actually

17   transmitting it through the open data portal. The

18   open data portal in turn gives us a single

19   interface to pull out data from New York City. So

20   CAP is a format and that's fantastic but I think

21   that the digester should be the open data portal.

22   The one stop shop for all New York City data. So if

23   that could be included in that planning that would

24   be fantastic for all city…

25   [background comments]

1

2   DERK KELLY: The RSS feed just means a

3 different format for all of our hackers to learn

4 and understand where as the open data portal…

5   COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: Alright alright.

6   DERK KELLY: Fantastic.

7   COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: I'm sorry Mr.

8 Chairman.

9   UNKNOWN: And I still have the whole

10 mess here yeah.

11   CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Listen to me. I

12 think this is great because not only did you come

13 back to speak and all which think is great but many

14 times city agencies don't even stay once the public

15 testifies and that we have this relationship…

16 [cross-talk]

17   UNKNOWN: As a matter of fact we're all

18 going to lunch right now. [cross-talk]

19   CHAIRPERSON VACCA: I, I really think we

20 should get together have a beer or something. But

21 no it's really great.

22   UNKNOWN: It's 11:00 in the morning.

23 Thank you… [cross-talk] thanks for… [cross-talk]

24   CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Thank you.

25   HENRY JACKSON: Thank you.

COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: Thank you. Mr.

Kelly I just had one more question about City

Graham. Have you considered allowing City Graham

for other data in the future like crime data where

building department permits.

DERK KELLY: Absolutely. Sorry even this

week we're inviting every civic hacker in New York

City to come and join us to go through the 3-1-1,

the open data portal, analyze how it relates to 3-

1-1 for the public when they create a submission of

an issue so that we can be giving them the same

data back that they put in. And in turn we are

pulling out Vision Zero which is vehicle collision

and also we would love to be getting crime data. As

was mentioned Seattle I believe immediately 15

minutes publishes their 9-1-1 details, their 9-1-1

calls. That's the sort of information we'd love to

be subscribing to. Just making it open to everyone.

COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: Has, has the

Chair of the Technology Committee ever been invited

to a hack-a-thon. It seems…

CHAIRPERSON VACCA: I went, I went last

year.

DERK KELLY: Yeah.

COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: Oh you did, okay.

DERK KELLY: Yeah.

COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: Alright.

CHAIRPERSON VACCA: I'm on top of these things Mark.

NOEL DELGADO: Council Member Weprin we'll add you to our, our list of invites.

COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: Please, yes.

NOEL DELGADO: Can I, I just want to say that there are just a few more data sets that we highlighted here. So, I, I think it's important to know that 9-1-1 is a very important data set. There are other cities that have already proven the example that it is, it is safe to release that data within near real time. We already have a great example of a data set that's released on a daily basis that could be released even on what we call a sub daily basis or equivalent to near real time which is NYC 3-1-1 if we could get that 3-1-1 program to release that data on a hourly, bihourly it would be a huge win broadly for open data. As I said the MPA service alerts. And there are a few, there are two particular data sets that are, that

would provide really interesting situational

awareness to all general New Yorkers. One is the

street closure and changes and/or the street

closure database. They appear to be two separate

data basis from Department of Transportation. Some

of that information is piped into Notify NYC. Some

of it is only done on a bimonthly update. But if we

can somehow bring those two things together we can

potentially increase traffic throughput. I think

that this is an opportunity for people to be

notified broadly around getting around New York

City safely and securely and, and not get stuck in

traffic jams. And the second one is that the

Department of Sanitation turned off the city's

snowplow data and we would really like to have the

snowplow data turned on. The general public can get

access to that through its map but the raw data has

been turned off. And so we can't actually monitor

where the city's snow plows are going through the

streets. This has been a, a, there's a huge

opportunity to ensure that all streets are plowed

equally. Chicago has had a problem with that. And

you know we would like to ensure that the

Department of Sanitation just turns back on the

data.

CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Let me tell you

something. I spoke to Sanitation Commissioner

Garcia about this. We get calls in my office about

sanitation plowing and many people say my street

was never plowed. While it's snowing that program

is on and they will tell you. Once it stops snowing

the program stops. And that, all that information

is no longer available.

NOEL DELGADO: Correct.

CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Now once it stops

snowing is when people are saying my street wasn't

done. Most people don't call while the snow is

continuing. So I, I did mention it to her and I

think it's got to be changed because how, how can

you assess performance of the agency and how can

you review what was done in your district if that

information is not ongoing and, and modified and,

and up to date. But when the snow stops is really

when you have to have transparency more than

anything. Good point. Okay. There being no further

questions, no other speakers, this hearing is

hereby adjourned 11:10 p.m.

[gavel]

C E R T I F I C A T E

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