

**DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS
TESTIMONY BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY IN GOVERNMENT
HEARING ON PROPOSED INTRO. 533 – WEBCASTING OF CITY HEARINGS/MEETINGS
WEDNESDAY, OCTOBER 29, 2008**

Good morning Chair Brewer and members of the City Council Committee on Technology in Government. My name is Paul Cosgrave, the Commissioner of the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications, or DoITT, and New York City CIO. With me is Christopher Long, Director of Web Strategy & Operations and New York City's Webmaster. Thank you for the opportunity to testify today regarding proposed City Council Intro. 533, which would require the recording, archiving and (where practicable) live webcasting on *NYC.gov* of all City hearings and meetings.

In keeping with Mayor Bloomberg's mandate to use technology to make New York City government more accessible, transparent, and accountable, the Administration agrees with the goal of enhancing current capabilities on *NYC.gov* to webcast public hearings and meetings. However, significant consideration must be given to the cost associated with this endeavor, as well as the size, scope and timeline of implementation. While there are relatively moderately-priced technological solutions available today to achieve this goal, there are both logistical and fiscal challenges inherent in developing a citywide solution. Though not at all insurmountable, we believe these issues should be fully considered before deciding upon a viable solution—~~legislative or otherwise—and timeline, and we are willing to keep the Council apprised of our progress in these areas as we explore options for moving forward.~~

Through NYC TV, DoITT today covers more than 530 New York City Council events each year, and has done so back to 2005; we have covered more than 450 so far in 2008. Channel 74 is dedicated to government coverage, including 61 programming hours per week of Council programming. On average, Council hearings usually air seven to ten days after they occur, though high-profile hearings are scheduled to the very next open air date. Channel 74 is streamed live today on *NYC.gov*, though the programming itself airs on tape delay and is not archived online. Efforts to webcast these hearings live are now underway by the City Council, and may involve a capital investment in the infrastructure of the Council chambers; archiving these hearings for on-demand access on *NYC.gov* would entail digitizing each event for storage on a server and assigned staff to manage the portfolio of hearings, additional costs to be considered.

We appreciate the work your staff has done in compiling the list of examples of other municipalities that have mandated webcasting. However, most of the municipalities listed—even larger ones such as Chicago (which estimated cost based *only* on webcasting its City Council hearings)—cannot compare with what is being proposed in this bill. This is illustrated by another municipality your staff has researched: Vancouver, British Columbia. Like New York City, Vancouver uses a combination of cable broadcasting and webcasting; and similar to today's proposed bill Vancouver requires access be made to an unlimited live audience and archiving for three months, for a total estimated cost per meeting of \$495.

Now, in New York City, a conservative estimate finds that in a given month, there may be more than 80 public hearings and meetings conducted by the City's Mayoral agencies, the City Council (stated meetings only) and Borough President Offices. This does not include another approximately 40 City Council committee meetings, an average of three meetings by each of the City's 59 community boards (between committees and subcommittees), or special events such as bill signings or citywide addresses. All told, that is more than 3,000 events per year to be webcast live, recorded, captured, documented and archived on *NYC.gov* for future access by the public. Using Vancouver's model as a rough baseline—which may or may not prove to be a replicable one for New York City—and not counting the initial equipment costs, this would mean nearly \$1.6 million in annual recurring cost to meet the requirements in the proposed bill.

Comparing this with the cost New York State incurred when mandating webcasting for all its agencies via Executive Order in 2007, the State committed nearly \$2 million to implement its directive for 65 agencies in the initial four months of the program, not including staff expenses. The \$2 million figure consists of a one-time outlay of approximately \$1.1 for equipment and \$800,000 in recurring costs for captioning and other services (one estimate of captioning services for deaf and hard-of-hearing individuals, for example, is \$315 per hour). While not explicitly required as per Intro. 533, consistent with the accessibility of City services captioning is an added consideration that should be assessed before proceeding with a comprehensive webcasting effort. It is clear that to date, efforts at the State level have required significant funding – one primary contract for webcasting services that State agencies may leverage includes a cost of \$1,500 per meeting, not including the captioning services described above.

What should also be noted here is that to a large extent, the State webcasts consist of one mounted, stationary camera, streaming live via connection to a broadband-enabled PC. Accordingly, there is little-to-no production value: no multiple camera angles, no “lower-third” graphics associated with the speaker, his/her title, or the topic or date the event. Instead, the meetings appear as they would to a silent observer—a “fly on the wall,” if you will. Any additional production elements required—during the live webcast or for archived events—would require significant increases in staffing levels across the city, as they would need to either attend every hearing or conduct considerable post-production work. As such we would propose that the number of required webcast events be limited, at least in the initial phases of deployment.

Another challenge presented by Intro. 533 as drafted is the 90-day timeframe provided for implementation. Returning to the New York State example, consistent with the executive order issued in January 2007 agencies were required to present their plans for webcasting public events within 90 days, with an additional three months allotted thereafter to implement their plans, for a total of 180 days. We believe a similar timeframe would be appropriate at the municipal level as well, taking into account both the size of the City of New York and the sheer volume of public hearings and meetings its agencies, committees, commissions and task forces conduct regularly. As part of statewide implementation, which proceeded in an essentially federated manner by agency, the State Offices for Technology and General Services offered policy guidance and roundtable discussions, set minimum requirements for open meeting webcasts, improved procurement options and provided technical assistance in equipping meeting facilities. In developing a plan for phased implementation at the City level, DoITT would explore similar measures.

A final consideration is retention standards across agencies, since not all events will require similar archiving. A community board meeting will likely appeal to a much more limited audience than City Council Speaker Quinn’s *State of the City Address*, though each might require the same bandwidth for storage if they are of similar duration. The longer the retention schedule for such meetings, the more storage is required, which in turn results in a significant increase in cost. Therefore the City—or individual agencies should webcasting proceed in a decentralized way as it did at the State level—will also need to invest in additional technical support staff, which will also increase commensurate with the number of public meetings and hearings included. That same community board might decide that on a limited budget, three months is adequate for archived meetings and may not wish to be tied to the Council’s standard—which might be twice that length, for example.

Therefore, while the Administration certainly agrees with the spirit of the proposed legislation, and the added dimension of accessibility it would bring to the City's numerous public proceedings, it is clear that more consideration must be given to the timeline for deployment, the scope and phasing of the program, and any proposed retention schedules. While we do not support Intro. 533 in its current draft, the Administration is open to exploring the use of cost-effective measures to facilitate webcasting and archiving on a pilot basis for agencies conducting public hearings and other events on a regular basis in modern, broadband-equipped meeting rooms. We imagine these efforts would begin by asking those agencies to submit plans describing how each would implement its own webcasting capability over the subsequent months, developing from there a strategy for wider implementation. As part of this initial phase, we would hope to include those City Council hearings now included as part of NYC TV Channel 74 programming.

As always, we are pleased to keep the Council informed of these efforts, building on the strides already made with streaming City Council hearings through *NYC.gov*.

Thank you.



NYS Contract # CMT-301A

NYC Council- Testimony on Webcasting from Robert Feldman, Total Webcasting Inc.

Good morning, my name is Robert Feldman and I am President of Total Webcasting. Total Webcasting is a small business located in the lower Hudson Valley. We have been in business since 2000 focused on delivering full service Webcasting solutions to both the public and private sectors. We have extensive experience working with state and local governments, primary and secondary educational institutions as well as small and large public and private companies.

Our experience related specifically to Webcasting government proceedings began in 2002 when we webcasted the local village board meetings in the community where I was serving as Deputy Mayor. Although, at that point, Webcasting was a relatively new technology, I (as a public servant and a small business entrepreneur) recognized the application as a method that could allow the public to better participate and understand what was going on in their community and Government. We have successfully webcasted hundreds of municipal meetings on behalf of New York State, County governments as well as towns and villages.

In January, 2007, Governor Spitzer, on his first day in office, issued Executive Order 3, which requires all New York State Agencies and Authorities to Webcast, their public meetings. Based on our experience this was initially met with some resistance by the various Departments and Agencies that had to comply, we have now found that Webcasting is considered, by most, as a valuable tool not only for the public but also for the Staff of the respective Agency's. Governor Patterson, after a detailed analysis of the benefits and costs, Governor Patterson re-enforced New York State's commitment to public access of government decision making by continuing the Executive Order. Today we Webcast for many agencies including the Department of Health, the DEC, the Lower Manhattan Development Corp, the Hudson River Park Trust and many others. We also Webcast many non-mandated State agencies such as counties, cities and towns. One notable point here is that even though many communities receive a 'free' open access channel from their franchised cable or telephone companies, these governments have chosen to Webcast which provides viewing availability anywhere in the world and on-demand archived content. Another unique advantage to Webcasting are the viewer statistics, which we capture, and clearly show how many viewers participated and where they are while they are watching. Webcasting is the best solution for the largest number of people in the most convenient format.

Today we are here to discuss specifically Government Webcasting, and how it can be implemented by NYC government. There are two possible approaches to take, full service or self service. With full service, a company like ours would come to the meeting location with all of the equipment necessary to conduct the Webcast, and the administration needed for the Webcast to reach an unlimited audience. We have

developed a comprehensive mobile, system called the TW Mediacart which allows us to do a full service Webcast with just one technician using an unobtrusive approach with remote control cameras.

With self service, we would rely on an installed system, either one that was previously installed or provided by us, and would then administer the webcast as we would in the full service approach. Regardless of whether the Webcast is full or self service, your Webcasting company should provide the necessary Content Distribution so there is no impact on your network. All bandwidth and archive storage are done outside of your network and requires no support from your IT department.

From a cost perspective, full service has a higher price per meeting but does not require any capital investment. Installing and maintaining your own system does lower the per Webcast cost but it does require some portion of a technician to operate the system during a meeting. For general informational purposes, a full service Webcast of a three hour meeting would cost approximately \$1,100 while the cost for the same meeting under a self service arrangement would be about \$250. A fixed, installed system would cost between \$6,000 to \$ 12,000, while one of our Mediacart's would cost about \$12,000. These are just rough estimates but are certainly close enough for budgetary purposes.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak at your hearing and share with you our perspective on the use of Webcasting. We look forward to NYC government implementing a Webcasting program and hope that we are a part of the initiative.



CITIZENS UNION OF THE CITY OF NEW YORK

Testimony to the

Committee on Technology and Government of the New York City Council On Proposed Intro 533-A, Requiring Webcasting of Public Meetings and Hearings October 29, 2008

Good morning, Chair Brewer, and other members of the Committee on Technology and Government. My name is Rachael Fauss, and I am the Policy and Research Associate of Citizens Union of the City of New York, an independent, nonpartisan civic organization of New Yorkers that promotes good government and advances political reform in our city and state. For more than a century, Citizens Union has served as a watchdog for the public interest and an advocate for the common good. We thank you for holding this hearing on this important bill, which aims to increase the openness of our City government by webcasting the meetings and hearings of the City Council, City agencies, commissions and task forces.

Citizens Union supports Intro 533-A, as it will move the City toward greater openness and transparency of government operations. Requiring the City Council, City agencies, commissions, and task forces to webcast their public meetings and hearings will increase their accessibility, allowing the public to easily view meetings from any location with internet access. We believe that this will encourage the public to become more engaged, and will result in more citizens weighing in on the decisions that are made by our local government. Further, archiving the webcasts will allow citizens to view meetings at later dates and provide an additional public record of the meetings. We applaud your leadership on this issue and the Council for introducing this important bill, and urge you to consider strengthening the bill further.

We recommend that the bill be expanded to include other government agencies that receive significant funds from the City budget, such as the Board of Elections in the City of New York. The City Board of Elections is not considered a City agency under the law, but rather is an entity created by state law that receives the majority of its funding from the City. Additionally, though former Governor Spitzer's Executive Order 3 from 2007 requires New York State agencies and commissions to webcast their meetings, the City Board of Elections is also not covered under the order. As the Commissioners of the City Board of Elections are appointed by the City Council, we believe that it is both in the interest of the Council and the public to require their meetings to be webcast under Intro 533-A.

Citizens Union also suggests that the Council conduct a review of other potential entities that may not be covered by this bill that receive the majority of their funds from the City to ensure that this bill is as inclusive as possible.

Thank you again for holding this hearing and allowing Citizens Union to present its views.

Testimony of Susan Lerner
Executive Director of Common Cause/New York
In Support of Proposed Int 533-A

Thank you for the opportunity to testify this morning. I am Susan Lerner, Executive Director of Common Cause/NY. Common Cause is a nonpartisan, nonprofit advocacy organization founded here in New York in 1970 by John Gardner as a vehicle for citizens to make their voices heard in the political process. We work at the national, state and municipal level, as the peoples' lobby, for honest, open and accountable government, as well as encouraging citizen participation in democracy.

Common Cause/NY strongly supports Proposed Initiative 533-A. Requiring all City meetings subject to the Open Meeting law to be webcast is an obvious step in fostering greater transparency for our City government and fosters citizen participation. We commend the chair and the co-sponsors of this important bill for its introduction and we look forward to its passage and implementation as soon as possible.

New York City is one of the leading communication centers of the world. Yet, paradoxically, we have fallen behind in the use of communication technology by our City government to make its affairs more transparent and to provide high levels of relevant and easily accessible information to its residents. The continuing expansion of the City's website and the implementation of 311 are very positive developments. Int 533-A is the obvious next step.

We hope that the implementation of webcasting all meetings will be followed by other innovations successfully implemented in cities across the country: providing copies of all relevant documents that will be discussed at meetings in portable document form (pdf) on the website along with the agendas sometimes now provided and providing a standardized email method for City residents to comment on items discussed at the hearings they can now access through the City website are just 2 suggestions. We look forward to working with the chair and the members of the Technology in Government Committee to continue to modernize and expand the information technology used by the City to encourage residents to be more informed and engaged in the City's governance and affairs.

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Written Testimony of
JOSHUA BREITBART
POLICY DIRECTOR, PEOPLE'S PRODUCTION HOUSE
before
THE NEW YORK CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY IN GOVERNMENT
on the topic of
"REQUIRING THAT ALL PUBLIC MEETINGS BE WEBCAST (Prop. Int. No. 533-A)"

October 29, 2008

Good morning. My name is Joshua Breitbart. I am the Policy Director of People's Production House. People's Production House provides young people, immigrants, and low-wage workers with a comprehensive education for the information age, combining media production, media literacy and media policy. We work in public schools and with community organizations in all five boroughs. We also support policies that increase opportunities for members of the public to participate in local journalism.

Thank you for the opportunity to speak with you today about this important, forward-thinking amendment to the city charter. This proposal embodies the highest ideals of technology in government and People's Production House believes it would bring numerous benefits to our city.

Webcasting and video-archiving public meetings of our local government is a great example of the democratizing power of the Internet. We often hear about this power, but we sometimes forget that the Internet is nothing without the content and applications that we choose to put on it.

Webcasting public meetings will increase engagement in our local government, leading to stronger policies that reflect a broader range of views. Archiving the videos is especially important to facilitate participation among those who are at work or school during the day when nearly all public hearings are scheduled.

This will strengthen your relationships with your constituents. Users with broadband connections have grown accustomed to watching videos online. This measure will allow them to see for themselves the work you are doing on their behalf. Video records come alive in a way that a transcript simply does not.

Providing in-home or in-office access to public meetings of our government has the potential to improve local journalism, since reporters can more readily see the event for themselves rather than relying on post-event press releases.

While my organization supports good government measures and policies to improve local journalism, we are primarily concerned with the digital divide in New York City. This divide is pronounced. While 56 percent of Manhattan households have a broadband connection, only 39 percent of Bronx

households do.¹ 54 percent of moderate and high-income households in New York City have high-speed Internet access at home, but only 26 percent of low-income households do.²

We believe this measure contributes to the closing of the digital divide in New York City by making the Internet a more valuable service for New Yorkers. Nearly all of people in New York who do not have broadband Internet access at home could purchase it, but have so far decided not to.

As John Horrigan of the Pew Internet & American Life Project has written, "Pew Internet Project research makes it clear that non-users don't yet see the benefits of home high-speed access. To reach the underserved, policymakers might consider more aggressive and targeted outreach efforts that educate hard-to-reach populations about the benefits of online connectivity."³

While City Council hearings may never get the same audience as others holding hands (about 12 million views at last count), this measure sends a message to all New Yorkers that there is important, relevant content for you online. This measure makes the Internet more valuable to New Yorkers, which is an incentive for them to invest in a broadband connection.

However, as the democratizing power of the Internet goes up, those without access to the Internet fall further behind. With passage of this measure, watching webcasts of government meetings joins the list of civic activities, like researching candidates or publishing one's political viewpoints, that people on the wrong side of the digital divide are shut out from. So this measure places a further burden on the City Council to support other measures to get New Yorkers online.

Measures such as this one mean little if the Council takes positions, as it did last week with the white spaces resolution, that seek to limit the opportunities for New Yorkers to access the Internet. In order to realize the full value of the investment in our democracy that this charter amendment represents, the Council should move quickly to finalize the work of the Broadband Advisory Committee and the EDC's draft Broadband Needs Assessment Study and enact their recommendations.

The Mayor and City Council should take full advantage of the Technology Education Fund included in the Verizon franchise. While the amount of \$4 million over seven years is paltry compared to the need, those dollars should be put to use soon and used to leverage private donations to help public school students, low income families, immigrants, and seniors get online.

On behalf of People's Production House, I look forward to working with you on this ongoing effort. Thank you.

1 Scarborough Market Research, 2006-2007.

2 New York City Broadband Needs Assessment Study (Discussion Draft, September 6, 2007).

3 John B. Horrigan, Pew Internet & American Life Project, "Why it will Be Hard to Close the Broadband Divide," August 1, 2007.



The NonProfit HelpDesk
helping you do good, better.

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A division of the
Jewish Community Council of
Greater Coney Island, Inc.

Good morning,

My name is Kayza Kleinman. I am the Director of the Nonprofit Helpdesk, a division of the Jewish Community Council of Greater Coney Island. In the 18 years that I have been providing technology related technical assistance to hundreds of New York City's non-profit organizations, I have seen many changes take place both technological and non-technological.

Clearly, the City Council understands that people need to have access to the workings of City Government. Furthermore, the mere fact that someone cannot travel to a hearing should not lock him out of getting the information without unnecessary interpreters. However, one can say the same thing about someone whose schedule does not allow her to be at the TV when a hearing is taking place. Webcasting hearing, meetings and sessions and then archiving them on line resolves this problem.

The internet has become one of the most important sources of news that people have access to. As the recent report that the City Council commissioned shows, despite the problems, internet access has reached the vast majority of the population of the City. When people are looking for information, the first place they go to look for it is on the internet. People expect to find it, and wonder what is going on when they can't find it.

Even if someone happens to be available when an interesting hearing is happening, people are far more likely to turn to the internet when looking for information than to the television. The range of what is available is just so much greater. The ability for the user to work to his or her own schedule, rather than being confined to that of another person or organization is a fundamental improvement in accessibility for most people.

As important as giving people access to information, is to give them access to *correct* information. Certainly the most accurate information one could have about any hearing or session would be an archive of the actual hearing. However, if this is not available people are far more likely to find information that is distorted or inaccurate, and they will have no way to know what the reality is.

It is tempting to push off something like this during hard economic times, for fear of the cost. However, during such times the decisions that the Council and City agencies make are going to be under a great deal of scrutiny, and there will always be those who would be more than happy to misrepresent what actually happened. As people are hurt by some of these decisions, or fear that damage, they need easy access to accurate information so that they are not vulnerable to this type of mis-information.

Putting this information on the web will allow the Council to reach more people, more easily, because of the nature of how people use the internet. The NYC TV is not a well known channel and, the Council would need to do a great deal of outreach to get people to use it regularly, and even more to get people to tune into specific sessions. On the other hand, if information is properly posted on the Web, it will be found by anyone who searches on the appropriate subjects.



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It is also worth noting that the cost to the City of such an initiative need not be that high. The city already has most of the infrastructure it needs to make this happen. The same technology that is used to broadcast the hearings now only needs modest “tweaking” to webcast and create archives. The existing NYC TV website is a perfect vehicle for providing access to the public. And, of course, the City can also look at using the resources of entities such a YouTube to expand it’s reach at even lower cost.

In short, I believe that the City should move ahead as fast as possible to webcast and make available “on demand” over the internet as many of the proceedings of City government as possible. In fact, the only change I would like to see is to lengthen the minimum amount of time each recording would be left available on line.

Thank you for having this hearing, and allowing me to testify.

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 533-A Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 10-29-08

Name: Robert FELDMAN (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 60 PARK LANE HIGHLAND NY

I represent: TOTAL WEBCASTING

Address: Same as above

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: Chris Rynders (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 845 Spring St. #101 Atlanta, GA

I represent: Granicus, Inc.

Address: 568 Howard St., San Francisco, CA

**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 533 Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: October 29, 2008

Name: Paul J. Cosgrave, Commissioner (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 75 Park Place, 9th Floor / New York, New York 10007

I represent: NYC Department of Information Technology & Telecommunications

Address: Same

Please complete this card and return to the Sergeant-at-Arms

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. _____ Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: JOLY MACFIE (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: _____

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THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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in favor in opposition

Date: 10/29/08

Name: SUSAN LERNER (PLEASE PRINT)

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I represent: Common Cause/NY

Address: same

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I intend to appear and speak on Int. No. 533-A Res. No. _____

in favor in opposition

Date: 10/29/08

Name: Rachael Fauss (PLEASE PRINT)

Address: 299 Broadway Suite 700

I represent: Citizens Union

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Date: _____

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Name: JOSHUA BAETSBERG

Address: 265 Canal St #410

I represent: People's Production House

Address: same

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**THE COUNCIL
THE CITY OF NEW YORK**

Appearance Card

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in favor in opposition

Date: _____

Name: Kayza Klerman (PLEASE PRINT)

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I represent: Jewish Community Council of Gr. Coney

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