CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

          Of the

COMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY

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                    April 29, 2025
                    Start: 10:15 a.m.
                    Recess: 1:34 p.m.

HELD AT: COMMITTEE ROOM – CITY HALL

B E F O R E: Jennifer Gutiérrez, Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:
                Robert F. Holden

OTHER COUNCIL MEMBERS ATTENDING:
                Lincoln Restler

A P P E A R A N C E S

Brett Sykoff, Executive Director of Broadband
and Franchise Administration for the New York
City Office of Technology and Innovation

Samantha Wright, Associate Commissioner for
External Partnerships at the New York City
Office of Technology and Innovation

Chantel Senatas, Deputy Commissioner of Legal
Matters at the New York City Office of
Technology and Innovation

Neelesh Shah, Information Technology at
Department of Citywide Administrative Services

Andrew Rasiej, Founder of Civic Hall

Ash Wolfson, volunteer installer and outreach
leader with NYC MESH

Michael Santorelli, Director of the Advanced
Communications Law and Policy Institute at New
York Law School

Alex Spyropoulos, Director of Government
Relations at TechNYC

Noel Hidalgo, Executive Director of Beta NYC

Susan Peters, New Yorkers 4 Wired Tech

Stuart Reid, Co-Chair of Smart Community
Initiative

A P P E A R A N C E S (CONTINUED)

James Ford, self

Odette Wilkens, President and General Counsel of
Wired Broadband Inc.

Keziah Sullivan, Interim General Manager of WHCR,
90.3 FM Harlem Community Radio

Jose Luis Rodriguez, Executive Director of
Caribbean Preparedness and Response, Inc.

Bernard Otalora, self

Julie Martin, New Yorkers 4 Wired Tech

Sharon Brown, Rose of Sharon Enterprises

Clayton Banks, Chief Executive Officer of Silicon
Harlem

Joseph Dumanov, self

Stanley Chan, self

Stephanie Robinson, Human-I-T

Tracy Appleton, self

Christopher Leon Johnson, self

Jerelyn Rodriguez, Chief Executive Officer and
Co-Founder o The Knowledge House

Ari Hoenig, self

2   SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: This is a microphone

3 check for the Committee on Technology. Today's date

4 is April 29, 2025. Located in the City Hall Committee

5 Room. Recording is done by Rocco Mesiti.

6   SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Good morning, and

7 welcome to today's New York City Council hearing from

8 the Committee on Technology.

9   At this point I'd like to remind everyone

10 to please silence their electronic devices, and at no

11 point going forward is anyone to approach the dais or

12 the witness table unless invited to testify.

13   If you would like to sign up to testify

14 and have not done so already, you can do so by

15 filling out a slip in the back of the room at the

16 table with Sergeant-at-Arms. And if you have any

17 other concerns during the hearing, please let one of

18 the Sergeant-at-Arms know, and we will address your

19 concerns.

20   Chair, we're ready to begin.

21   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you. [GAVEL]

22 Good morning, and welcome. I'm Council Member

23 Jennifer Gutiérrez, Chair of the Committee on

24 Technology. Thank you all for joining us today's

25 oversight hearing on the City's Broadband Strategy.

When I asked to Chair this Committee before I was
even sworn in, people were surprised because my
background is not in tech. It is in housing, it is in
organizing, it is in immigration, but not tech. And
during the pandemic, District 34, like so many
communities, were cut off. Families without broadband
couldn't access school, jobs, or basic services. The
digital divide wasn't just real, it was violent in
its consequences. So, I just want to be very clear
that we are not here to question OTI's commitment to
digital equity. I believe that you all have staff and
there are public servants working hard to close that
gap. But this hearing is about accountability,
because after years of promises, we still don't have
a long-term plan. My team reviewed every transcript
from every single hearing since I've become Chair in
2022. This Committee was promised over 10 times that
a comprehensive strategy would be shared, some with
timelines under a year. It's 2025 and we are still
waiting. Meanwhile, the Internet Master Plan was
shelved without public explanation, a plan developed
with dozens of partners, praised globally, and
designed to build long-term infrastructure and
affordability. In its place, we've seen no roadmap,

2   little transparency, and 40 million dollars a year

3   going to two major cable companies. I'm not knocking

4   330,000 people getting free Internet, but that is a

5   short-term, expensive solution and we have to walk

6   and chew gum at the same time. I believe we can do

7   both. This Committee wants to know what has been

8   built, what is planned, and what is the City doing to

9   connect all New Yorkers, not just public housing

10   residents, but the millions of people still left

11   behind? How are we innovating service delivery?

12   We're also considering a legislative

13   package that includes Intros 481, 483, 486, which

14   expands support for community broadband access,

15   Intro. 878, which increases transparency in cable

16   franchise agreements, and as well as two of my own

17   bills, Intro. 198, which improves reporting on

18   discounted internet programs, and Intro. 1122,

19   resurrecting the Internet Master Plan, which would

20   require the City to develop a real long-term

21   broadband plan, much like the Internet Master Plan.

22   I want to thank the Tech Committee Staff,

23   Policy Analyst Eric Brown; Legislative Counsel Irene

24   Byhovsky, and my Chief-of-Staff Anya Lehr;

25   Legislative Associate Victoria Peters; and our

2   Legislative Fellow Josmary Ochoa-Cruz for their work

3   to prepare for today's hearing.

4   I want to recognize Members of the

5   Technology Committee who have joined us today,

6   Council Member Bob Holden, and I'm sure more will be

7   trickling in, and we're going to pass it over to

8   Council Member Bob Holden, who has a statement.

9   COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you, Chair

10   Gutiérrez, for the opportunity to hear Intro. 898, a

11   bill to increase transparency and provide the public

12   with easier access to information about broadband

13   service and cable franchise agreements in New York

14   City. This legislation would create a user-friendly

15   portal featuring a navigable map updated annually

16   that outlines where broadband services are available

17   and what obligations franchisees have to the City and

18   its residents. Constituents deserve to know which

19   companies are operating in their neighborhoods, what

20   services they should receive, and what commitments

21   those companies have made. Just so we don't have all

22   the advertising of these companies that say this is

23   what we offer, and then they don't, and we've seen

24   that a lot. So, during my time as Chair of the

25   Council's Committee on Technology, broadband access

2 and franchise compliance were issues that came up

3 often. This bill is a simple but important step

4 toward making this information clearer and more

5 accessible to the public. I look forward to hearing

6 from the Administration on this bill and working

7 together to move it forward. Thank you, Chair, for

8 allowing me to make a statement. Thank you.

9   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Of course. Thank

10 you, Council Member Holden.

11   Today, we'll hear testimonies from the

12 Office of Technology and Innovation followed by

13 testimonies from the public.

14   Now I want to welcome Brett Sykoff,

15 Executive Director Franchise Administration and

16 Broadband; Samantha Wright, Associate Commissioner of

17 External Partnerships; and Chantel Senatas, I've said

18 it so many times, Deputy Commissioner Legal Matters.

19   And I'll pass it to Irene.

20   COMMITTEE COUNSEL BYHOVSKY: Thank you,

21 Chair. Good morning, everyone.

22   Before we begin, I kindly ask you to

23 raise your right hand.

24   Do swear or affirm to tell the truth and

25 answer honestly to Council Member questions?

2 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: I do.

3 ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER WRIGHT: I do.

4 DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SENATAS: I do.

5 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BYHOVSKY: Thank you.

6 You may begin your testimony.

7 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Thank you.

8 Good morning, Chair Gutiérrez and Members of the City

9 Council Committee on Technology. My name is Brett

10 Sykoff, and I am the Executive Director of Broadband

11 and Franchise Administration for the Office of

12 Technology and Innovation, or OTI. With me is

13 Samantha Wright, OTI's Associate Commissioner for

14 External Partnerships, and Chantel Senatas, OTI's

15 Deputy Commissioner for Legal Matters. We're pleased

16 to discuss our recent efforts and future plans

17 related to broadband and digital equity with the

18 Committee today.

19 Under the leadership of Chief Technology

20 Officer Matthew Fraser, OTI has spearheaded numerous

21 programs and initiatives focused on accomplishing

22 Mayor Adams' vision of bridging the digital divide.

23 Internet access is essential to fully participate in

24 our modern digital society, and we consider it akin

25 to a modern utility like heat or hot water. Prior to

2 this Administration, 30 to 40 percent of public

3 housing residents lacked this basic modern necessity,

4 an injustice that caused real harm to our older

5 adults, students, families, and jobseekers during the

6 pandemic. Today, thanks to the leadership of Mayor

7 Adams and CTO Fraser, New York City provides more

8 residents with free high-speed Internet than any

9 other city in the nation. We also supply equitable

10 access to devices, digital skills training, and

11 support programs to ensure New Yorkers across the

12 five boroughs are equipped to use the Internet.

13   Recognizing the urgent need for broadband

14 access in public housing, we launched Big Apple

15 Connect in the first year of this Administration. Big

16 Apple Connect, the nation's largest municipal

17 subsidized broadband program, provides free in-home

18 broadband and basic cable to access to over 330,000

19 New Yorkers in 220 NYCHA sites. The program's

20 popularity is demonstrated by its 80 percent citywide

21 adoption rate, and we continue efforts to increase

22 adoption. Last week, we sent a survey to thousands of

23 NYCHA households enrolled in Big Apple Connect to

24 assess the quality of services being provided and to

25 better understand the ongoing digital needs of

2   residents. Since the Federal Affordable Connectivity

3   Program, or ACP, ended in 2024, the City's provision

4   of these essential services to NYCHA residents has

5   taken on an even greater significance, and we are

6   committed to a baseline in the OTI budget.

7   We're extremely proud of the Big Apple

8   Connect success, but it is important to note that it

9   is just one piece of our digital equity efforts. Last

10   month, we released the New York City Digital Equity

11   Roadmap, with a 2.4-million-dollar investment

12   designed to enhance free Internet access and the

13   skills and support to use it. The roadmap, which is

14   the product of extensive interagency collaboration,

15   focuses on meeting the immediate needs of New Yorkers

16   while also laying the foundation for future success.

17   We're making this initial investment to upgrade

18   technology in older adult centers, libraries, and the

19   NYCHA Digital Van program. This month, we held our

20   first convening of a digital equity working group

21   that will build upon existing City government

22   partnerships, and we will be hiring a chief digital

23   equity officer to lead this important work.

24   Given the recent enactment of the New

25   York State Affordable Broadband Act, which requires

2 Internet service providers to offer a low-cost

3 broadband option to eligible households, we have also

4 been in close coordination with the Connect All team

5 and plan to collaborate on efforts to amplify the

6 availability of these services.

7   As mentioned in the Roadmap, we recently

8 released a request for information to further explore

9 how expanding the use of public infrastructure can

10 improve digital equity outcomes. We look forward to

11 hearing from a wide range of stakeholders, including

12 elected officials, before the May 30 response

13 deadline. The RFI seeks to build on our current

14 franchise portfolio, comprised of non-exclusive

15 agreements with dozens of companies that provide

16 services such as cable television, public

17 communication structures, mobile telecommunications,

18 and information services. It is important to note

19 that although the cable television franchisees

20 Charter, Altice, and Verizon also provide broadband

21 services, the franchise agreements are limited to the

22 provision of cable television, subject to applicable

23 federal law.

24   The Adams Administration is committed to

25 keeping New Yorkers connected wherever they live,

2 work, and travel across the five boroughs. As part of

3 our broadband offerings, LinkNYC operates about 2,200

4 kiosks, including Original Links and the newer Link

5 5G Smart Poles, that reach over 18 million

6 subscribers. These kiosks provide free Wi-Fi,

7 nationwide calling, device charging, and quick access

8 to 9-1-1 and government services. 90 percent of Link

9 5Gs, which are built to provide the added benefit of

10 multi-tenant 5G service, will be located outside of

11 Manhattan's Central Business District. We continue to

12 work with the franchisee CityBridge to expand the

13 Link 5G network across the city.

14   In addition to Link 5G, my team

15 administers mobile telecommunications franchises.

16 These franchises allow companies to install 4G and 5G

17 equipment on light poles and utility poles. Through

18 this franchise, mobile carriers enhance and densify

19 their cellular networks, providing crucial service to

20 anyone who owns a cell phone. More recently, we

21 provided incentives for these companies to build

22 their equipment in historically underserved areas of

23 the city, ensuring that mobile coverage is equitable.

24   Finally, information services franchises

25 are held by companies that install and operate fiber

2 optic cable in city streets for the purpose of

3 offering voice, data, and/or business-to-business

4 internet service across the five boroughs. In the

5 past year, the City has entered into 13 of these

6 franchises, and we continue to consider qualified

7 companies on a rolling basis.

8   Now, I'll turn to the legislation

9 considered today. Chair Gutiérrez's bill, Intro. 198,

10 would require OTI to report on discounted internet

11 service program utilization rates, and report to the

12 Council about outreach efforts related to such

13 programs. Currently, we do provide information

14 through our website on eligibility for Big Apple

15 Connect, and we intend to post a dashboard that shows

16 the utilization rates of all eligible households

17 citywide. As mentioned, Big Apple Connect is directly

18 administered by Altice and Charter, and they have

19 dedicated resources to outreach since the program

20 launched. We can work with these companies to detail

21 such efforts on the Big Apple Connect webpage.

22   Intro. 481, sponsored by Council Member

23 Won, would require OTI to disseminate information on

24 affordable internet programs and community-based

25 internet services to community-based organizations,

or CBOs. As written, it is unclear what the intended

reach is for this dissemination, which makes it

challenging for OTI to assess the resources required

for such efforts. Further, while we are working to

amplify information on statewide programs like the

discounts provided through the Affordable Broadband

Act, it is more challenging to catalog community-

based internet services and target the appropriate

geographic areas where such networks may be

available. We'd like to discuss with the Council how

we may address existing gaps.

Council Member Won's bill, Intro. 483,

would require OTI to establish a program whereby City

agencies provide wireless network access for the

public to utilize the internet. We appreciate the

spirit of this proposal, but we are unclear whether

the proposal intends to provide service to agencies'

walk-in customers or to the general public. Further,

an agency's capability to provide this service is

highly dependent on numerous factors and may require

significant infrastructure investments and different

network requirements, depending on the intended

constituency. We'd like to discuss further what the

sponsor envisions with this bill, considering the

2 operational and fiscal implications, as currently

3 written.

4   Intro. 486, also sponsored by Council

5 Member Won, would require OTI to provide written

6 materials about affordable internet for wide-ranging

7 outreach to students and families. We appreciate the

8 Council's focus on educating students and their

9 families about the low- or no-cost broadband services

10 available to them. In the past, we have collaborated

11 with the Public Engagement Unit and the New York City

12 Schools to promote Affordable Connectivity Program,

13 which is unfortunately no longer available. Given the

14 enactment of the Affordable Broadband Act, we are

15 already working towards a day of action at the

16 beginning of the school year. New York City Public

17 Schools has advised that they can share provided

18 information on affordable broadband by posting on

19 their family-facing website, actively notifying

20 students and families via enterprise digital

21 communication tools, as well as making hard copies

22 available. We can further discuss, with New York City

23 Public Schools and the Council, additional strategies

24 to better get the word out about current offerings.

25

2   Intro. 878, sponsored by Council Member

3   Holden, would require OTI to post information on our

4   website related to the Cable Franchise Agreements.

5   Our website contains wide-ranging information about

6   all our franchises, including cable franchises, that

7   is easily accessible to the general public. We

8   welcome any feedback on how it may be improved.

9   Finally, Intro. 1122, sponsored by Chair

10   Gutiérrez, would require OTI to publish a plan to

11   make universal, affordable, and equitable internet

12   available in homes throughout the city. The plan

13   would be required to be published every five years,

14   along with an annual progress report. This bill also

15   establishes an advisory board that would review OTI's

16   plans and make recommendations. It is laudable for

17   the Council to advocate for a future-proof broadband

18   plan that envisions access for all. We agree that it

19   is important for all New Yorkers to have access to

20   affordable in-home broadband, and we are aligned on

21   the importance of setting goals to increase that

22   access. However, we have concerns that the

23   legislation, as written, does not align with our

24   current work and future planning, could result in the

25   duplication of efforts, and assumes future funding

2   streams that may not materialize. As we have laid out

3   above, OTI has several ongoing and planned efforts

4   with respect to broadband and digital equity. The

5   Digital Equity Roadmap underscores many of those

6   efforts, and lays out the groundwork for both short-

7   and long-term goals. As written, Intro. 1122 does

8   touch on many of the items we are currently working

9   to address, including digital inclusion efforts and

10   the incentivization for multi-tenant structures.

11   Other areas the legislation seeks to address,

12   including creating opportunities for non-profit and

13   M/WBE ISPs and expanding Wi-Fi availability within

14   City buildings, come with unknown budget

15   implications. We are interested in discussing the

16   ways we may better align on other aspects of the

17   legislation that the Council feels have not been

18   addressed by our recently proposed plans. Finally, we

19   are aware that the aim of this bill has been

20   described as resurrecting the Internet Master Plan.

21   That plan featured data representing an outdated

22   snapshot of the state of broadband access in New York

23   City in early 2020, a lifetime ago in our post-

24   pandemic world. After the Adams Administration took

25   office and Mayor Adams created OTI, we evaluated how

2 we could provide the best service to the largest

3 amount of people as quickly as possible, not five or

4 ten years down the road. This led to the creation of

5 Big Apple Connect. Our change in course from the

6 Internet Master Plan to Big Apple Connect has proven

7 to be both less expensive and a more effective way to

8 deliver high-speed broadband service to New Yorkers.

9 We believe a pivot back to the Internet Master Plan,

10 as it has been proposed over five years ago, would

11 hinder the progress we've made over the past three

12 years, cost taxpayers more money, and could harm

13 residents of communities on the wrong side of the

14 digital divide. That said, it is worth emphasizing

15 that there are many opportunities for us to work

16 towards our shared goals without holding the prior

17 Administration's plan on a pedestal.

18   Thank you so much for the opportunity to

19 testify today. We will now be happy to answer any

20 questions.

21   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you so much.

22 I wanted to begin my questions today with just kind

23 of level setting a little bit and just ask some

24 foundational questions. I hope you can answer,

25 because they are data-driven questions. The first one

2 is, can you share how many households in New York

3 City are without any broadband or cellular access?

4   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Based on

5 current data, in our broadband and digital equity

6 roadmap, we tried to set out what the universe is of

7 broadband accessibility in New York City. As of

8 today, there is virtually entire coverage of

9 broadband in New York City. There is no residence

10 where you cannot get broadband service in your home.

11 There is a question of access versus adoption. Access

12 is virtually 100 percent connectivity available to

13 residents across the city, save for some areas that

14 may be like cemeteries and around the airports where

15 there's no residential buildings. In terms of

16 adoption, based on recent figures, it's estimated

17 that there are roughly about 10 percent of people

18 that don't have the combination of home broadband and

19 mobile service, so either one of those two things.

20 Clearly, when the Administration took office, there

21 was this particular constituency, public housing

22 residents, that had very clearly, based on census

23 data, 30 to 40 percent of New York City public

24 housing residents did not have home broadband. That

25 is why the Big Apple Connect program was a huge

2   victory for not just public housing residents, but

3   for the city as a whole to be able to deliver those

4   services to the people most in need.

5   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: I'm sorry, you're

6   saying every single household has access?

7   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Correct.

8   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: How many

9   households has internet connectivity at home, and how

10   many of them, although it exists because they have

11   the access to it, do you have the data that says how

12   many households have active internet at home outside

13   of Big Apple Connect, and how many have cellular,

14   have phones?

15   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: I don't have

16   that particular data in front of me, but what I would

17   say is that the whole reason for the New York

18   question, whether it's home broadband or mobile

19   broadband, some people just prefer to use their cell

20   phone as either their primary or only means of

21   connecting to the internet, which is why it's part of

22   our larger, holistic strategy to ensure that folks

23   have broadband in the home, but if not, we want to

24   improve cellular communications throughout the city

25   through our Link 5G program, mobile

2 telecommunications, information services, all the

3 other programs and franchises that we offer.

4   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: So you don't have

5 that information?

6   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: I don't have

7 that specific information, but we can get that for

8 you.

9   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: At the time of the

10 Internet Master Plan being released, in their plan,

11 this is of course five years ago, nearly 29 percent

12 of New Yorkers lacked broadband at home. Do you know

13 what that number is today, and do you see a trend

14 line over time?

15   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Sorry, I don't

16 have that number. We can get that for you based on

17 current census data, but we've seen improvements.

18 Clearly, it made a huge dent by initiating the Big

19 Apple Connect program, so getting 330,000 New Yorkers

20 connectivity for free has made a significant…

21   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Yes, you're going

22 to keep talking about Big Apple Connect. I get it,

23 and we've had those hearings, and the Commissioner

24 has touted it, and I've applauded it and given him my

25 flowers. I would love for the responses to include

2   more than the Big Apple Connect, because that's not

3   what this hearing topic is.

4   Can I ask, when will the City… oh, has

5   the City… is it on a dashboard, and excuse me if I

6   haven't seen it, have you all updated a broadband map

7   at this point?

8   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: So, we have a

9   public asset map, which includes information on how

10 people can either… sorry to mention, but Big Apple

11 Connect, the locations, Link 5Gs, where public

12 computer centers are, access to that. But in terms of

13 a broadband map, you…

14   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Just to share, I

15 mean, you said that technically every New Yorker at

16 this point has access to broadband. Just the

17 visualization of understanding the technicalities of,

18 yes, broadband access is everywhere, cellular access

19 is everywhere, but the connectivity of household to

20 household. Is there a map that exists, or are you all

21 using the New York State broadband map going forward?

22   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: So, we've

23 certainly looked at the Connect All maps and the

24 information that they've provided. We looked at

25 census data, but I don't know that we have that

2 particular information in terms of broadband adoption

3 and the percentage and the geographic locations of

4 those.

5   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: And I'm sorry if

6 you said it, so there is no map currently for New

7 York City?

8   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: For broadband

9 adoption? I'd have to double check to see if there is

10 an updated number based on current data or if we're

11 utilizing now five-year-old information.

12   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. So back in

13 2022, Finance Chair Brannan had asked for a map of

14 all infrastructure in the city and included streets,

15 blocks. He wanted specifics about what might not be

16 covered, and I believe the Commissioner said that one

17 exists and that he would provide one so that's the

18 map that I'm referring to.

19   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Of areas that

20 have Internet access?

21   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Yeah. I think just

22 very plainly, just being able to see where there's

23 access, where there isn't, where people are

24 connected, and I think for you all, as you all

25 obviously have been working through the digital

2   roadmap, I'm assuming you would have that, right,

3   just to kind of see where areas of targeted outreach,

4   you know. So that is an ask from a little while back

5   ago, so that's what I'm referring to, so do you have

6   one or do you not have one? Is it internal?

7   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Let's get back

8   to your staff as to what we have and what we can

9   provide.

10   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. Now, I do

11   want to ask some questions on Big Apple Connect, but

12   just a few, okay, because we did have that hearing a

13   couple years ago, and obviously this was when it was

14   first announced. My first question is related to the

15   RFP process and procurement. So, in September '22,

16   you testified that OTI had received proposals under

17   Big Apple Connect through an RFP and shared that

18   there would be followup on whether bulk purchasing

19   options were included. We have repeatedly asked for

20   that RFP, and then obviously since the rollout of the

21   plan, has an RFP been provided to this Committee, to

22   your knowledge?

23   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: I don't know

24   exactly what was provided to the Committee, but what

25   I can tell you is there wasn't what we would consider

2 an RFP in parlance of franchises. An RFP would go out

3 broadly to interested parties generally for a non-

4 exclusive franchise, for some sort of service that

5 they could provide. In this case, it was more like a

6 mini-bid that was sent out to parties, to entities

7 that can provide the services that were being

8 requested. In this case, it was going to be

9 broadband, basic cable TV, and some other

10 requirements related.

11   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: But it is referred

12 to as an RFP? So the question is, because in

13 September '22, the day of the hearing I think was the

14 same day that the announcement was made about Big

15 Apple Connect, and so it was surprising to us at the

16 Council, it was surprising to me as Chair of this

17 Committee, and so we had asked for how did you decide

18 on these two providers? And I think you said, oh, we

19 wanted these four services, three or four services.

20 But what you also shared, Brett, is that you would

21 share kind of what that RFP looked like. To my

22 knowledge, it has not been shared with the Committee,

23 and so that is the question. If it exists, and when

24 can we have it?

25

2   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: It certainly

3   exists, and I believe we did share this several years

4   ago, so we can double check and confirm, but I

5   believe we did share it with the Committee.

6   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. Okay. But it

7   exists?

8   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: It definitely

9   does.

10   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: And then you just

11   said because it was not an RFP that was made public

12   at the time? Or can you just give me a little bit of

13   that, what you just shared? Chantel, come on.

14   DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SENATAS: Good

15   morning.

16   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Good morning. What

17   do you got for me?

18   DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SENATAS: So, the way

19   our telecom enterprise agreements are framed, when

20   that original RFP went out, we essentially wanted the

21   ability to have multiple providers who have contracts

22   with the City so that we can create competition there

23   and minimize the cost to the City so there's a

24   mechanism where essentially we create a mini-bid

25   between our existing vendors who have those telecom

2   enterprise agreements, and essentially that is the

3   competition that is laid out, and that's where the

4   requests for proposals are issued in that context.

5   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: And did you all,

6   besides Altice and Spectrum, because those are the

7   two that are designated, can you share, I don't need

8   the names, but how many other providers participated

9   or submitted this request for proposals?

10   DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SENATAS: I think we

11   only have one other provider that has a telecom

12   enterprise agreement, and that's Verizon. I'm happy

13   to share that.

14   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: It was only one

15   other one.

16   DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SENATAS: Verizon.

17   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: And so I guess

18   would you define it as an open RFP process then?

19   DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SENATAS: I wouldn't

20   describe it as an open RFP process. It's really more

21   of a mini-bid between existing contractors.

22   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Has OTI put out an

23   existing mini-bid in other instances?

24   DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SENATAS: There are

25   processes that encourage mini-bids, like say for

2   instance when you have minority and women-owned

3   businesses, and we have new provisions that MOCS put

4   out a couple of years ago that essentially allow us

5   to procure directly with M/WBEs. We also engage in a

6   mini-bid there. Like to the extent that there are

7   multiple M/WBEs that perform the same sort of work,

8   we essentially send out mini solicitations to them

9   all.

10   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. Was there an

11   RFP process for Big Apple Connect?

12   DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SENATAS: It would be

13   the mini-bid process also within that context.

14   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. So that's

15   another example of a mini-bid process. Is there any

16   public record of the responses from those providers?

17   DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SENATAS: I'd have to…

18   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: From Charter or

19   Altice?

20   DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SENATAS: Yeah. We'd

21   have to take a look and see what we actually have in-

22   house. I wasn't part of that particular process at

23   the time, so we'd have to kind of get back to you and

24   see what we have in the office.

25

2   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. So you're

3 not sure if it was made public. Do you know if it can

4 be made public now?

5   DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SENATAS: I'll have to

6 look into that. And we're more than happy to get back

7 to your staff with respect to that response.

8   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Say the last part.

9   DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SENATAS: I'm more

10 than happy to get get back to your staff…

11   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Oh, thank you so

12 much.

13   DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SENATAS: With that

14 response.

15   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: So on the

16 contract, the Big Apple Connect contract, we've also,

17 as a Committee, we've asked several times for a copy

18 of that contract. I don't believe we've been provided

19 it. We are now independently in possession of the

20 contracts for both companies for Big Apple Connect.

21 Why was it not provided to this Committee, and why is

22 it not publicly available?

23   DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SENATAS: It was my

24 understanding that your last request for that came in

25

2 yesterday. It's my understanding that they're public

3 documents…

4   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: For the Big Apple

5 Connect contract?

6   DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SENATAS: No. No, no,

7 that's the last time I heard of a request.

8   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Oh.

9   DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SENATAS: It's my

10 understanding that…

11   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: I'm pretty sure I

12 asked for it at that 2022 hearing, because it was

13 news to me.

14   DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SENATAS: We must've…

15 I feel that we've provided this in the past, but we

16 can take a look.

17   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. Why did OTI

18 do this through a master services agreement?

19   DEPUTY COMMISSIONER SENATAS: Because, I

20 mean, you want to answer this one, Brett?

21   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Essentially,

22 we were purchasing bulk services for City-owned

23 property, which falls under exactly why the telecom

24 enterprise agreement was designed so that we can get

25

2   the best pricing, use the City's purchasing power to

3   provide services to the public at the lowest price…

4   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay.

5   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Lowest cost.

6   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Did OTI have to

7   obtain any additional EOs or approvals from the

8   Mayor's Office to execute this contract?

9   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Not to my

10   understanding.

11   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Since I don't have

12   the contract in front of me, was there a clause in

13   the agreement with Altice and Charter that offers any

14   exclusive rights to the building infrastructure or

15   marketing?

16   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Not to my

17   understanding. It was intended to provide core

18   services of the basic cable and high-speed internet,

19   with the expectation that the infrastructure was

20   already in place and that the other providers can

21   provide services. There's no exclusive arrangement

22   specified in the contract or in practice. That was

23   not the intent, and that's not how it was rolled out.

24   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. Are there

25   developments where there are other providers outside

2   of that designated one for the Big Apple Connect

3   program?

4   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Yeah. So to be

5   clear, none of the developments, of the 220 that are

6   part of Big Apple Connect, it's an opt-in service. A

7   resident can enroll in Big Apple Connect, they can

8   choose not to, they can take another provider, they

9   can have no service at all so there's no exclusivity

10   related to the program.

11   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: They don't even

12   have to take advantage of the program?

13   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Totally.

14   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. Do you have

15   the percentage of how many Big Apple Connect

16   subscribers were not set up with internet previously?

17   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Based on

18   estimates we were looking at, I mentioned earlier, 30

19   to 40 percent of NYCHA residents did not have any

20   home broadband service.

21   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: 30 to 40.

22   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: 30 to 40

23   percent, yeah.

24   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Do you all know

25   how many of them did not have cable?

2   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: I don't know.

3 Largely, just anecdotally, people generally get their

4 cable and internet as a bundle of package from the

5 provider, so we don't know what the breakout is. I

6 don't even know if we have data on that in terms of

7 specific cable connections. We obviously do, as part

8 of our administration of the cable franchise, we know

9 overall how many cable subscribers there are around

10 the city, but not necessarily pinpointed by

11 geographically.

12   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: I see. You don't

13 have it, or you didn't have the data of how many

14 people had, of how many residents, or units, excuse

15 me, it's by unit, had cable. Just curious if you can

16 share, I guess, why? What is the agreement that makes

17 it so that cable had to be an anchor for this program

18 for residents?

19   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: I think it was

20 driven largely by the fact that the cable providers

21 had the infrastructure in place for decades. They had

22 their fiber or coax or a combination of the two

23 already in place to deliver cable services, and

24 obviously internet has come along since then, so to

25 be able to leverage the cable infrastructure plant

2   that's already in place to every NYCHA property, and

3   to be able to tack on, obviously, the internet was

4   the major draw to utilizing the cable providers.

5   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: They had the

6   infrastructure already. So I'm just curious then, I

7   guess, what was the inception of the RFP? Was it to

8   provide, always to provide internet and cable, or was

9   it the infrastructure's there, they're already

10   providing cable, so let's make it so that the only

11   providers that could respond to this RFP are the ones

12   that are already in there providing cable?

13   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Well,

14   ultimately the goal, as we mentioned already, not to

15   rehash it, was to get people connected immediately

16   when this Administration came on. We did not, setting

17   aside the IMP plans, we did not want to wait. We did

18   not want our residents to wait any longer to be able

19   to get connectivity. So we did see, looked around and

20   say, where's the infrastructure in place, and who's

21   providing that infrastructure, who's built it? Cable

22   companies, all the NYCHA developments have them, and

23   we were able to leverage that infrastructure in

24   combination with the fact that the three cable

25   providers, Altice, Spectrum, and Verizon, are all

2   signed up on the master services agreement. So we

3   were able to leverage the master services agreement,

4   existing infrastructure, and that's how we were able

5   to get people connected so quickly.

6   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: All three, excuse

7   me, all three that applied are under the MES?

8   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Yes, master

9   services, yes.

10   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: My questions are

11 just because what it, I think this process that

12 you're sharing, while yes, I get the intent was to

13 get people connected as quickly as possible, I think

14 it limited competition among some of the ISPs that

15 probably could do it, many of who were starting that

16 process already from the internet master plan and

17 were booted, it limited who you all, who the City

18 could work with, and so that's why I'm asking what

19 came first, was it these internet providers saying

20 like, we've got dwindling numbers, we've got the

21 cable infrastructure, we'd love to also provide

22 internet, versus you all having a process that's, I

23 think, more open, more public, more competitive, and

24 provided an opportunity to these internet service

25

2   providers, many of who, some of these NYCHA tenants

3   were already working with.

4   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Yeah. And

5   factored into the analysis about pivoting away from

6   the Internet Master Plan to Big Apple, was the fact

7   that a number of, to your point, Chair, a number of

8   the smaller internet service providers were providing

9   service to NYCHA residents under a pilot of sorts,

10   what was termed the RFEI through the Internet Master

11   Plan, and while we have tremendous relationships with

12   these companies and we support them as much as we can

13   and we encourage their participation in the

14   marketplace, frankly, they didn't make a huge dent in

15   terms of getting customers, getting folks living in

16   NYCHA to sign up for their service, which was

17   entirely free, thanks to ACP at the time. While ACP

18   was in place, these smaller providers were able to

19   sell their services, and it really didn't move the

20   needle on new broadband connections. That's not to

21   say they didn't do great work, and we encourage their

22   participation, not just in NYCHA, but throughout the

23   city, but it ultimately didn't, people just didn't

24   want to go with the unknown guys.

25

2   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: But prior to that,

3 thank you, and prior to that, they had not been, they

4 were not contracting with the City, right, these

5 smaller providers?

6   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: So, they

7 received a permit from NYCHA to be able to occupy the

8 space in NYCHA to run their facilities through their,

9 through the buildings. They didn't have a permit with

10 OTI, I can tell you that, but they did have a permit

11 to occupy the space to be able to provide the service

12 and to market their services to the public so they

13 did, and as I mentioned, the numbers just were not

14 impressive. Had they perhaps, and this is speculation

15 that I probably shouldn't even say, but perhaps if

16 their numbers were greater, higher percentage of

17 adoption, that may have factored in future decisions

18 that we had made, but the fact remains that folks

19 just did not embrace the smaller companies at the

20 time.

21   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Correct. But they

22 also didn't, I mean, I think what Altice and Charter

23 are getting, or what it's costing us is significantly

24 larger than what any of these ISPs had, because they

25 were not contracted yet, right, because they were in

2   negotiation so I think it's not the same amount of

3   resources obviously for the two providers in Big

4   Apple Connect.

5   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: I wouldn't

6   exactly say that, because the smaller providers,

7   again, I say they, the smaller providers were

8   building out on their own dime with the expectation

9   that the Internet Master Plan would come to fruition,

10 and that there would be a City investment at as large

11 scale as you know, hundreds of millions of dollars,

12 even in the billions to complete that deployment so

13 there was an expectation that the City would invest

14 it, so it wasn't like private investment versus the

15 City paying for Big Apple Connect. There was always

16 an expectation that the City would be funding a

17 considerable cost.

18   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: But they were not

19 able to access any of that City funding?

20   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: No, they were

21 not, correct.

22   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: And how quickly

23 were Spectrum and Altice able to access the City

24 funding?

25

2   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Well, again,

3 mind you, it's just for services. The infrastructure

4 was in place. We didn't have to pay for construction,

5 which is a significant cost and one that the smaller

6 ISPs would have had to incur so it's strictly for

7 services. As they were able to get customers online,

8 we were able to a very low per unit rate for services

9 that they provide under the Big Apple Connect

10 contract.

11   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. Okay. I know

12 that there is still a small portion of, correct me,

13 you said 80 percent of NYCHA residents are connected?

14   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: It's Big

15 Apple, yes.

16   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Big Apple, okay.

17 Is there any plan to, and I've asked the Commissioner

18 this before, you know, I was like, what is the

19 reason, and, you know, it ranges, but still like why

20 people aren't connected? Is there any update? How are

21 you all engaging with the remaining 20 percent to

22 ensure that they are connected or just, maybe they

23 are connected to the internet already and just not

24 with Big Apple Connect? What is that data?

25

2   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: I'm sorry.

3   It's a great question, one that we deliberate over

4   internally to try to figure out how we can get to

5   that, you know, get to as close to 100 percent as

6   possible. Largely, the outreach efforts are the

7   responsibility of the providers, right? They're doing

8   door knocking, they're sending out flyers, they're

9   mailers. We do work with them and NYCHA to set up on-

10   site sign-up events where we set up a tent and tables

11   and computers and have the representatives of both

12   companies there with their family day events. I've

13   been to dozens of them. So, it's certainly helped

14   anecdotally from just from me speaking with the

15   residents. I can tell you a lot of them just like

16   their existing provider. Some of them are older

17   adults who, for whatever their personal reason, they

18   don't want internet at home, which is why we've seen

19   a relatively, you know, trickle, slow trickle of new

20   subscribers over the last few months. That said, 80

21   percent is pretty impressive when compared to these

22   types of programs that we see.

23   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: What was it, and

24   I'm sorry you said this already, what was it before?

25

2   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: It was

3 probably in the 50, 60 range.

4   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay.

5   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Maybe even

6 lower based on some numbers.

7   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Sure. And of that

8 20 percent, do you all have a sense of how many are

9 actually connected versus like those who are not?

10   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: We don't. It's

11 hard to get that data because, again, we don't

12 regulate internet service in the city, we can't, so

13 we don't have that level of specificity. But, just

14 again, given my personal anecdotes from speaking to

15 folks, it's a large part of that 20 percent have

16 service through another provider. So, I'm relatively

17 happy to know that they are getting it. We encourage

18 them to take advantage of the City program, but

19 that's ultimately their choice.

20   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: So, they're not

21 connected, it's just they have their provider.

22   I also want to recognize Council Member

23 Paladino, who's joined us virtually.

24   I wanted to, just quickly, I'll jump back

25 into Big Apple, I'll jump back into these questions,

2   but I know in your testimony you shared that, I

3   believe last week, surveys were sent to residents

4   about Big Apple Connect. Can you share, what are some

5   of the things that you're asking, what are you

6   looking to accomplish?

7   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Yep. It's a

8   short and sweet survey. We first want to confirm that

9   they are receiving it, a kind of audit, if you will,

10   to make sure that the folks who we're paying for to

11   get the service are actually getting it. But then we

12   want to know how they're using the internet, what

13   kind of activities are they doing? Are they using it

14   for homework, job searches, telemed, those types of

15   things. We ask what kind of devices they have at

16   home. We want to understand if they're using a

17   laptop, tablet, the cellular phone for their primary

18   means of connecting to the internet. So, it's a five-

19   question survey. We just sent it out a week ago, so

20   we hope to get some insight. We'll also be following

21   it up with in-person surveys as soon as the weather,

22   which is now cooperating, we'll be setting up more

23   sign-up events and also surveying residents.

24   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: How are people

25   getting the survey? Is it digitally?

2   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: We did a mail

3 survey. We sent it out via U.S. Mail.

4   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Oh, really?

5   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: They're going

6 to get a pretty postcard.

7   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: There's a missed

8 opportunity there.

9   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Well, we

10 discussed this one, whether it should be digital,

11 virtual, through a QR code. We thought about that,

12 and based on some research of how surveys are

13 generally responded to, we thought that the mailer

14 would yield the best results so we gave a lot of

15 thought to it, for sure.

16   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. Okay. When

17 are you looking to conclude the collection portion?

18   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: We're

19 encouraging responses by mid-May. We even have a gift

20 card raffle drawing for folks who respond, so we'll

21 be doing that to incentivize them to respond, but

22 there's really no firm end date. We anticipate

23 throughout the course of the rest of the spring and

24 the summer, we'll be doing in-person surveys.

25

2 Probably by mid- to late-summer, we'll be able to do

3 a full-scale analysis once we get everything done.

4   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Mid- to late-

5 September?

6   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Summer.

7   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Summer. I'm sorry.

8 Okay. I have a hard time hearing in here. Okay.

9 Wonderful.

10   Can I ask, do you have data for how many,

11 in Big Apple Connect, of the people subscribed, how

12 many people are paying for additional services, or to

13 your knowledge, it's…

14   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: So, we don't

15 have data on that?

16   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: You don't have

17 data.

18   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Just

19 anecdotally, from speaking to residents, many of them

20 take advantage of the free offerings, which severely,

21 significantly reduce their cable bill, so they do

22 take part in the premium services, premium channels,

23 and things like that, but we don't have insight.

24   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. I guess I'm

25 just wondering, like, does the data exist, because

2   the data does not exist because you don't have it, or

3   you're not necessarily asking the providers to share

4   that information?

5   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Yeah. That's

6   not information that they would normally share, and

7   we did not ask them to share that as part of this

8   program.

9   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. I feel like

10   it's, I don't know, I feel like it's important,

11   considering that it's two of the larger providers,

12   for them to share with you all, with the City, kind

13   of how this specific contract is also benefiting them

14   outside of the contract. I don't know what the

15   packages are. I don't subscribe to either internet

16   service provider, but I don't know. I would feel like

17   it's important for the City to have a good sense of

18   how this program is also leading to, like, you know,

19   just more revenue for these providers outside of,

20   like, outside of the scope of what you're asking

21   them, right, like upselling a resident. You don't

22   have the data, but I just feel like it's an important

23   ask to make of that provider.

24   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Yeah. I mean

25   we could take a look at that to see if that's useful

2   or relevant in terms of analyzing the impact that the

3   program is having, both on the public and for the

4   providers. What I would say is, ultimately, it's the

5   customer's choice, right? If they're subscribing to

6   HBO through the provider, that's their choice.

7   They're not being forced to take it, forced to pay

8   for it.

9   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Right, I know, 100

10   percent. I'm not trying to say that it's like a

11   misuse, but, like, Spectrum, for example, the fact

12   that they're in NYCHA providing this service where

13   maybe they weren't before is because of the contract,

14   because of Big Apple Connect. It's a pathway that the

15   City has provided for them, and in the instance where

16   they're upselling to tenants, I think that is an

17   opportunity that doesn't exist for any other provider

18   in that instance, and so I think it's important to

19   capture that information. It's something that we are,

20   it's a pathway that we're, a business pathway that

21   we're creating for them that didn't exist before and

22   that we're not providing to anybody else.

23   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Yeah. It's a

24   fair question. We can take a look to see if that's

25   helpful.

2   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you. Okay.

3   Can I ask about the cost of Big Apple Connect? I know

4   you said in your testimony, and certainly before, and

5   the Commissioner has testified that it is more

6   affordable. It's currently funded at approximately 38

7   million dollars per year?

8   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Correct.

9   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: To serve 330,000

10   NYCHA residents, which, again, is huge. That's not

11   nothing. I think that's wonderful. But as noted in

12   the Prelim hearing that we had in March, we didn't

13   see funding for FY25 for the current budget, and

14   wanted to make the ask. I know that the response was

15   if the funding is restored and baselined, you said in

16   your testimony that is the goal, that it would cost,

17   it would be a 190-million-dollar commitment over five

18   years?

19   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: I'd have to do

20   the quick math, but to your point, it was roughly

21   like 38 million per year based on how many

22   subscribers we get so if there's more subscribers,

23   it'll increase the overall cost per year.

24   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. So, I guess

25   my question is to you, so of that, and maybe not

2 confirming the full amount, that is what the

3 Commissioner said, though, at the March hearing. All

4 the 190 million or so would be going to Altice and

5 Spectrum with no capital investment or infrastructure

6 build-out, right? That would be funding to sustain

7 the 330,000 residents?

8   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Correct.

9 That's just expense funding to provide the services

10 to the NYCHA residents.

11   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: So that's just to

12 sustain the existing program, which you've said is a

13 great program, but then there is no, so then what is

14 the next step of build-out for Big Apple Connect? I

15 think at this point, would you say it's safe to say

16 that there's no plans for expansion of this program

17 at this time?

18   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: I would say at

19 this time, it's about making sure that everyone in

20 NYCHA who is eligible for it can enroll and inform

21 those, educate those who may not be aware of the

22 program, and make sure that they are aware of the

23 program so they can get connected if they're not

24 already. But we are committed to looking at ways,

25 maybe not expanding Big Apple as it's currently

2   constituted, which was always focused on NYCHA, other

3   programs that may benefit other New Yorkers, such as

4   a program that was included in the Digital Equity

5   Roadmap that HPD is spearheading called the Internet

6   Pilot that similarly provides low-cost or free

7   internet to Section 8 residents. So, there's other

8   programs of that ilk that we can look at.

9   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Is that the

10   program that came down from the State?

11   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: The funding

12   came down from the State, but the program was

13   initiated by the City.

14   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: By HPD?

15   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Correct.

16   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: But the funding

17   came down from the State. So there's no plan to

18   expand at this point, or what can you share with me?

19   What have you all been able to assess about the

20   future of expanding? Because I think, and I'm so

21   sorry to interrupt you, obviously there are NYCHA

22   sites that are now RAD-PACT, who are still very much

23   public housing, and tenants with the same need, and I

24   know that in speaking with the Commissioner shortly

25   after the announcement of Big Apple Connect was made,

2 that was what he shared, the intention to expand this

3 program so we're here now. I have gotten no sense

4 from this agency that there is a plan to expand into

5 those developments through this program so what are

6 you looking at right now?

7 　　　　　　　EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: So

8 specifically with respect to the RAD-PACT, there is

9 in the contract that NYCHA has signed with the

10 private property managers who are taking over those

11 developments a requirement that the property managers

12 provide free broadband to residents. So, as they get

13 started replacing roofs and boilers and elevators, as

14 part of that they're also providing or will have to

15 provide free broadband. And it's my understanding,

16 while OTI is not intimately involved in that, that

17 they are working with the smaller ISPs or some

18 smaller ISPs to be able to provide that service to

19 residents.

20 　　　　　　　CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Is OTI in

21 communication with those developments, those RAD-PACT

22 developments?

23 　　　　　　　EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: We're in touch

24 with NYCHA to get updates on the status of it,

25 because like I said, it's part of a large-scale

2 construction project to update and rehab the

3 developments.

4   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: And what is some

5 of that feedback?

6   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: It's going

7 well. There's some target dates for when the

8 broadband will be available to folks, but that was

9 always the reason why they were excluded initially

10 from Big Apple Connect, because there was an

11 anticipation that there would be a comparable, not

12 identical, but a comparable broadband offering. And

13 so those are unfortunately a little slower, but those

14 are coming along.

15   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Is there efforts

16 from OTI to expand beyond the existing NYCHA sites,

17 the RAD-PACT that you said that you're checking in

18 with NYCHA about, and outside of this Flume project?

19   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Yeah. So, I

20 think it's important to note that there's other parts

21 of the whole digital equity world, right? Not just

22 infrastructure, not just access to the Internet. And

23 that's really where our digital equity roadmap comes

24 into play, that highlights some of those initiatives,

25 the device offerings, the digital literacy training

2   courses that are available through City agencies

3   across the city and libraries across the city, and

4   that really are intended to kind of have the holistic

5   digital equity experience. Certainly, as you

6   acknowledge and as we talked about, Big Apple Connect

7   is the centerpiece to the City's digital equity goals

8   and missions in an effort to bridge the digital

9   divide. But the digital equity roadmap, and if I may

10   turn it over to Associate Commissioner Wright to talk

11   a little bit about the digital equity roadmap and the

12   initiatives there, I think that will highlight the

13   efforts that are underway currently.

14   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: We can definitely

15   talk about it, but I think my questions are more

16   focused just because I've heard different things, not

17   different things, but I've heard the intent to expand

18   for many years, and so I just need to know that that

19   is not what is happening right now. The digital

20   roadmap is something separate, and we will ask

21   questions, but with regards to expansion of

22   connectivity to individual households is what I'm

23   really trying to hone in on right now so, at this

24   point, again, you're looking to baseline it, of

25   course, but at this point there is no commitment. You

2 can't make a commitment to expand beyond where you

3 are at right now.

4   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: I think that's

5 fair to say. I'll say yes to that, but what I would

6 say is, again, part of the roadmap is new

7 initiatives, starting with the Chief Digital Equity

8 Officer, which we hope will engage additional

9 communities and stakeholders in the space to identify

10 where there may be a need for additional service so

11 that we can make a targeted, logical decision as to

12 where additional City resources can and should go in

13 the future. So, sitting here today, no immediate

14 plans to expand Big Apple Connect, but that there are

15 efforts underway to identify those areas of the city

16 that can benefit from additional services and to see

17 where we can strategically deploy those.

18   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. But beyond,

19 I'm speaking just specifically about connecting

20 residents to a free or affordable internet program,

21 it's Big Apple Connect. It's what exists right now in

22 Big Apple Connect.

23   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: In terms of

24 City initiatives, but not to rehash this, but there's

25

2   the Affordable Broadband Act that the State recently

3   passed, which provides low-cost broadband.

4   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: But that's the

5   State.

6   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: But that's an

7   area that the City is working with the Connect All

8   office to get outreach out to the communities that

9   can benefit from.

10   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: How often are you

11   in communication with the State for this program?

12   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Pretty

13   frequently. I don't know if there's a schedule, like

14   a specific cadence, but we do engage with them very

15   often.

16   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. I think my

17   last question about this is at the hearing just last

18   month, CTO Fraser said that there would be some

19   announcements covering other large parts of the

20   population, including Section 8. Do you have any

21   details on that?

22   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Commissioner

23   Wright can discuss a little bit some of the

24   initiatives in the digital equity roadmap that

25

2   outlines that Section 8 initiative that you referred

3   to and many others.

4   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. So we'll

5   hold off then. So just kind of what's in the roadmap

6   is what you're going to…

7   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Correct.

8   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. All right. I

9   have questions for the roadmap. You'll have your time

10   in the center. Give me one second.

11   Can you, on the conversations with RAD

12   and PACT, and this is, I'm nervous about NYCHA, so I

13   represent, I think, now five, four NYCHA RAD-PACT

14   developments. Obviously. residents don't necessarily

15   know the conversations that NYCHA is having with the

16   City and the State, but are you able to share at this

17   time which of those RAD-PACT management companies OTI

18   has met with or is speaking with, and how often are

19   you all in conversation with them?

20   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Yeah. To be

21   clear, OTI is not directly involved in those

22   relationships. That's between NYCHA and the private

23   property owners and then those ISPs. We are regularly

24   meeting with NYCHA to get updates on the status of it

25   because frankly, as you mentioned, it's been…

2   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Are they giving

3 you updates often?

4   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: They are.

5   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Yeah.

6   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: So we're in

7 communication with NYCHA getting those numbers so I

8 don't have the information as to specific

9 developments. We can get that either what we have in

10 our records or we can get it from NYCHA as well to

11 get the latest status for you, particularly for those

12 developments in your District.

13   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Would you say that

14 maybe at this point that you've heard from every RAD-

15 PACT development?

16   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: I wouldn't say

17 that because, again, the conversations with NYCHA in

18 particular, like NYCHA proper, not the individual

19 developments so we're not speaking with the

20 individual developments or representatives.

21   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Right. I'm saying

22 it to distinguish it. So, the NYCHA developments that

23 are in RAD-PACT, would you say that you've been able

24 to communicate with each one, I guess with NYCHA,

25

2 about each one of those developments regarding

3 connection?

4   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: NYCHA has

5 provided a schedule because they're being

6 transitioned or converted to RAD-PACT on a schedule

7 that's planned out in advance. So, the ones that are

8 in the process of being converted or have recently

9 been converted, those are the ones we're focusing in

10 on, understanding that there's additional work that

11 needs to happen on the ones to be converted. So, the

12 ones that are in the pipeline down the road, we don't

13 have much visibility into because we expect that

14 there will be some time before those get resolved so

15 we're focusing on the ones that will hopefully be

16 activating the broadband service soon.

17   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. So let me

18 just understand. So you are in communication, OTI,

19 excuse me, is in communication with NYCHA. NYCHA is

20 responsible for reporting back to you or sharing with

21 you how their negotiations are going with these ISPs.

22 You're not working directly with ISPs.

23   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: That's

24 correct. And I wouldn't characterize it that NYCHA is

25 responsible necessarily. It's just part of our

2   interagency relationship that we have with all

3   agencies, but in this case NYCHA, where we meet with

4   them, we get an update, and we talk to them about the

5   status.

6   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. So, I guess

7   I'm a little unclear on what the intention or the

8   goal was, if that's the case, to basically say early

9   on in 2022 that Big Apple Connect had the capacity to

10   expand into these developments. Because it seems like

11   what you're describing is not really an active

12   mobilization from these management companies, and

13   again, I know them personally, they're in my

14   district. They've never once brought this up to me.

15   They've never once said that they are talking to

16   NYCHA, and I can list those off to you if that'll

17   help in your conversations with NYCHA, but it just

18   seems like there was a little, there was not proper

19   steps taken originally in '22 by Commissioner Fraser

20   when he said, we have this plan to expand into NYCHA

21   RAD because what you're saying now, it does not feel

22   like a strong, it doesn't feel like these management

23   companies are being held accountable. It doesn't feel

24   like they're bought into this program in an urgent

25   way, is what I'm saying.

2   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Again, to be

3 clear, we're not expanding into RAD-PACT. There's a

4 pre-existing contract and arrangement between NYCHA

5 and those property managers to provide the broadband

6 service so it's not an active initiative that OTI is

7 involved in, but one that we're certainly given our

8 role with the City in ensuring that broadband is

9 ubiquitous and affordable and available, we are

10 involved in making sure that those things are, and

11 offering our help to make sure those things are

12 rolled out.

13   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: So each one of

14 those management companies made commitments to

15 connectivity in their RFP?

16   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: That's my

17 understanding, yes, in addition to many other parts

18 of the rehabbing, the developments.

19   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Sure, sure, sure.

20 But I'm referring to this exclusively. Okay.

21   Can you confirm that the City is

22 currently paying Spectrum a bulk rate of 24.95 per

23 unit for internet service through the Big Apple

24 Connect program?

25

2   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: That's

3   correct, yes.

4   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. Did they

5   commit to long-term price caps, or is that price

6   subject… so 24.95 is what they're charging the

7   residents?

8   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: So, 24.95 is

9   what the City is paying per unit for every household

10 that's connected to the Big Apple Connect program.

11   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Is what the City

12 is paying?

13   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Correct.

14   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: What we're paying.

15 And so did they, again I don't have the contract, but

16 is there a price cap or are the prices subject to

17 change?

18   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: For the

19 duration of the contract, the price is fixed subject

20 to applicable taxes and fees, but the price is fixed.

21   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: And just remind

22 me, the contract is until when?

23   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: So, they were

24 initially three-year contracts with two one-year

25

2 renewal options or options for up to two years in

3 renewals.

4   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Two two-year

5 renewals?

6   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Two one-year

7 renewals.

8   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Oh, sorry.

9   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: No, I'm sorry.

10 So, we're actively in discussions with both providers

11 now to ensure that there's no loss in service and

12 that the program, as CTO Fraser has mentioned, is

13 around for a really long time so we're in active

14 discussions with the providers so that rates remain

15 the same. Maybe there'll be some additional offerings

16 that we'll hopefully be able to announce in the near

17 future, but the expectation is that folks living in

18 NYCHA will be able to have Big Apple Connect for a

19 really long time.

20   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. And so how

21 are you all meeting that expectation, or how are

22 these providers meeting that expectation if there's

23 no baseline funding yet, correct?

24   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Correct. And

25 we continue to secure funding year to year until that

2   can be baselined. But we'll be hopefully entering

3   into an agreement with both providers to provide

4   service beyond this year.

5   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Beyond this year.

6   Okay. So can you, if for some reason the City were to

7   end their contract with Spectrum, would residents

8   face an increase to the cost of their internet? I

9   guess, what is the commitment from Spectrum and

10   Altice? How can they afford that? With no baseline

11   funding, what is that looking like?

12   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: So, early on

13   in the Administration, we negotiated that very low

14   price point, you mentioned 24.95 for Charter, it's

15   about 25 and change for Altice at a very competitive

16   price, well below the market rate for the services

17   that we negotiated. You mentioned the cable TV, the

18   high-speed internet, the very high-speed internet,

19   the modem, the router, the cable box remote control,

20   all that, which has a market rate well over 100

21   dollars per unit so that's what a comparable rate

22   would be for those services that we're getting for 24

23   or 25 dollars. So, for those folks who are already a

24   cable subscriber, a subscriber to Charter or Altice,

25   their cable bills in many cases were brought down to

2 zero. If they only had basic cable and internet, they

3 started getting 0-dollars bills. For those folks who

4 may have had packages where they had premium

5 services, all those services that we negotiated that

6 we pay for were stricken from their bills so it went

7 down considerably. So, if they were paying just 190

8 per month for a cable package, the high-speed

9 internet, the basic cable, the modem, router, cable

10 box, all that, all those charges were removed from

11 their bill because the City was paying for that. So,

12 I think it's safe to say to answer your question,

13 Chair, if the program were to go away, residents will

14 see a sharp increase in their monthly bills, in some

15 cases from zero if they're only getting the base

16 services to something more substantial, or if they're

17 already getting a bill for incremental premium

18 services that they've signed up for, those base

19 services will now be added to that bill so it's in

20 our hope and expectation that we'll be able to fund

21 Big Apple Connect in the short term and for a long

22 time to come.

23   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: But if we're not,

24 for whatever reason, if the City's not able to

25 baseline this funding in the FY25 budget and moving

2   forward FY26, what of your negotiations with these

3   providers, what is the incentive for them to maintain

4   the price for residents as low as they are?

5   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: I can't

6   speculate what their incentive is, but from our

7   perspective, from my speaking personally, we would

8   seek to secure the funding year to year. If it can't

9   be baselined or if it's not yet baselined in the

10   City's budget, we would just secure the funding

11   that's necessary to keep the Big Apple Connect

12   program in place year to year.

13   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. I'm going to

14   pause on the Big Apple Connect questions.

15   I know Council Member Holden's got some

16   questions, and then we'll come back. Thank you.

17   COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you. Thank

18   you for your testimony.

19   Just a couple of questions on Intro. 878.

20   Are all current and past franchise agreements

21   publicly available and where can we find them, and

22   why are some agreements not available?

23   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Thank you,

24   Council Member. Good to see you.

25

2   All of our franchise agreements are on

3 the City's website, so that's inclusive of our cable

4 franchise agreements, mobile telecommunications,

5 public communications, information services are all

6 available. In some cases, they're redacted for

7 signatures, personal signatures, but they're all

8 available, and we hope that they're all accessible

9 for (INAUDIBLE)

10   COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Even some of them

11 that were signed on or after 2006 are available?

12   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: All the

13 current agreements should be… I would love to hear

14 which one you're referring to.

15   COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: I don't think so,

16 so I think you have to go look at that. Also, New

17 York State already has a broadband map, correct?

18   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: New York

19 State, yes.

20   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: New York State.

21   COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: What would it take

22 to utilize the publicly available map, an interactive

23 map, because people don't know what they… Again,

24 we're at the mercy of these cable companies, and it's

25 muddled, and they each claim they're better than the

2 other. Is there somewhere we can go and look at this

3 and say, what covers our area with an interactive

4 map? That's what my bill does. Is that currently

5 available?

6   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: So, we do

7 include maps on our website that has the franchise

8 area for all the cable companies. So as you know,

9 Altice and Spectrum don't overlap. They have separate

10 geographic areas. Verizon Fios is available in most

11 places around the city. So we do have that

12 information. Down to the level of ISP from beyond the

13 cable companies, we don't have that information, and

14 that may be difficult given our limited authority in

15 regulating, not just limited.

16   COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Just to compare

17 and look, and even on performance, because I'm always

18 at odds with my cable provider saying, I'm not

19 getting the speed. They come over, they find there's

20 a wire that's not great. We have poles above ground,

21 and the weather takes its toll on that so I'm

22 constantly having to keep after them, and then they

23 use outside technicians that they hire, and they

24 complain. We're stuck in between. What I'm saying is

25 the company will say, oh, this guy wasn't right. And

2   this is the same company, but they're hiring out. And

3   I just don't know if we're regulating this as we

4   should.

5   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Yeah. I mean,

6   with respect to the cable providers, we do have

7   provisions in our franchise agreement that require

8   that they have certain customer satisfaction

9   requirements and repair things in a certain amount of

10   time. Customers, folks, residents can complain to us.

11   They can report to us any issues they're having with

12   the cable company, and we help to resolve them. We

13   have a team dedicated to that, whether that's billing

14   or service issues.

15   COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Now, you gather

16   this information about complaints. Is there one place

17   I can go and see how many complaints on Verizon, how

18   many complaints on Spectrum?

19   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: I'd have to

20   look. Generally, they're centralized through 3-1-1,

21   so there may be a 3-1-1 data set that can identify

22   the source of the complaints or the category.

23   COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: This is important,

24   because we're getting scammed by advertising all the

25   time. You know that. And many people can't keep up

2   with this, where if we had an area that we can see a

3   comparison. Maybe it's not government. I mean, you

4   could argue it's not government's role to do that,

5   but I think if we're going to give franchisees and

6   we're going to give them space in the public domain,

7   that we should somehow decipher some of this, because

8   it is very muddled.

9   But let me just get into CityBridge.

10   Since CityBridge announced its partnership with

11   Zenfi, how many 5G towers have been installed across

12   the city?

13   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: So there are

14   just over 200 Link5Gs that have been deployed. A

15   little less than that are activated currently.

16   COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Do you have a

17   breakdown by borough?

18   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: I don't have

19   it in front of me, but we can get that right to you.

20   COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: How many

21   additional LinkNYC kiosks have been installed since

22   the announcement of the partnership? Do we have a

23   number on that? I really don't get that many in my

24   District. It's very slow. I had two at one point.

25

2   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: It's very

3 likely that since the partnership, you mean

4 CityBridge and Zenfi partnership? So all of the 200

5 plus that have been installed have been done since

6 that partnership so that partnership is what's

7 generating the new Link locations that are requested

8 and ultimately the installations.

9   COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: (TIMER CHIME) One

10 other question. Is CityBridge current on all the

11 required franchise payments of the City because we

12 had a huge issue with that in the previous Council.

13 Are they caught up?

14   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Yes. They're

15 on time with all their franchise obligations.

16   COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Great. They don't

17 owe us anything. Great. That's good news. Thank you.

18 Thank you, Chair.

19   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you, Council

20 Member. Okay. In a recent interview with City and

21 State Commissioner Fraser said that 2 billion dollars

22 budgeted for the Internet Master Plan was too much

23 money. But if we break it down, he said that for a

24 fraction of the cost of the 2-billion-dollar program,

25 OTI provides connectivity to over 330,000 people in

2 the city. If the City continues Big Apple Connect at

3 its current rate, 38 million dollars per year, like

4 we said before, the City will have spent roughly 2

5 billion in 22 years. That's 2 billion with no capital

6 investment, no citywide infrastructure and service

7 limited only to NYCHA, to public housing. Meanwhile,

8 the Internet Master Plan proposed using 2 billion

9 over potential decades to build a citywide public-

10 private broadband infrastructure that could scale,

11 deliver long-term affordability. Just to clarify, are

12 you aware that the 2 billion cited in the Internet

13 Master Plan was not all City funding and would have

14 been over years?

15   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: I believe

16 that's the case, yeah.

17   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: And it included

18 private investment, but the first investment was just

19 that initial 157 million.

20   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Right, and I

21 believe there was more to come, but yes, it was

22 initially 157.

23   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. So what

24 long-term investments is the City making today in

25

2 broadband infrastructure or sustainable

3 affordability?

4   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Yeah, I mean,

5 it really goes back to the genesis of Big Apple

6 Connect. I'm not going to belabor the point of what

7 Big Apple Connect does, but that's the reason why we

8 went in that direction, because there is in 2020,

9 certainly in 2022, and for sure now in 2025, there is

10 a ton of broadband infrastructure in the city in

11 terms of the availability of it. We didn't think it

12 was a good investment of City dollars, of limited

13 City resources to invest in what could be perceived

14 as redundant, unnecessary infrastructure. It's not to

15 say it wasn't for a good intent, just as you

16 acknowledge Big Apple Connect has great intent and

17 has ensured that hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers

18 are connected. With respect to the Internet Master

19 Plan, there was no guarantee that this investment of

20 City dollars, private dollars over many, many years

21 would yield the results that we are seeing with Big

22 Apple Connect. There's too many unknowns, and based

23 on that, that's the reason why we went with Big Apple

24 Connect and a lot of these very important digital

25 equity programs.

2   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: In the same light,

3   there's no guarantee with Big Apple Connect. The

4   funding that you're trying to get baselined, if you

5   don't get a baselined, which could very realistically

6   happen under this Administration, you'd have to try

7   to secure year after year after year. There is no

8   guarantee even with this existing program, correct?

9   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: There's a

10   guarantee in terms of the folks getting connected

11   right away, and there's a guarantee that they're

12   receiving those benefits immediately upon almost day

13   one of this Administration, and for as long as, to

14   your point, funding is available.

15   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: There's no

16   guarantee that you can maintain funding, maintain it?

17   And there's no guarantee that you're going to expand

18   beyond NYCHA.

19   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Correct, but

20   as we've said, as we've maintained for years now, the

21   expectation is that Big Apple Connect will be a

22   mainstay, will be available just as heat and hot

23   water is available to NYCHA residents, that Big Apple

24   Connect will be there so we're operating under that

25   expectation.

2   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Has the City

3   conducted a cost-benefit analysis comparing the MSA-

4   based Big Apple Connect model to the Internet Master

5   Plan model? So 2-billion-dollar infrastructure

6   investment over 20 or so years versus 2 billion bulk

7   purchasing 20 or so years.

8   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: I'm not aware

9   of a specific assessment that was done relative to

10   those two things, but just based on the site test, we

11   were able to see how we can make the biggest

12   difference in the city immediately. So that was

13   really what ultimately led us in the direction.

14   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Can you say that

15   last part again? We wanted to make the biggest

16   difference to the folks who are most in need, the

17   most vulnerable populations, the most historically

18   underserved, which includes all of NYCHA, and we

19   wanted to get them connected immediately. So, a cost

20   analysis or any other analysis would have ultimately

21   led us still to a Big Apple Connect strategy.

22   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: But there's also…

23   but I mean, 100 percent, I represent about eight

24   NYCHA development sites door-knocked, totally

25   familiar with the range of needs. And again, agree

2 that the program is connecting people, and that's a

3 huge accolade. But the needs that exist amongst NYCHA

4 residents exist equally, not equally, but like

5 similarly with other residents, maybe Section 8

6 voucher holders, maybe families that are doubled up

7 right now so I understand that this program is

8 working, and you're working to expand it even more to

9 get to that 100 percent, but what is OTI's plan to

10 expand beyond the existing target, the existing

11 universe, because those are also communities in need,

12 and I'm not trying to be overly critical, I'm just

13 trying to get you all to share what the plan is, and

14 that the Internet Master Plan, I get it, while in

15 your testimony you shared this is like from years

16 ago, it's the intent is to live beyond an

17 Administration. The intent is to live beyond a four-

18 year, two-term mayor, to live beyond me, beyond you

19 at this agency, and so what is, if OTI is saying

20 Internet Master Plan is the OG, and we're not rocking

21 with it, what are you rocking with now? What is the

22 plan to expand actual connectivity in these other

23 areas of need?

24   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Well, again,

25 you're going to hate this, but Big Apple Connect, it

2   should be 330,000 New Yorkers, right? 330,000 New

3   Yorkers, 150,000 households, no guarantee that the

4   Internet Master Plan…

5   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Why would I hate

6   that? I don't hate that. Don't put words in my mouth.

7   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Yeah, yeah, I

8   get it. But that's the centerpiece of the plan. It's

9   not the only part of the plan. As I mentioned,

10   there's a lot of other areas that are around it, and

11   that we can look at alternative providers that can

12   provide service like the HPD pilot, and other areas

13   where we could potentially expand infrastructure

14   where it strategically makes sense, but a full-scale

15   infrastructure deployment that's going to cost

16   upwards of billions of dollars where there's already

17   a ton of fiber infrastructure already available

18   didn't seem like a wise use of the City's money, both

19   at the time and today, and that remains true.

20   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: But we're not

21   doing away with the existing infrastructure. The idea

22   of the bill, and we'll get into those questions, is

23   to provide something that is going to have vision,

24   that is going to be able to evolve. Obviously, the

25   Internet Master Plan came out before the pandemic

2   based on your feedback and Commissioner's feedback. A

3   lot has changed. I agree. A lot of that may or may

4   not apply, but I'm just trying to gauge what the

5   opposition to something, just a plan. You don't even

6   have to call it the Internet Master Plan, but what is

7   the opposition to something that goes beyond the

8   success of Big Apple Connect at this point?

9   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: We just don't

10   see that there's a need for a major infrastructure

11   play, and that seems to be at the core of 1122. It's

12   like coming up with a plan to deploy new

13   infrastructure to provide services. While certainly

14   we share the goal of expanding access to low-cost,

15   free-if-possible Internet, we see that there may be

16   other ways to do it, either by leveraging the state

17   program, the Affordable Broadband Act, which provides

18   very low-cost broadband service to eligible

19   households, or other programs that we may materialize

20   over the future. But for now, Big Apple Connect is

21   the City's big broadband investment.

22   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: So no need for

23   infrastructure is the reason?

24   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: That was the

25   determination a couple of years ago when the

2   Administration came into office, and that remains

3   true today.

4   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. On the

5   bundling for Big Apple Connect, what is the reason

6   for cable being a requirement?

7   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Well, for one,

8   because they were cable providers under the Master

9   Service Agreement, and because they had, thanks to

10   their cable agreements, the infrastructure in place

11   to provide the Internet. It just made sense because

12   of the very low price that we were getting for each

13   unit, to include basic cable for folks to be able to

14   watch local news or get local access channels that

15   they maybe otherwise couldn't get.

16   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: And they were

17   offering lower prices than some of the smaller ISPs

18   were?

19   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Who were, I'm

20   sorry?

21   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Altice and

22   Spectrum.

23   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: So that little

24   mini-bid that we referred to earlier was available to

25

2   the cable providers, because they were the ones with

3   the infrastructure in place.

4   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: And so, in their

5   responses, they each included cable, just because

6   they had the infrastructure, or was this something

7   that…

8   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: I believe it

9   was a requirement, or it was a…

10   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: I don't understand

11   what came first. Was it like, the mini-bid came out,

12   and everybody that participated also provided cable,

13   so now it's part of this program, or was the City

14   looking for providers exclusively that could provide

15   cable because obviously that limits the pool.

16   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Yeah, my

17   understanding was that mini-bid had requirements for

18   high-speed Internet, basic cable service, and that

19   the infrastructure was already in place so that they

20   can get started immediately. So that was at the very

21   beginning, if that answers you.

22   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: So there was no

23   intention for a real competitive process?

24

25

2   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: It was

3   certainly competitive among those who qualified to be

4   able to provide the services that were outlined.

5   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Oh, it's only

6   three of them that you mentioned that applied,

7   correct?

8   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: One of the

9   contingencies was that there be service available

10   immediately to residents.

11   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. Were there

12   any negotiations with internet service providers,

13   excuse me, just with Charter Spectrum, I apologize,

14   Spectrum and Altice?

15   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Yep, yep.

16   There were discussions with all three in an effort,

17   as I mentioned, to get the best pricing for the City.

18   So, we wanted to make sure that the services that

19   were provided were adequate in terms of the speeds,

20   minimum of 300 megabits per second, high-speed

21   Internet, and that the rates were certainly

22   competitive with the marketplace, and in the cases

23   that we ultimately negotiated, were well below those

24   market rates.

25

2   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Do you all have a

3 sense of what the City would be paying for just

4 internet versus internet and cable with these

5 providers?

6   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: I don't have

7 that offhand. It was pretty much the same. It's

8 largely the Internet that costs the bulk of that per

9 unit rate, but I don't have the breakout in front of

10 me.

11   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: So, it was almost

12 the same?

13   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: For the most

14 part. It wasn't a big difference if we were just

15 procuring internet service.

16   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. I don't know

17 if you can share that at any point.

18   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: I'll see if we

19 have that.

20   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Just what the cost

21 difference is. Yeah, we just want to know what we're

22 paying more for.

23   I think I asked this before, so I jumped

24 the gun a little bit, but do you know of the 330,000

25

2   users, how many of them have a TV set up with cable?

3   Is that information that is reported to you all?

4   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: It's not

5   reported to us. We don't have that visibility.

6   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Is it something

7   that they can provide, Spectrum and Altice.

8   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: We could take

9   a look at that. I don't want to commit to that. I

10   don't know if they… we could take a look to see if

11   that's information we can get.

12   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: I get it. I get

13   that the intent was like the cable was kind of a

14   bonus, but again, I think there's dwindling cable

15   subscriptions, and if we're paying at all any more

16   money for cable, I'm just curious the intention of

17   keeping cable as part of that subscription if all

18   these providers are seeing dwindling subscriptions,

19   people are not necessarily watching cable. They're

20   streaming it on their phones or their devices. Then I

21   think it's important for you all to, as part of your

22   contract, because the cable piece seems very crucial

23   to this designation, I think it's important that you

24   all ask, how many of these 330,000 units are even

25   connecting to cable? Is there a clause or is there a

2   possibility for you all to work that piece out of

3   your renegotiations and your renewals?

4   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: We could take

5   a look. I don't know offhand whether that's an option

6   or one that we would want to consider, frankly. We do

7   realize there's a benefit to providing the basic

8   cable services to folks so that they can stay

9   connected, not just online, but also to the local

10   news and the community access organizations and the

11   (CROSS-TALK) channels.

12   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Is that included

13   in your surveys? Are you asking tenants like, are you

14   connected to cable? Are you using cable?

15   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: No. It was

16   focused on the Internet and how they're using the

17   Internet.

18   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: But the cable is a

19   big part of your contract. It's a big reason why you

20   designated these providers, correct?

21   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: It is, again,

22   tying back to the fact that they have infrastructure.

23   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: And getting

24   quickly connected. Yes, I understand that. I feel

25   like if you're sending out surveys, I feel like it's

2   a missed opportunity not to say, how relevant is this

3   cable subscription in 2025.

4   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: We intended to

5   have a very straightforward five-question survey so a

6   lot of questions…

7   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: One more question

8   is, do you have cable at home? Are you using cable?

9   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: We can

10   certainly do that when we do the in-person surveys.

11   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: I'm going to be at

12   NYCHA this summer, so I'm going to see. I'm going to

13   ask folks.

14   Okay. Is there, and just for the sake of

15   my Colleagues who have other bills, I know I have it

16   in your testimony, but is there anything else that

17   you want to expand on on any of the bills, Council

18   Member Won's bills. Yeah, anything else that you, I

19   mean, I can ask specific questions, I'm sorry, but is

20   there anything else? It seems like you're not in

21   support of any of these bills so I just want to see

22   where you all are at with the remaining bills.

23   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Yeah, I think

24   we would like more information, particularly in

25   Council Member Won's bills, in terms of how, for

example, the wireless network access to City

facilities, how she envisions that being implemented.

Is it for users of a TLC licensing center, for

example? Is it for members of the general public to

come in and use the internet? And then we would have

to do an analysis to see if the way it's set up is

even available for public access. There may have to

be a redesign of the network. There may have to be

security protocols in place. There's a lot of

questions that we have.

CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Do you know how

many agencies would be capable of providing internet

to the public?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: That are

currently providing internet?

CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: No, well, I mean,

do you have a sense of how many would be able, under

this bill, would be able to provide internet to the

public?

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: No, I think we

would have to do that. I don't want to speak for

other agencies that may be present, but we'd have to

ask another agency to do that assessment.

2 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Do we have someone

3 here from DCAS? Yes, would you be able to speak to

4 that? About how many agencies would be capable of

5 providing free internet to the public?

6 You have to be sworn in.

7 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BYHOVSKY: Thank you so

8 much. I just want you to raise your right hand.

9 Do you swear and affirm to tell the truth

10 and answer honestly to Council Member questions?

11 NEELESH SHAH: Yes, I do.

12 COMMITTEE COUNSEL BYHOVSKY: Thank you so

13 much.

14 NEELESH SHAH: I represent IT for DCAS.

15 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Just say your

16 name. I apologize.

17 NEELESH SHAH: My name is Neelesh Shah,

18 and I oversee the technology for DCAS IT. DCAS IT

19 administers all the connectivity for our employees

20 and custodian staff who resides in these 55

21 buildings. Other than those 55 buildings, we don't do

22 or oversee anything else. We do have other agencies

23 who are the tenants within our buildings, and they

24 actually manage their own internet connectivity and

25 setup.

2   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: I'm sorry. It's

3 really hard for me to hear in here. Currently,

4 obviously, you don't have internet that's set up for

5 the public?

6   NEELESH SHAH: Yeah, we don't, no.

7   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. Do any of

8 the agencies at this point, any of their

9 infrastructure is set up for?

10   NEELESH SHAH: We are not sure about that.

11 I will say that will be more a question for OTI,

12 because they oversee the citywide connectivity. DCAS

13 only manages connectivity within the 55 buildings

14 that we manage.

15   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you. Are

16 there any risks that you can speak to that you think

17 would exist if there was access provided by the City

18 agencies to the public?

19   NEELESH SHAH: High level, I cannot think

20 of any risk as long as it's managed and secured the

21 right way, like public internet versus private

22 internet. For public, there's typically a different

23 channel open for every user. Those all kind of

24 things, let's say when we do implementation with OTI,

25 we would go through the cyber review, if there was a

2 decision made to make publicly internet accessible

3 within our 55 buildings.

4   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. Is there a

5 cost, an additional cost? I guess what would change

6 about the existing contract with OTI within these

7 City agencies to be able to provide internet beyond

8 for the purpose of the agency?

9   NEELESH SHAH: For sure, there will be

10 cost considerations. I can give you an example. When

11 we expanded our own private internet access within

12 buildings, we had to install wireless routers, we had

13 to create separate channels. If we are talking here

14 about public internet access in DCAS' 55 buildings,

15 then we'll actually have to work with the OTI

16 networking infrastructure team, actually do the

17 survey and come up with the cost analysis of what it

18 would take to install the access points across our

19 buildings.

20   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. Thank you. I

21 think that's it for the DCAS question.

22   For OTI, for Intro. 486, which is the

23 bill by Council Member Won on information on

24 affordable internet programs for students and

25 families. I think you mentioned in your testimony,

2   working with New York City Public Schools, have you

3   all had these discussions or what are some of the

4   discussions that you've had regarding this, and

5   what's any feedback?

6   ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER WRIGHT: Thank you

7   for that question. We have engaged with PEU and have

8   initiated conversations with New York City public

9   schools about backpack flyers. We are also planning a

10   day of action, as Mr. Sykoff recommended in his

11   testimony. We're hoping to do that mid-summer and

12   then also do a back-to-school event to promote the

13   Affordable Broadband Act with the Connect All team.

14   We have information currently posted on our website,

15   but also looking to make that information available

16   to people on the street. Putting it in backpack

17   flyers is a great idea as a way of reaching

18   populations that currently do not have online access.

19   We're excited to advance this over the summer.

20   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: And what is the

21   information that you're thinking you're going to be

22   able to share?

23   ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER WRIGHT: The

24   information would be focusing in on the ABA

25   enrollment. Letting folks know that when they contact

2   their internet service provider, what are the

3   keywords that you need to be using in order to

4   register for the discounted price. Just to let people

5   know that this is available. I don't think that it's

6   something that we're going to see the internet

7   service providers promoting so we want to be doing

8   that to make sure all New York City residents know

9   that this is a program available to them.

10   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Is there anything

11   else that you would be, is there any other internet

12   program, is there anything in your conversations with

13   the state that you'd be able to include for families?

14   ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER WRIGHT: I think

15   because of this ABA enrollment opportunity offering a

16   low-cost available option, 25 dollars a month, that

17   is such a wonderful offering for families in New York

18   City, we are putting our effort towards promoting

19   that as it just recently rolled out. The Connect All

20   team is sharing lessons learned that they are hearing

21   of folks when they are trying to register and get

22   signed up. We're continuing to work closely with the

23   Connect All team to learn any of those, to

24   incorporate that into any communications. I think we

25

2   are going to continue to advance with promoting the

3   ABA program.

4   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: The day of action

5   you all are thinking is?

6   ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER WRIGHT: We're

7   thinking of doing a day of action in the summer with

8   PEU coordinating, they have their CUNY interns that

9   can support that, and then doing another day of

10   action in September for back-to-school efforts.

11   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. Is that

12   information from the day of action, is that

13   information that you are planning to track to see how

14   many families are engaging with you all on this?

15   ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER WRIGHT:

16   Definitely.

17   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay, great. We

18   would love to have it when you have it ready. Maybe

19   even district by school district if that's easier,

20   but just some kind of breakdown of how people are

21   responding to this?

22   ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER WRIGHT: Certainly.

23   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: A couple more

24   questions on the cost of the Master Plan, and this is

25   just for me to understand. I know that the 157

2   million was through, initially of the Master Plan was

3   supposed to go through EDC, the Economic Development

4   Corporation. Can you share if that money has been

5   spent, or has any of it been redirected?

6   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: So, yes.

7   Originally, you're correct, it was with EDC for a

8   period, then I think it was transferred over to OTI.

9   It has since been repurposed for a number of other

10 public interface projects around the city, such as 3-

11 1-1, MyCity, cybersecurity initiatives, and including

12 the 2.4-million-dollar investment that we included in

13 the Digital Equity Roadmap so it's been repurposed

14 for a lot of other purposes.

15   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: For the Digital

16 Roadmap, the 2.4, this is an expense, correct?

17   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Correct.

18   ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER WRIGHT: That is

19 capital funds, the 2.4 million.

20   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: It's in capital?

21   ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER WRIGHT: Yes,

22 correct.

23   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. And what is

24 the capital, what are you spending the money on?

25

2   ASSOCIATE COMMISSIONER WRIGHT: I'm happy

3   to talk through in more detail for the Digital Equity

4   Roadmap, but just specifically on the investments,

5   it's a 1.1-million investment in refurbishing older

6   adult centers, and that is focusing on updating and

7   refreshing the technology; a 1-million-dollar

8   investment in the expansion of the New York Public

9   Library Tech Connect program; and then a 300,000-

10   dollar investment to grow the reach of NYCHA's

11   digital vans.

12   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. And then of

13   that original, of the 157 million, do you believe

14   it's all been redirected at this point?

15   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: I believe so,

16   yes.

17   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. Would you be

18   able to share just a breakdown, kind of what you just

19   did now, of how that money was redirected?

20   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Yeah, we'll

21   see if we can pull that together.

22   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. Thank you.

23   Now, the next series of questions, I

24   think, are a little bit very specific about the

25   Internet Plan, because I know that in that September

2 2022 hearing that you were there for, and then I

3 think later with the Commissioner, I was curious,

4 obviously as a sponsor of the bill, what wasn't

5 working, right? What was it that this Administration

6 just didn't agree with? Based on kind of your

7 previous response, you all felt there was no need for

8 further investment in infrastructure, but I think the

9 Internet Master Plan did have other aspects of it.

10 Obviously, it brought a ton of stakeholders together,

11 a ton of experts, internet service providers, one of

12 whom is my understanding is Flume, is that designee

13 for that State program, so I think it's great to see

14 that they are being integrated into the City's

15 broader vision and the reality of the value that

16 these smaller ISPs bring. So if you're able, I would

17 love to know just kind of, because I feel like you're

18 not going to be able to answer these, but just

19 specifically, are there specific parts of the

20 Internet Master Plan, and I can go through them with

21 you, that you feel are worth integrating or parts of

22 the plan besides the infrastructure piece that you're

23 like, this is just not going to work?

24   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: One in

25 particular comes to mind, which is leveraging City

2   assets, so whether it's City buildings or other types

3   of public infrastructure, that's certainly an area

4   that was referenced in the Internet Master Plan, and

5   there was extensive engagement with City agencies at

6   the time to catalog those potentially available sites

7   where, whether it's a fiber provider or a wireless

8   carrier can site telecommunications equipment on City

9   facilities, so that's one of the reasons why we

10 recently published a request for information, which

11 is also referenced in the Roadmap, which puts out a

12 request for information from tech companies, the

13 general public, elected officials, community boards,

14 wide range of potential respondents so we can learn

15 how best to use public infrastructure to serve the

16 public for digital equity purposes. So that's just

17 the one thing that comes to mind, but there are

18 certainly other elements of it that are worth

19 considering.

20   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Was there an

21 evaluation done? I believe at one of the hearings,

22 the Commissioner said that there was an internal

23 evaluation of the plan, of the Internet Master Plan.

24 Does that exist?

25

2   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: I don't know

3 that there's a formal paper evaluation, but there

4 were certainly many, many discussions early on in the

5 Administration as to how best to proceed with both

6 with the Master Plan and ultimately what turned out

7 to be the Big Apple Connect program so there were

8 many evaluations. I don't know that there's a

9 physical document.

10   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Really?

11   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: I don't know.

12   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: You don't know

13 that it exists? I mean, I would be very disappointed

14 if there's not something more formal. It was a really

15 big document. It was brought together by a major

16 coalition. Obviously, some of the members of that

17 coalition felt like it was a slap to the face to

18 abandon this plan, and so that process was really

19 formalized so if you can confirm that there was no

20 formal evaluation, and if there is one, if you could

21 share, but if there wasn't, I would be really, really

22 disappointed considering the time it took to put

23 together, it would be really, I think, disrespectful

24 if OTI didn't formally provide something to,

25 especially the providers that were on the hook

2   originally, just out of respect to the coalition

3   members.

4   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: For certain. I

5   hope it goes without saying, but we do have a

6   tremendous amount of respect for all those providers,

7   not just the ones who are initially contracted with,

8   but the entire industry who seeks to do a whole lot

9   of good in the city. We did at the time, I do recall,

10   we made personal phone calls to representatives, to

11   the chiefs, the CEOs of each of those companies,

12   letting them know of the City's intent to move away

13   from the IMP in another direction so there was

14   considerable effort to ensure that they were

15   communicated with once a decision was arrived at.

16   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: That communication

17   was to say, we're scrapping it.

18   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Correct.

19   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Right. My next

20   question, I guess, is to understand, was OTI ever

21   able, and I'm just going to break down some parts of

22   that, you let me know yes or no, break down some

23   parts of the Internet Master Plan to the best of your

24   ability, you let me know what you all did, didn't do.

25   In phase one, which is coordinating City processes,

2   did OTI ever convene a full intra-agency broadband

3   City asset task force after 2021?

4   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: I don't

5   believe so. Again, that's a core element of the

6   Digital Equity Roadmap is to convene just that, a

7   roundtable of City experts who will ultimately help

8   arrive at decisions that are made for broadband and

9   digital equity that will eventually lead to bringing

10   in external stakeholders as well.

11   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: It's in the

12   Roadmap, but I'm asking, this also, this existed in

13   the Internet Master Plan so are you just saying that

14   you kind of redid it up?

15   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Yeah. I mean,

16   there's certainly parallels to what was in the

17   original plan to what we're doing now so when we talk

18   about the pivot away from the Internet Master Plan to

19   Big Apple and other initiatives, it was not just

20   because we don't believe that every element of the

21   plan was not helpful. It was really about the core

22   investment in infrastructure. That was the concern.

23   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: I understand. I'm

24   just trying to make the distinction of, now the bill

25   that I'm trying to work with you all to pass, I'm

2   just trying to make the distinction piece by piece

3   because you're saying you don't know if there's a

4   formal evaluation. I've been talking about this since

5   I started. I'm just trying to understand phase by

6   phase where the decision was made so that's what I'm

7   doing with you now. So, I understand there are

8   parallels, but obviously the Internet Master Plan did

9   call for this interagency task force. It exists now

10   under the Digital Roadmap. Okay. And you all had a

11   meeting already?

12   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: (INAUDIBLE)

13   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Yeah? Okay. Well,

14   the Commissioner said that I would be made aware of

15   it, and I was not at that fall hearing. Just want to

16   let you know so I would love to be made aware. I get

17   it. Maybe I won't be invited for many reasons, but I

18   would love to be made aware so that we can stay in

19   communication so that I know how this is moving

20   along.

21   For phase two, optimizing public assets,

22   it outlined a universal solicitation for broadband

23   using City-owned buildings. Did the City ever

24   complete the public asset inventory that the plan

25   called for?

2 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: I don't know

3 that it was… so we have an inventory of public

4 assets. I don't know that it specifically mirrors the

5 one that was in the Internet Master Plan.

6 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: City-owned

7 buildings, rooftops, poles, and rights of way.

8 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Yeah, a lot of

9 that is unchanged so that can be leveraged for

10 future, and that's what I mentioned earlier about

11 potentially repurposing elements of the Internet

12 Master Plan that could be utilized in the future so

13 having a comprehensive inventory of City facilities,

14 City assets, that can be utilized.

15 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: So you have that,

16 OTI has that?

17 EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: We certainly

18 have the remnants of the original plan, but I'm

19 certain that over time it's been updated with respect

20 to new buildings that have come and gone over time.

21 CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. Phase three

22 was infrastructure, not just subsidized service. It

23 was about infrastructure and not relying on

24 subsidized service. The plan states the City will

25 invest in new infrastructure and can be shared by

2 multiple broadband operators. What didn't work about

3 this part of the plan?

4   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Yeah, and

5 Chair, we talked about this today. It's really the

6 investment in, huge investment in infrastructure,

7 infrastructure that's already in many cases widely

8 available and wouldn't necessarily materialize in the

9 results that were sought, both under the Master Plan

10 and that we seek to connect people to today.

11   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Has the City

12 invested any funding into shared broadband

13 infrastructure?

14   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Not to my

15 knowledge. Not for public use, but there may be other

16 investments.

17   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. And in 2022,

18 Mr. Sykoff, you testified before this Committee that

19 there was a duplication in fiber infrastructure

20 compared with the plan. Were there any places you

21 identified that fiber infrastructure was missing?

22   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Fiber

23 infrastructure was missing? I don't believe so. I

24 mean, that goes to the point earlier that I mentioned

25 that nearly the entire city is covered, maybe not

2   with fiber, but with coax or a hybrid of broadband

3   infrastructure that's necessary so we'd be hard-

4   pressed to identify the locations where there's no

5   broadband infrastructure. There may not be fiber

6   everywhere. That's something that we're ultimately

7   trying to get to by making our information services

8   franchise available at extremely low cost to small

9   providers. I'm not sure if you're aware, but we do

10   encourage small providers or incentivize them to

11   build out in the city by deferring payments for five

12   years when they build outside of the core of

13   Manhattan.

14   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Build out…

15   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Outside the

16   core of Manhattan, so above 96th Street and the outer

17   boroughs, there's no payments to the City for five

18   years for fiber that's deployed.

19   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. Thank you.

20   Thank you for that.

21   Okay. So, it doesn't sound like you have

22   it, though, but there's no areas where infrastructure

23   is missing. It ranges.

24

25

2   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Where there's

3 no broadband infrastructure whatsoever, virtually

4 nowhere in the city.

5   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. And do you

6 agree with the premise that public infrastructure

7 creates long-term affordability?

8   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: That's really

9 the debate, right? That's what the core of the

10 Internet Master Plan was intended to do, was build

11 out public infrastructure owned by the City with the

12 intention of getting people connected, giving them

13 choice, and hopefully driving down costs. We did not

14 see… that was the old Administration's plan and

15 policy. This Administration came in with a concerted

16 effort to make sure that people got connected without

17 the eventuality or possibility that it would

18 materialize into any actual connectivity for folks or

19 that it would drive down prices. So based on that

20 assessment that we made, it was determined that the

21 best way to go forward was connecting people with the

22 infrastructure that's already available.

23   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay. Phase four,

24 which is the final phase, was enabling service

25 delivery in underserved areas, which is obviously Big

2 Apple Connect, and that's what you're doing in NYCHA.

3 Is any part of Big Apple Connect shared

4 infrastructure?

5   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: No, it's not.

6 It's each provider has their own independent fiber

7 and coax lines, and they're using it for their own

8 purposes. And to be clear, we didn't invest in that

9 infrastructure. That was already preexisting.

10   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Say that again,

11 I'm sorry.

12   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: That

13 infrastructure was already in place prior to this

14 Administration coming on and certainly prior to Big

15 Apple Connect becoming available.

16   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: So it's not shared

17 to your knowledge?

18   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: I don't

19 believe so, yeah.

20   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: I know Council

21 Member Holden's got some more questions, so I'll take

22 a pause and I'll pass it to Council Member Holden.

23   COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Thank you. Just a

24 follow-up question on CityBridge. Does CityBridge

25 engage with community boards regarding the placement

2 and installation of LinkNYC kiosks and 5G Link

3 towers?

4   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Yeah. Thanks,

5 Council Member. So we, OTI, working with CityBridge,

6 CityBridge identifies sites that work for them from a

7 business perspective where there's a 5G need, where

8 there's a wireless need, where they can bring fiber

9 to, where the site may fit within the very extensive

10 siting criteria that our franchise agreement requires

11 them to fit within, and then OTI undertakes a very

12 substantial community engagement role so we have a

13 60-day process by which we reach out to Council

14 Members, to community boards, borough presidents,

15 BIDs, seeking comment from those entities and from

16 their constituents. It's during that process that we

17 routinely attend community board meetings, meet with

18 members, and then we ultimately try to address any

19 concerns that we have regarding siting of kiosks.

20 After that process, if there's no issues and the site

21 passes the compliance review, it passes the State

22 Historical Preservation review, which is another

23 requirement, we then issue a notice to proceed to the

24 franchisee. Once that notice to proceed is issued,

25 the company can get permits to start building, and

2   then we do another round of outreach to the

3   communities, to all those entities to let them know,

4   hey, the site was approved and construction is about

5   to begin.

6   COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Have there been

7   examples where it wasn't installed because the

8   community board objected or the homeowners?

9   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Where there's

10   substantive response in terms of like, it's hard to

11   say. There haven't been many cases where we've

12   relocated a site based on community feedback where

13   there's something that we just wouldn't know from not

14   living there. If someone who's been living for 40

15   years on that block knows that there's a particular

16   building, I'll give you an example. There's a case

17   where there's a medical clinic where folks hang out

18   after going to the medical clinic and they hang out

19   near the Link. That's an example of some feedback

20   that's substantive that we can take back to the

21   provider and say, hey, maybe pick another site or see

22   if you can provide the coverage objectives by going

23   across the street or around the corner because we

24   don't want to add to the community.

25

2   COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: So there have been

3   modifications or…

4   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Generally,

5   it's if it doesn't comply with the siting criteria or

6   it doesn't pass the historical review, those are the

7   ones that would trigger a new site to be selected.

8   COUNCIL MEMBER HOLDEN: Great. Thank you.

9   Thank you, Chair.

10   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you, Council

11 Member. I'm going to pass it on to and welcome to

12 Council Member Restler.

13   COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Thank you so

14 much.

15   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: You're timed,

16 Council Member.

17   COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Good to know,

18 Madam Chair.

19   This is my first foray to the Technology

20 Committee, and I just want to say it is truly an

21 honor to be, I'm using my time, this is important,

22 under, it's truly an honor to be here with Chair

23 Gutiérrez who is the very best of the very best.

24   With that, I appreciate that we have an

25 important objective to get more of these 5G towers up

2 and to improve our internet reliability, but I am

3 totally dismayed by the complete lack of community

4 engagement by OTI. I think it's disgraceful,

5 actually, and I don't use that word lightly. I have

6 examples in my community where these towers are built

7 directly in front, on private property, directly in

8 front of people's homes, looking out the window, as

9 far away as I am from Bob right now, closer than you

10 and I sitting here today, and there's no

11 communication with the property whatsoever. That just

12 one day, you all start digging up the ground in front

13 of their home without thinking that it was relevant

14 to communicate with them at all so the extent of the

15 communication as far as I understand it was an email

16 to my office letting us know that you were moving

17 forward, and an email to the community board letting

18 them know you were moving forward. I believe you're

19 familiar with the site that I'm talking about on the

20 Northside as an example. Is that accurate, that that

21 was the full extent of the community engagement that

22 occurred for this siting? Yes or no?

23   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: No. There was

24 certainly more to it.

25   COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Sorry?

2   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: There was more

3 to it, the community engagement process. And you just

4 walked in as I was answering Council Member… (CROSS-

5 TALK)

6   COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Emailed the

7 community board, and you emailed my office, and that

8 was the extent of your community engagement. Two one-

9 off emails, and no other communication, and no

10 conversations transpired whatsoever about this

11 siting. Is that correct?

12   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: So there's

13 notifications that are sent to every Council Member

14 in who's District (CROSS-TALK)

15   COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Sorry. This is a

16 yes or no question. The extent of the community

17 engagement that you all did for this siting, as an

18 example, just picking this site as an example, was

19 one email to me, and one email to the community

20 board. No other communication, no other conversation,

21 no other community engagement whatsoever. Yes or no?

22   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: No.

23   COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Okay. What else

24 did you do? It was also a letter that's sent out to

25 the Borough President, and I'm not sure if there's a

2   BID in that area, but it was sent out to the Borough

3   President's office, all with an effort to…

4   COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: Okay. So, you

5   sent three emails to us, me, the Borough President,

6   the community board, and that was the extent of the

7   community engagement about the installation of a 30-

8   plus foot tower directly in front of somebody's

9   property. That inherently means that my job is to

10   raise the alarm, flag concerns, and impose, right,

11   and make noise about every potential siting so that

12   people in my community are aware and organized. I

13   don't want to make your life impossible, but if

14   you're not going to talk to the property owners, the

15   people that are most impacted by a siting, then I'm

16   going to have to pursue legislation to impose a much

17   more meaningful community engagement process. I've

18   worked on siting human service facilities and sitings

19   of all kinds of different facilities, infrastructure.

20   Some of it's welcome, some of it's not welcomed when

21   I've worked in the Office of the Mayor, and never

22   have I encountered a process that is so completely

23   inconsiderate and lacking as what you all do. Citi

24   Bike, which is a privately operated entity. DOT talks

25   to every single property owner whenever they're

2 putting a dock into a potential site. Sometimes they

3 listen to what the property owner's concerns are,

4 sometimes they don't, but they talk to them. Why do

5 you not think OTI needs to talk to the property

6 owners that are directly impacted? Why is that not

7 your job?

8   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: We've had

9 extensive engagement with property owners, with

10 concerned residents at community board meetings.

11 Myself, my colleagues, the franchisee have attended

12 countless, Council Member, countless community board

13 meetings, meetings with individual members to talk

14 about specific sites (CROSS-TALK)

15   COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: If the community

16 board or the Council Member sounds an alarm and makes

17 a lot of noise and gets everybody worked up and

18 opposed, so instead of you taking the responsibility

19 to constructively thoughtfully have conversations and

20 engage the stakeholders who are directly impacted,

21 you're saying it's up to the Council Member to scream

22 and shout and cause issues or it won't happen at all.

23   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: In those cases

24 I described, it wasn't a case of anyone screaming and

25 shouting. It was we send a letter, they disseminate

2   it to their constituents, they say, hey, we'd like to

3   have more, we have questions, who can we talk to.

4   They call us up, say, can you come to a community

5   board meeting, and we sit there for hours on

6   weeknights addressing questions.

7   COUNCIL MEMBER RESTLER: I've been to

8   community board meetings. I've served on community

9   boards. I attend every single community board meeting

10 in the Council District I represent every single

11 month. I know what community boards are like. But

12 what I don't understand, like genuinely don't

13 understand, is how a City agency could be so

14 completely inconsiderate and completely lacking in

15 doing any meaningful community engagement around a

16 process unless you're absolutely forced to. That is a

17 failure. So, I am drafting legislation today that is

18 going to make this… that is going to regulate every

19 single step of the community engagement process. We

20 are going to force OTI to, in time-specific ways,

21 talk to every single impacted stakeholder, get every

22 single piece of feedback, jump through every single

23 hoop that you can possibly imagine to make sure that

24 this is done the right way, because you're not

25

2 working with me and my communities, so we're going to

3 force you to. Thank you.

4   GALLERY: (APPLAUSE)

5   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: All right. Thank

6 you, Council Member.

7   I just want to… I know that we have a

8 number of people signed up to testify, and I hope

9 that some of you, all of you, can be here to listen.

10   I just have one kind of off question,

11 which is about wi-fi in parks. Can you share with me

12 if that is part of a franchise agreement?

13   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: So, there is a

14 long-standing, there's a couple of initiatives in the

15 parks. Related to the cable franchise agreement from

16 many, many years ago, there's a limited free wi-fi

17 that's made available by the cable companies at

18 certain parks. I think it's like 120 parks around the

19 city. So you get three free 10-minute sessions, I

20 believe, and then you can pay for a day pass if you

21 so choose.

22   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: You said it is

23 part of the franchise agreement?

24   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: It's, I

25 believe, a side letter to the cable franchise

2   agreement from like 2010 or something. It goes back a

3   ways. So, I don't know if it's in the core of the

4   franchise agreement, but it was a commitment made by

5   the cable companies to provide parks wi-fi. That's in

6   addition to…

7   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: From 2010, you

8   think?

9   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: I'd have to

10   look back at the… it's been a minute.

11   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Okay.

12   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: And that's in

13   addition to a separate agreement that the Parks

14   Department has with AT and T. It's in the form of a

15   gift agreement to provide wi-fi service.

16   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: That's the gift

17   agreement with AT and T. Okay. So that's a question

18   for Parks.

19   Okay. I want to thank you all for your

20   time. I hope that we can have further discussions on

21   all the bills, particularly the Internet Master Plan.

22   It sounds based on kind of what you shared here

23   today, what I know, what I've read from the Digital

24   Road Map, there are so many elements that you all

25   have thoughtfully put together that I think were

2   included. There could have been an opportunity to run

3   parallel to the Internet Master Plan. And the

4   intention and the reason that it has the support and

5   the reason that the bill has even been endorsed by,

6   outside of my Colleagues, but just stakeholders that

7   you already work with, is because it provided a

8   vision and longevity that outlived administrations,

9   egos, visions, all of that. And I think I understand

10   that there is this assessment from the agency about

11   the realities of the need for infrastructure, but

12   what we are trying to achieve is guaranteed to the

13   best of our ability connectivity, devices, internet

14   for every single New Yorker. Obviously, you know

15   this. This is a necessity. And I'm hearing from more

16   and more people about how they are making the

17   difficult decision of not paying for internet,

18   letting their phone contracts lapse because the cost

19   of food is so high, the cost of public health care,

20   of child care is so expensive, and I think it's an

21   opportunity for New York City to shine because those

22   are what our values are. So, to say that there is an

23   absolute abandonment of an Internet Master Plan, but

24   then run this Roadmap that in many ways highlights a

25   lot of what was in there, I think is disingenuous.

2   And I hope that we can work together to really create

3   something that has longevity beyond an

4   administration, beyond a mayor, beyond a Council

5   Member, because that is really what we deserve.

6   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SyKOFF: No. Thank you

7   for that, Council Member. I would just sum up by

8   saying our goals are certainly aligned. Everything

9   you just described is very much at the forefront of

10   what we're trying to do, not only with Big Apple

11   Connect, but with all the initiatives. I don't want

12   to minimize the impact that the Roadmap has already

13   and will continue to have at ultimately bridging the

14   digital divide. It addresses everything you talked

15   about in terms of access to devices and affordable

16   access to the internet, digital literacy training,

17   digital education. All those things are addressed,

18   but there's certainly more that… (CROSS-TALK)

19   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: And those are all

20   things that were in the Internet Master Plan.

21   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Some elements

22   which I addressed are…

23   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: I'm just trying to

24   distinguish what is real and what is like ego of this

25   Mayor to say, this is my thing, I don't want to hear

2   anything from the previous Administration, and he can

3   do whatever he wants, any Mayor can do whatever they

4   want, but there is value in that plan. There is value

5   in the hours spent that every single stakeholder and

6   expert put into that plan is what I'm saying.

7   EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR SYKOFF: Yeah. We agree

8   that there are certain elements of it that should and

9   is being considered, and you see it in the… as you

10   acknowledge, you see it in the Roadmap, so we do look

11   forward to sitting down with you and seeing if

12   there's ways that we can help accentuate some of the

13   already existing initiatives and maybe come up with

14   some new stuff going forward.

15   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: I thank you all

16   for being with us. Thank you.

17   We are going to take a quick two-minute

18   bathroom break before I'm switching over to public

19   testimony. Thank you all so much.

20   Okay. Thank you. I now open the hearing

21   for public testimony. I remind members of the public

22   that this is a formal government proceeding and that

23   decorum shall be reserved at all times. As such,

24   members of the public shall remain silent at all

25   times.

2   The witness table is reserved for people

3 who wish to testify. No video recording or

4 photography is allowed from the witness table.

5 Further, members of the public may not present audio

6 or video recordings as testimony but may submit

7 transcripts of such recordings to the Sergeant-at-

8 Arms for inclusion in the hearing record.

9   If you wish to speak at today's hearing,

10 please fill out an appearance card with the Sergeant-

11 at-Arms and wait to be recognized. When recognized,

12 you will have two and a half minutes to speak on

13 today's hearing topics, broadband access or related

14 legislation, Intro. 198, 481, 483, 486, 878, and

15 1122.

16   If you have a written statement or

17 additional written testimony you wish to submit for

18 the record, please provide a copy of that testimony

19 to the Sergeant-at-Arms. You can also email written

20 testimony to testimony@council.nyc.gov within 72

21 hours of this hearing. Audio and video recordings,

22 once again, will not be accepted.

23   Our first panel, we have Professor

24 Michael Santorelli, Andrew Rasiej, and I apologize,

25   ANDREW RASIEJ: Rasiej.

2   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Rasiej? I

3 apologize. Ash Wolfson and Alex Spyropoulos. And I

4 apologize for the mispronunciation.

5   Anybody can start, whichever. Andrew, do

6 you want to start? Okay, yes, go for it.

7   ANDREW RASIEJ: Councilwoman, it's a

8 pleasure to be here. Thank you for inviting me. Very

9 important hearing on a very, very important topic. My

10 name is Andrew Rasiej, and I'm the Founder of Civic

11 Hall, the city's and the country's largest digital

12 skills training center focused on providing

13 underestimated populations with the skills they need

14 to compete for jobs in New York's growing technology

15 ecosystem. I'm also the founder of mouse.org, which

16 began wiring New York City public schools to the

17 internet all the way back in 1997 at a time when even

18 if a single teacher in a school had an AOL account,

19 Vice President Al Gore would have considered that

20 school wired to the internet. Suffice to say,

21 bridging the digital divide has been my life's work.

22 A quality education, safe and secure housing, and

23 access to essential infrastructure are pillars that

24 lift up marginalized communities, and today broadband

25 access must be recognized as essential

2 infrastructure. Thanks to years of both public and

3 private investment, virtually every New Yorker now

4 lives in an area where reliable broadband service is

5 available. But availability alone isn't enough. The

6 real challenges we face are adoption, ensuring

7 seniors and low-income families have the digital

8 skills they need, and making sure every household has

9 a computer or tablet to actually access the internet.

10 Irrespective of some of the criticisms today, we have

11 made some important strides with programs like Big

12 Apple Connect, which are providing free internet to

13 more than 300,000 New York City Housing Authority

14 residents, and that number continues to grow. Big

15 Apple Connect shows what's possible when the City

16 works hand-in-hand with existing providers to deliver

17 fast, affordable service, leveraging infrastructure

18 that's already in place. Another important tool is

19 the State's requirement that broadband providers

20 offer a 15-dollar-a-month service to low-income

21 families who qualify through programs like SNAP,

22 Medicaid, and National School Lunch Program. Many New

23 Yorkers are eligible today. The challenge is getting

24 the word out and helping them enroll. As we move

25 forward, we must be careful about investing in

2 duplicative infrastructure in ways that make sense,

3 but also thoughtful about the ways some of those

4 resources could be directed towards bridging other

5 parts of the digital divide, including funding

6 digital skills training and providing devices so that

7 all New Yorkers can fully participate in the

8 opportunities of broadband access. The good news is

9 broadband is more affordable and more accessible than

10 ever before. Now is the time to finish what we've

11 begun with broadband and moving on to ensure that

12 every New Yorker can use it effectively and

13 meaningfully to participate in the digital economy of

14 our city. (TIMER CHIME) Thank you for your time.

15   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you. You

16 want to go next?

17   ASH WOLFSON: Council Member, thank you

18 for holding this. My name is Ash Wolfson. I'm a

19 volunteer installer and outreach leader with NYC

20 MESH. Since our founding 10 years ago, we have served

21 as an affordable and accessible option for thousands

22 of New Yorkers who don't have any other option. I can

23 testify personally that I've installed internet for

24 people who have never had home internet before, and

25 for those families, internet means access to jobs,

2 training, public resources, education, and community.

3 Internet is a necessity, and we wouldn't tolerate

4 these disparities in other essential services. Yet

5 the City has not made sufficient investments to reach

6 many families across New York City. It is clear that

7 the major internet service providers have no

8 intention of correcting this despite having the

9 resources to do so. We are a small team working on a

10 shoestring budget, and despite that, we've been able

11 to connect thousands of New Yorkers. Every dollar we

12 receive goes right back into the community, and we

13 provide a number of public benefits, including

14 providing hotspots in public spaces and rooftops

15 across New York City. Our volunteers are extremely

16 dedicated, showing up to spend their evenings and

17 weekends installing internet for people. We also work

18 with many communities, educating them on the use of

19 their technology. I can testify that we are

20 overwhelmed by the need for digital literacy

21 programs, especially among non-English-speaking

22 populations, and it's really a struggle to empower

23 people to use the technology available to them when

24 they don't even know how to work with it. We are

25 eager to work with City government to improve our

2   ability to reach these families and make affordable

3   and accessible internet available to all families.

4   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you. We're

5   going to reset the time, and then, you want to go

6   next?

7   MICHAEL SANTORELLI: Good afternoon. My

8   name is Michael Santorelli. I am the Director of the

9   Advanced Communications Law and Policy Institute at

10   New York Law School right up the street, a program

11   that focuses on all things broadband here in New York

12   City, at the State level, and across the country. I'm

13   going to make many of the same points that Andrew

14   made, but in a different way. Getting back to the

15   Internet Master Plan, that is a supply-side solution

16   to a demand-side problem. You can't build your way

17   out of broadband adoption issues. The data shows that

18   the Internet Master Plan is even more unnecessary now

19   than when it was released in 2020. We do know

20   broadband availability in New York City and where

21   there's no service is 99.98 percent availability

22   across the city. The State has released new data on

23   that, and it shows where the 740 or so unserved and

24   underserved locations are across the city. That's

25   great progress. That should be celebrated. At the

2 same time, broadband adoption rates in recent years

3 have increased, according to the Census Bureau, but

4 they've plateaued over the last few years, even with

5 widespread subsidies available, making it free or

6 very low cost to get online. Respectfully, these

7 discussions need to focus on what the data are

8 telling us, and that more attention is needed to

9 focus on convincing the digital holdouts to get

10 online, the final 10 or 25 percent that are not

11 online, because the conditions for broadband adoption

12 seem pretty ideal with universal availability and the

13 wide availability of subsidies and low cost or free

14 options. Just making cheap or free broadband

15 available is not enough, and we've seen that. There's

16 significant data showing that these subsidies move

17 the adoption needle only so much. To bring the rest

18 of the unconnected households online, more needs to

19 be done at the very hyper-local level to show why

20 broadband is relevant to digital holdouts and why

21 they need to take the necessary steps to get a

22 computer, sign up for a subscription, and, if needed,

23 get a subsidy to help pay for it. This is very hard

24 work, very resource-intensive work, but fortunately,

25 New York City is home to many organizations,

2 including Civic Hall and others, that have great

3 experience in doing this and have shown results in

4 doing this, and so, respectfully, the City is best

5 positioned to lift those organizations up with more

6 funding and assistance to help scale them out, and to

7 the extent that more planning is needed, there's more

8 thinking and strategizing needed to figure out how

9 the City can strategize (TIMER CHIME) and come up

10 with a plan for harnessing all the great work that's

11 happening and spreading it out across all the

12 boroughs. Thank you.

13   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you.

14   ALEX SPYROPOULOS: Madam Chair and Members

15 of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to

16 testify today. My name is Alex Spyropoulos, and I'm

17 the Director of Government Relations at TechNYC, an

18 organization representing more than 550 technology

19 companies. Our membership includes hundreds of

20 innovative startups, as well as some of the largest

21 tech companies in the world. We are committed to

22 ensuring that the tech sector remains a leading

23 driver of the city's overall economy, and that all

24 New Yorkers can benefit from innovation. We are here

25 to express our strong support for Intro. 1122, which

2   will require OTI to create and publish a

3   comprehensive plan for achieving universal,

4   affordable, and equitable internet access across New

5   York City. This legislation addresses one of the most

6   critical issues facing our city today, digital

7   equity. In an increasingly connected world, access to

8   the internet is not a luxury, it is a necessity. It

9   affects how residents find jobs, access education,

10   communicate with government services, and participate

11   in civic life. Gaps in broadband access continue to

12   reinforce existing disparities in income, geography,

13   and opportunity. We applaud the legislation's

14   comprehensive and forward-looking framework. By

15   focusing on multi-agency coordination, public-private

16   partnerships, and targeted outreach, this bill sets

17   the stage for a citywide effort to close the digital

18   divide. It recognizes that addressing infrastructure

19   alone is not enough. We must also consider

20   affordability, accessibility, digital literacy, and

21   trust in the system. We also believe that the

22   collaboration this legislation envisions between City

23   government, internet service providers, community-

24   based organizations, and private sector partners can

25   serve as a model for how to tackle large-scale,

2 cross-cutting challenges in an inclusive and

3 equitable way. TechNYC stands ready to be a partner

4 in that effort. Our members are deeply invested in

5 New York City's future. A more connected population

6 helps build stronger workforce pipelines, fosters

7 innovation, and ensures all communities can

8 participate in and benefit from the City's tech-

9 driven economy. This legislation is not just good

10 policy, it is a critical investment in the long-term

11 health and equity of our city. We thank the City

12 Council for continued leadership in advancing digital

13 inclusion and urge the swift passage of 1122. I

14 appreciate the opportunity to testify today and am

15 happy to answer any questions.

16   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you. Thank

17 you, Andrew. I was a student in 1997. Our one tiny

18 computer in the back of my classroom. Thank you for

19 connecting us.

20   ANDREW RASIEJ: Thank you.

21   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: It was a slow

22 process.

23   I had a couple of, just like one or two

24 questions based on your testimony. Ash, thank you for

25 your testimony and for your work with MESH NYC. Have

2 you or any of the other volunteers at MESH reviewed

3 the City, OTI's Digital Roadmap? Anything, I guess

4 from today's hearing and considering that the

5 Administration's response and many of my questions

6 was like, we're doing it and we're trying to do it in

7 the Digital Roadmap, where do you think some of the

8 holes are, potentially, that are not covered by the

9 Digital Roadmap, for example?

10   ASH WOLFSON: I think there's a lot of

11 communities where, you know, there's been a lot of

12 talk about how extensive coverage is, and that's

13 important, but what a lot of this conversation has

14 failed to address is the quality of those

15 connections. In much of the city, even if broadband

16 is technically available, the advertised speeds often

17 don't match the speeds that are available, and there

18 are frequent outages, which, especially if you're

19 someone who is using it for something like education

20 or for your job, that can be a significant burden. I

21 believe that in large parts of the city, there has

22 not really been an effort to address this lack of

23 quality and that the OTI hasn't really presented a

24 plan to reach out to significant parts of the city on

25

2   that basis. They've really only addressed this very

3   binary question.

4   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you so much,

5   Ash.

6   Michael, in your testimony, you said that

7   more effort should be focused on the holdouts, the

8   people that are not necessarily connected, or, yeah,

9   the people that are not connected. In your opinion,

10   do you think that there is something more specific

11   that OTI should be focused on? Some of the things

12   that Mr. Sykoff focused on today in NYCHA, for

13   example, is leaving that outreach to the internet

14   service providers through Big Apple Connect. They're

15   door-knocking. What is something that OTI can be

16   doing, the City should be doing? I asked for data.

17   They don't have it. What are some of the reasons

18   people aren't connected? A lot of it was anecdotal,

19   but in your experience, what do you think we need to

20   be doing? How can we be even more targeted?

21   MICHAEL SANTORELLI: Well, I think as a

22   first step, it's helpful to, like you said, try to

23   figure out why people aren't online, and the best

24   information we have are just general surveys from

25   national surveys that always seem to come back to the

2 same sort of reasons. Affordability has been one, but

3 also tied into that is this notion of relevance or

4 seeing that a connection might not be worth the

5 investment of your resources. Again, if you're trying

6 to weigh that against groceries or an electric bill,

7 then broadband, if you don't view it as something

8 that's essential to your life, then you might cut

9 that off of your budget. But at the same time, there

10 are lots of other nuanced barriers across lots of

11 different communities, and just trying to understand

12 what those are, and they differ from older adults to

13 low-income households, low-income households with

14 children, and it goes on and on. The only way to get

15 that data at a large scale is just to go into the

16 communities, and there are programs that are working

17 at the local level across the city in these

18 communities, trying to get them online. So arguably,

19 the City could be trying to reach out to those groups

20 and engage them and get information from them. Just

21 figuring out what the landscape is of those

22 providers, because again, there's Civic Hall, which

23 is great, but there are so many others across the

24 five boroughs that are doing this at a much smaller

25 scale that arguably need to be recognized and get

2   more resources if they're proving to be successful.

3   So the Roadmap that I read that the Mayor put out

4   seems like a good first step, but it seems like

5   there's a lot more work that could be done to bring

6   it all together into a more ground-up strategy to try

7   to get more people online.

8   ANDREW RASIEJ: Council Member, do you

9   mind if I add to that, answer that question? So for

10   years, we've been focusing on the physical

11   infrastructure and the distribution. I remember when

12   Mike Bloomberg was Mayor, he announced that 97

13   percent of the city was covered by broadband, and

14   that was considered a win, but 40 percent of the

15   city's population couldn't afford it, but he didn't

16   highlight that particular detail. The digital divide

17   is actually now worse than it's ever been, not

18   because of the infrastructure, but because of the

19   ability to use it is not in the hands of the people

20   who need it the most. And now, with the advent of AI,

21   we are now approaching even a larger digital divide,

22   not only between the citizens of New York and this

23   technology, but the institutions that support those

24   citizens also are not able to take advantage of the

25   technology, because the skills that they need to

2   navigate these networks are not easily accessible. So

3   the funding that's focused on infrastructure, and

4   your criticism of OTI or the City's policies are

5   great, but what we really need is a holistic plan

6   that looks at the digital divide holistically, not

7   just as physical infrastructure, whether it's mesh

8   networks or whether it's broadband providers, but

9   rather are we actually training New Yorkers to be

10   able to use the technology at whatever cost or

11   ability or even the quality of the connection. If we

12   don't get people to understand the potential of its

13   use, there's no point in talking about the

14   infrastructure.

15   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you. Thank

16   you all so much. Thank you for your testimony. Thanks

17   for sticking around.

18   Our next panel, Noel Hidalgo, Susan

19   Peters, and Stuart Reid.

20   Anybody want to start? Would you like to

21   go first?

22   NOEL HIDALGO: Great. Ready? Great. Thank

23   you, dear Chair Gutiérrez and fellow Council Members

24   and staff. Beta NYC is a public interest technology

25   non-profit dedicated to helping New Yorkers access

2   information and use technology. I want to preface by

3   saying digital literacy must be viewed as critical

4   infrastructure. We are, for transparency purposes,

5   we're recipients of the State's digital equity

6   technical assistance grant. And since 2008, we have

7   taught a diverse group of people to learn, earn, and

8   grow their networks. We have trained and employed

9   this Committee Staff. We have taught over 50,000 New

10   Yorkers how to use their data and mentor a new

11   generation of civil servants to whom we depend on.

12   Our work has equipped New Yorkers with digital and

13   data literacy tools to hold government accountable.

14   Additionally, I'm a father of a brilliant 33-month-

15   old boy who was born with profound hearing loss and

16   many, many medical complications. We've been

17   dependent on telehealth and virtual therapists since

18   his birth. Twice a week, my wife, son, and I leverage

19   virtual meeting tools to meet with his teacher at

20   Lexington School for the Deaf in Queens. We use the

21   same technology to meet with representatives from the

22   Department of Education and Early Intervention who

23   are scattered across the city. Every day, we use

24   Signing Time, Signing Savvy, PBS Kids, YouTube, and a

25   handful of digital media tools to entertain and learn

2 American Sign Language. At home, I have used every

3 conceivable network connection, cable, DSL, cell

4 phone modems, and it took 10 years for Fios to come

5 to my small Greenpoint apartment. By the way, I'm

6 delighted, but I wish there was more competition.

7 Your Internet Master Plan would ensure bi-

8 directional, high-speed internet connections, fueling

9 my work, my education, and my son's future. About the

10 bills that you proposed today, we have some critical

11 comments, actually more like constructive critiques.

12 I will submit that in written testimony, but just to

13 speak highly is that we love your bill. We love that

14 it has an advisory board. We propose that your bill

15 should be the foundation for helping OTI execute its

16 Digital Equity Roadmap, while ensuring that digital

17 literacy is, once again, written as critical

18 infrastructure. In 17 seconds, the high-level idea is

19 that, really, we need a lot more funding. I think

20 that the previous panel was articulating that very

21 clearly. We have lost all of the federal research

22 funding, the education funding, any (TIMER CHIME)

23 equity funding, and now we're in a situation where we

24 need to ensure that we can baseline our level of work

25 and be invested in as foundationally as we are

2 investing in critical infrastructure. I have many

3 more thoughtful written comments. Thank you.

4   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you. I look

5 forward to reading them. Thank you.

6   SUSAN PETERS: Hi. I'm Susan Peters. I'm a

7 member of New Yorkers 4 Wired Tech, and I'm a

8 consulting party to the National Historic

9 Preservation Act for Manhattan Community Board 7. I

10 am negatively replying to these bills that expand

11 wireless and not wired communication. Our federal

12 regulator, the FCC, acts outside the rule of law. In

13 August 2021, the FCC was told by a federal court to

14 return to court after looking at 11,000 pages of

15 scientific research and testimonies that they

16 ignored. These 11,000 pages showed biological effects

17 from electromagnetic energy below the FCC's 1996

18 guidelines, published in 1996 and never changed. The

19 FCC has ignored the court for four years. This is a

20 flagrant disregard of the rule of law. Every day,

21 more and more evidence is published validating the

22 damage done by wireless. Here is one such study

23 published last month of this year concerning damage

24 being done by cell phones to male fertility. The

25 title, The Effects of Radiofrequency Radiation on

2 Male Reproductive Health. Based on an analysis of 90

3 scientific articles, it highlights the risk of young

4 men keeping cell phones in their trouser pockets for

5 hours every day. You see it on the street all the

6 time. Some of the risks of cell phones being kept in

7 trousers includes disrupting the development of sperm

8 cells, cell oxidation stress damaging sperm DNA,

9 harmful cell inflammatory processes, changes in

10 hormonal levels, decreased sperm mobility and

11 vitality. In sum, don't put your cell phones in your

12 pockets anymore and wire your devices at home. And

13 I'm going to show this. I hope it gets into the

14 record. You see this all the time. (TIMER CHIME)

15 Thank you.

16   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you.

17   SUSAN PETERS: You're welcome.

18   STUART REID: Madam Chair and honored

19 Council Members, thank you for this opportunity to

20 speak about the Internet Master Plan and the City

21 Council's plan for its resurrection. My name is

22 Stuart Reid and I'm the Co-Chair of the Smart

23 Community Initiative, a resident-led not-for-profit

24 organization focused on providing free internet

25 applications and services to public housing

2   communities. First and foremost, I have to thank the

3   many elected officials, organizations and individuals

4   that have made it possible for me to speak with you

5   today on this topic. Council Member Jennifer

6   Gutiérrez has been a tireless and fearless advocate

7   of community-controlled technology initiatives and I

8   thank her and your staff for your dedicated work.

9   Brooklyn Borough President Antonio Reynoso,

10   Congresswoman Nydia Velázquez, NYCHA CEO Eva Trimble,

11   the St. Nick's Alliance, the City College of New

12   York, including President Vince Boudreau, WHCR

13   General Managers Angela Hardin and Keziah Glow, the

14   Internet Society New York Chapter, Diana Blackwell,

15   TA President at Fred Samuel Apartments, Deborah

16   Benders, Resident Council President at Cooper Park

17   Houses, and Nathaniel Green, NYCHA Manhattan North

18   District Chair and TA President at Dyckman Houses.

19   Thank you all for your support. And finally, Ethel

20   Velez, may you rest in peace knowing that your

21   tireless efforts as NYCHA Manhattan North District

22   Chair, James Weldon Johnson TA President and Co-Chair

23   of the Smart Community Initiative were not in vain.

24   As the Council is well aware, the Smart

25   Community Initiative, or TSCI, was among those

2   organizations selected to receive funding from the

3   initial 157 million dollars that the City Council set

4   aside and designated to fund the Internet Master

5   Plan. Here we are some three years after that and the

6   current Administration decided it had a better

7   solution and paused TSCI's community-operated and

8   controlled project. And OTI efforts to bring

9   broadband equity, opportunity equity, or community-

10 led and operated stimulation to our public housing

11 and lower income communities have been underwhelming

12 and financially lugubrious at best. Where is the

13 community opportunity in the current iteration of the

14 City's plan? Certainly, it is not in anything we have

15 seen. The Administration currently pays millions

16 annually to (TIMER CHIME) broadband incumbents,

17 Spectrum Optima. While our group was told by the

18 current Administration that we would be included, we

19 have seen nothing in follow-up to what only can be

20 described as a hollow promise. It is critical that

21 the City Council not abandon its plan to provide

22 significant funding for out-of-the-box innovative

23 solutions and organizations that address the chronic

24 distress in our public housing and other low-income

25 communities. TSCI's Internet Master Plan project…

2   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Stuart, can you

3 wrap up?

4   STUART REID: Does just that and should be

5 unpaused and fully funded.

6   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you. Do you

7 have that written, the testimony? Oh, it's right

8 here. Thank you all so much.

9   STUART REID: Written is a little bit

10 longer.

11   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you all so

12 much for your testimony today.

13   STUART REID: No questions?

14   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: No questions.

15   Next panel, I'd like to call up James

16 Ford, Odette Wilkens, Jose Rodriguez, and Keziah

17 Sullivan.

18   Okay. Do you want to start on this side?

19 Just make sure the light is on. Thank you.

20   JAMES FORD: Hello, hello. Hi, my name is

21 James Ford. Thank you for the time. I guess I would

22 just like to add to the conversation. I've heard

23 people speak about cybersecurity, but I haven't heard

24 people talk about dual-use technology. So for the

25 sake of brevity, I'd just like to refer to Dr. James

2 Giordano. If you're unaware, he has a lecture at West

3 Point, the War College, called The Brain, the

4 Battlefield, and the Future, and Giordano talks about

5 dual-use technologies. And I think it's important to

6 have on the table, at least as a part of the

7 conversation, that a lot of the technologies that are

8 part of this infrastructure have these capabilities.

9 He tells the cadets, he says, you will, now these are

10 the cadets at West Point. This is Dr. James Giordano.

11 He tells the cadets, you will encounter the

12 weaponization of neuroscience in your personal lives

13 and in your careers. They are valuable, viable, and

14 they are in play now. And he also says, know these

15 two acronyms. And I've heard the word access today,

16 which kind of, not that it's good or bad, it just

17 reminded me of the conversation they were having at

18 this lecture. He says, WMD squared, know this

19 acronym, weapons of mass destruction and disruption,

20 and AAA, assess, access, and affect. They're talking

21 about the weaponization of neuroscience. And I'm not

22 suggesting that this is the intent, but I think it's

23 important to have on the table that we should

24 understand that all these technologies have these

25 capabilities, and that, in fact, some of them have

2   been invented with the intent to have these

3   capabilities so I think it's… I guess what I'm here

4   to share is I think it's an important thing to put on

5   the table for any kind of conversation regarding this

6   type of infrastructure. Thank you.

7   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you.

8   Whichever order.

9   Can you just turn on your mic, please, so

10 we can hear it? The red light should be on.

11   ODETTE WILKENS: Thank you very much. I am

12 Odette Wilkens, President and General Counsel of

13 Wired Broadband Inc., a non-profit advocating for

14 safe telecommunications, and am part of the New York

15 City Alliance for Safe Technology. I am also a

16 technology transactional attorney, and recently

17 served on the Federal Communications Commission's

18 Communications Equity and Diversity Council along

19 with Chair Gutiérrez. We at Wired Broadband are

20 keenly interested in digital equity and inclusion,

21 but the bills do not adequately address these issues,

22 neither does the Master Plan. The bills say nothing

23 of how to make internet affordable, how to identify

24 where the access gaps are, or how to safely deploy

25 telecom infrastructure that preserves the health of

2 the communities. It also leads to the discretion of

3 unelected administrators at OTI, who work in

4 partnership with the telecom industry, but not in

5 partnership with the communities. I have witnessed

6 OTI's participation at community boards, and OTI's

7 track record has been abysmal, with a complete

8 disregard for community input on the irresponsible

9 deployment of wireless telecom infrastructure,

10 especially the 5G towers, in our communities,

11 threatening our health, especially our children and

12 property values. What OTI has not told this Committee

13 is that 16 community boards, representing 25 percent

14 of New York City residents, over 2 million people,

15 oppose the 5G cell towers in their Districts. It is

16 in writing, it has been sent to the Mayor, it has

17 been sent to OTI. They want wired broadband. The

18 message is clear. They don't want the 5G towers, and

19 they don't need them. Residents also don't want the

20 pole-top antennas or pods or utility poles outside

21 their windows, or rooftop antennas directly above

22 their apartments. I know of the stories that people

23 have suffered from this. Studies have shown that

24 children are more susceptible to wireless's adverse

25 biological effects, including cancer. The World

2 Health Organization just published a review, citing

3 wireless' high cancer risk. 5G has never been tested

4 for safety. No federal agency is testing wireless for

5 safety. 5G is likely to exacerbate the digital

6 divide, according to the U.S. Government

7 Accountability Office. New York City should have a

8 cohesive and sustainable plan, not patchwork. New

9 York City should have municipal broadband, where it

10 owns the telecom (TIMER CHIME) infrastructure, and

11 then leases it out to providers. May I conclude?

12   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Yes, please. Thank

13 you.

14   ODETTE WILKENS: Thank you. That means

15 connecting everyone with fiber, for which Verizon got

16 ratepayer subsidies to do, but didn't. That will

17 provide affordable broadband now and in the future.

18 That would provide what Intro. 486 seeks to achieve,

19 providing internet to students and families.

20 Chattanooga, Tennessee, is a model with 600 square

21 miles of fiber connected to every home, business, and

22 school. It has the fastest Internet in the United

23 States, offering symmetrical one gigabit download and

24 upload speeds at affordable prices, and one of the

25 fastest in the world.

2   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Odette, can you

3 conclude, please?

4   ODETTE WILKENS: Yes. Just one more. With

5 their windfall of profits, they are providing free

6 internet to every household that has a school-aged

7 child. That is, I think, what the bill is trying to

8 do.

9   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you. Thank

10 you for the reference. We have your testimony. I'll

11 take a look at it.

12   The next panelist, please.

13   KEZIAH SULLIVAN: Good afternoon, Council

14 Member Gutiérrez, Staff, and fellow New Yorkers. My

15 name is Keziah Sullivan-Norman, also known as Keziah

16 Glow, and I serve as Interim General Manager at WHCR

17 90.3 FM, Harlem Community Radio. It is an honor to

18 appear before you today to share an important

19 initiative that strengthens our City's emergency

20 communications infrastructure and ensures that every

21 voice, especially those most vulnerable, are heard.

22 WHCR 90.3 FM is a community radio station housed on

23 the campus of City College, CCNY, one of the

24 country's leading public research and engineering

25 institutions. Our station has long embodied CCNY's

spirit of innovation, public service, and commitment

to uplifting underserved communities. In that spirit,

shortly following Superstorm Sandy in 2012, we

collaborated with local community organizations,

technologists, including Digital Divide Partners to

form the WHCR Emergency Broadcast Team, which

developed precisely to respond to the clear need for

localized, reliable communications during crisis. The

urgency of this work is personal for us. During

Hurricane Sandy, one of WHCR's veteran engineers

experienced the collapse of normal communications

systems firsthand. From far Rockaway, he heard

heartbreaking calls for help over the radio. He

described it being like a war zone, but the enemy was

the weather. During the critical window, even the

police precincts, the National Guard's posts were

overwhelmed. This story is not an outlier, it is a

warning. WEBT's response has been to train local

residents in emergency communications and protocols,

including emergency preparedness and mitigation

preparedness, and to collaborate with others to

create innovative ways to communicate with our

communities before, during, and after emergencies and

disaster events. For the past 10 years, WEBT has

2 presented the Harlem Emergency Preparedness Day event

3 at City College, a forum that brings together

4 emergency preparedness professionals, community

5 organizations active in disasters, co-eds, and

6 community residents for demonstrations,

7 presentations, and discussions around emergency

8 preparedness, mitigation, and recovery, working in

9 collaboration with the SMART Community Initiative,

10 that would be (TIMER CHIME) TSCI, and their Streaming

11 University Project. May I please finish?

12   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Yes, please wrap

13 up. Thank you.

14   KEZIAH SULLIVAN: Thank you. WEBT has

15 developed a 24/7 streaming platform for community

16 content, integrated with radio and emergency alerts,

17 training programs for the public, and real-time

18 emergency response systems. WEBT empowers residents

19 not just to consume information, but to control the

20 emergency platforms and restoring connectivity to

21 communities. It is our heart. We are trying to bring

22 WEBT. We are proud of what we created, and we ask for

23 the Master Plan to be reinstated.

24

25

2   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you. I know

3   you were trying to speed. I have your written

4   testimony here. Thank you so much for testifying.

5   The last panelist. Just make sure the

6   light is on.

7   JOSE LUIS RODRIGUEZ: Good afternoon.

8   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Is it on? Can you

9   just touch the button? Thank you. How are you?

10   JOSE LUIS RODRIGUEZ: Good afternoon,

11   Chair Gutiérrez and Members of the Committee. My name

12   is Jose Luis Rodriguez, and I serve as Executive

13   Director of the Caribbean Preparedness and Response,

14   Inc., CPR. CPR is a not-for-profit organization

15   dedicated to resilience and digital participation for

16   Caribbean and Latino communities, both here in New

17   York City and across the broader region, including

18   other parts of the state. Puerto Rico, Connecticut,

19   and Pennsylvania are also parts that we service.

20   Since our inception, responding to emergencies, what

21   a coincidence, in the Caribbean, our mission has

22   focused on the role of communications and

23   connectivity in disaster preparedness and recovery

24   involving diaspora communities. Today, we're leading

25   efforts to expand access to broadband in under-

2   resourced communities through satellite-based

3   solutions, digital navigation programs, digital

4   community centers, youth-centered digital learning

5   initiatives, and workforce development, among others,

6   with the goal of continuing operating and growing as

7   a not-for-profit internet provider for our

8   communities. We believe that any legislative effort

9   to bolster access to broadband is not only noble but

10 essential. These bills reflect a shared understanding

11 that connectivity is a lifeline for education,

12 employment, health, and civic participation. We

13 support these bills. However, I want to raise an

14 important gap. The City's digital equity framework

15 does not reference the State's Digital Equity Plan,

16 nor does the current Internet Master Plan

17 meaningfully integrate digital equity as a guiding

18 principle. We urge the Council to ensure future

19 versions for both plans center this concept more

20 explicitly and coordinate across all levels of

21 government.

22   Finally, with regard to Intro. 1122, we

23 believe this bill is critical. A comprehensive and

24 regularly updated broadband expansion plan, including

25 the use of alternative technologies as defined by the

2   State, such as unlicensed (TIMER CHIME) fixed-

3   wireless, low-Earth-orbit, LEO, satellite services,

4   paired with an advisory board, it is exactly the kind

5   of strategic infrastructure we need. CPR will be

6   honored to support this effort in any capacity that

7   might be helpful. Additionally, the City should

8   include provisions to incentivize and support

9   alternative interstate providers like CPR…

10   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Please wrap up.

11   JOSE LUIS RODRIGUEZ: As part of the

12   broadband expansion. Thank you.

13   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you all so

14   much. I do have some questions, but I think maybe

15   we'll, if it's okay if I can, we have your contact

16   information. I know, Odette, I just want to touch

17   base with you, and I want to touch base with you,

18   just because we do have another hearing. I thank you

19   for your testimony, and I'll email with questions.

20   Thank you, and thank you so much for testifying and

21   sticking around.

22   Our last in-person panel, I'd like to

23   call up, I believe this is Julie Martin, Otalora, and

24   Sharon Brown.

25

2   Hi, how are you? Thank you. You all can

3   start. Whoever can start can go ahead. Just make sure

4   the button is on. It's a red light.

5   BERNARD OTALORA: Good afternoon. My name

6   is Bernard Otalora. I come here to talk about the 5G

7   tower that is already installed on Juno Street in

8   front of public, I mean an historic elementary

9   school, PS144, and I want to say what I don't like

10   about it. Wait, I wrote it last night, but excuse my

11   English.

12   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: That's okay. This

13   is your testimony that you're submitting though,

14   right?

15   BERNARD OTALORA: And then you can ask me

16   questions, and I will give you my point of view.

17   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: You got it.

18   BERNARD OTALORA: The argument that the

19   community needs this tower because there is a gap in

20   service is baseless. People do not need free internet

21   access. They never asked for it. PS144 does not have

22   any need for it. They are fully equipped also.

23   Contrary to what was said, there was no tall

24   building, because this was an argument of theirs,

25   that there was a tall building with more people on

2   the street. Who is this tower going to help? And I

3   ask the birds. Nothing else. It's flat. The site of

4   the tower does not take into account the risk young

5   children of PS144 will be exposed to daily. I want to

6   stress that there is a sidewalk, and after the

7   sidewalk there is a distance from me to you, and this

8   is a playground for the kindergartners who go there

9   every day to breathe a bit of fresh air, and they

10   will be under the umbrella of electromagnetic waves

11   year-round, and this is not good. Since it is also a

12   charging station, it will attract people who do not

13   belong around an elementary school. A school should

14   be a place kept free of any bad influences. The

15   company that is behind this 5G tower is not going to

16   tell you about the health risks they cause, cancer to

17   cite only one, and this is documented, but when this

18   (TIMER CHIME) company talks about past studies, we

19   have more recent studies that say that this is really

20   a health hazard. The reason why I am so vocal about

21   that, all of my life I helped children build their

22   own health. (INAUDIBLE) I taught physical education

23   all of my life.

24   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you. We need

25   to wrap up.

2   BERNARD OTALORA: Okay. I know I need to

3 wrap up but I don't have a stopwatch.

4   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: We have your

5 written testimony, sir.

6   BERNARD OTALORA: Okay.

7   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: I'm sorry. We need

8 to move on. Thank you.

9   BERNARD OTALORA: Would you want a 5G

10 tower to be installed by your children's school? I

11 doubt it. No one in our community needs this tower.

12 Children do not need it. The tower must go.

13   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you.

14   BERNARD OTALORA: Okay.

15   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you.

16   JULIE MARTIN: Thank you for this

17 opportunity to speak today. My name is Julie Martin.

18 I'm a lifelong New Yorker and have been volunteering

19 for the grassroots group called New Yorkers 4 Wired

20 Tech. As the name implies, we believe wired

21 technology is superior to wireless for health,

22 privacy, and for speed so I'm appreciative that these

23 bills are trying to diversify New Yorkers' options

24 and focusing in on cable franchises as well. But

25 there is a major asset that has fallen into the

2 memory hole. In the 2000s in New York, it was Verizon

3 which took up the task of transforming our copper

4 phone lines to fiber optic. They obtained many

5 concessions and the ability to charge extra fees on

6 their regular phone customers for years in order to

7 do so. And yet what we ended up with is a partially

8 built out system, which basically became the backhaul

9 for their private cell phone services. I need to

10 thank Bruce Kushnick and the Irregulators, a group of

11 technology and consumer advocates, for shining a

12 light on this period of history. I will admit I was

13 attached to my old copper landline. It was the only

14 thing that worked during 9/11 and during Sandy while

15 everyone else was huddling around wi-fi hotspots. But

16 I was one of the lucky ones who got fiber to the

17 premises. Especially lucky as I had heard from other

18 New Yorkers that they were being forced to go

19 directly to wireless so this is where the true

20 digital inequity lies. Those neighborhoods that did

21 not get fiber to the premises but only to the corners

22 are the ones that are not getting proper service

23 today. And so if we could focus on having that last

24 mile to the premises finished, then I think a lot

25 would be accomplished. If Verizon cannot do it or

2   will not do it, then let a smaller local company

3   finish the job. I think this is one of the most

4   important and meaningful tasks before our tech

5   officials today. And there is still that question of

6   the infrastructure that Verizon did build out. Since

7   it was built with Title II public utility status,

8   does it not belong to the public? I hope that these

9   bills, especially 1122, can get to the bottom of

10   that. Thank you.

11   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you, Julie.

12   Our last panelist, Sharon.

13   SHARON BROWN: Hello, my name is Sharon

14   Brown. Before I begin, remember Israel, release the

15   hostages, let Yahweh's people go, defend Israel.

16   Okay. We need the internet access for all

17   New Yorkers on cell phones, in homes. People use it

18   for searching for housing, filling out applications,

19   going to school online, working jobs online. That

20   takes up a considerable amount of time so they need

21   to connect with the community, attend hearings such

22   as this via the internet. And some people need

23   unlimited internet access for some of these things.

24   There should be covered internet kiosks or rain-

25   resistant, weather-resistant kiosks throughout the

2   city that people can use when their devices, the

3   batteries die, so that they can use internet, they

4   can make calls if there's some kind of emergency. We

5   need public phones back with internet and charging

6   stations and kiosks everywhere so people won't be

7   stranded. We need to make sure that the internet is

8   available for everyone, students, people taking

9   tests, people applying for college, different things

10   like that. The children really need the internet. We

11   need to make sure that it's safe for the children,

12   but they do need the internet. And also, phones

13   should not be taken away from children in school

14   because of all of the sensitive things that occur at

15   school, shootings, different things like that. They

16   need to have access to their phone and the internet

17   when they are in class. When there are things,

18   they're being bullied or any kind of thing is going

19   on in school, they need access to their phone and

20   internet. It should be something where all students

21   should have access to the internet on their phone so

22   that if something occurs in school, they can reach

23   their parents, the police, or someone that they can

24   trust. Thank you.

25

2   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you all so

3 much. Thank you for this panel. Thank you for

4 waiting.

5   We're now going to move on to the virtual

6 panel. Did we miss anybody?

7   BERNARD OTALORA: (INAUDIBLE)

8   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Sir, I'm so sorry.

9 I'm talking about new panelists. You already

10 testified. Thank you.

11   Okay. We're going to move on to the Zoom

12 panel. First panel is Clayton Banks, Joseph Dumanov,

13 Stanley Chan, and Stephanie Robinson.

14   CLAYTON BANKS: Hi, can I go first? This

15 is Clayton Banks.

16   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Yes, you can

17 start.

18   CLAYTON BANKS: Well, first of all, good

19 afternoon. Good afternoon, Chair Gutiérrez and

20 distinguished Members of the Committee on Technology.

21 I got to say hi to Holden and Irene. My name is

22 Clayton Banks, and I am the CEO of Silicon Harlem, a

23 community-driven company dedicated to advancing

24 digital equity and broadband access for all. I'm here

25 in strong support, strong support for the Bill 1122

2   and the package of all the bills that are aimed at

3   closing the digital divide and expanding broadband

4   access to every home in New York City. I want to

5   express my deepest thanks to Council Member Gutiérrez

6   for her leadership on this critical issue and her

7   commitment to ensuring that no New Yorker is left

8   behind in this digital age. Too many New Yorkers

9   still do not have access to reliable, affordable

10   internet. This digital divide has held our community

11   back, and we must change that. Intro. 1122 is a

12   pivotal step forward in this fight. This bill would

13   task developing a comprehensive plan to expand

14   broadband access to all homes in the city. One of the

15   most crucial aspects of this bill is the creation of

16   an Internet Advisory Board, which will involve key

17   stakeholders from diverse sectors, including

18   technology experts, community organizations, and

19   residents. This Advisory Board will play a vital role

20   in refining the broadband expansion plan and ensuring

21   that it meets the needs of every community. We cannot

22   have a one-size-fits-all solution. The challenges

23   faced by communities require targeted solutions that

24   prioritize the needs of the residents who have been

25   historically underserved.

2   In conclusion, I want to reiterate that

3   broadband access is not just about providing

4   internet, it's about providing opportunity. It's

5   about ensuring that every New Yorker, regardless of

6   where they live or where their income is, has equal

7   access to the opportunities of the digital age. Thank

8   you for your time, for your leadership, and certainly

9   I look forward to working with all of you to make

10 this vision a reality and to create a more connected,

11 equitable New York City. Thank you.

12   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you so much,

13 Clayton. Good to see you.

14   Joseph?

15   SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

16   JOSEPH DUMANOV: Hello, yes. The video is

17 turned off here. Can you turn the video on?

18   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Joseph, we're

19 having difficulty hearing you.

20   JOSEPH DUMANOV: Okay. Can you hear me

21 now?

22   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Yes, barely, but

23 yes, we can hear you. You can get started.

24   JOSEPH DUMANOV: Okay, let me just give

25 you a little bit of my background. I'm an IBEW

2 Electronics and Communications Engineer. I got my

3 licensing from IBEW 1430 out of Larchmont back in the

4 70s. I went to RCA Institute and Sarnoff Laboratories

5 to work on communications and electronic systems.

6 That was early on in my career. I had a long

7 extensive career in technology, and 25 years ago,

8 because of a cancer in my family, I got into the

9 field of medical mycology. I did eight years of

10 medical schooling nationally and internationally

11 (INAUDIBLE)

12   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Joseph, I'm sorry,

13 can you just speak a little bit louder?

14   JOSEPH DUMANOV: Anyway, I got into the

15 field of clinical molecular biology, which is about

16 causation. Everything is about causation, and here's

17 a big challenge that everybody has. We're reading

18 things on the internet that are out of context,

19 they're being misinterpreted, and the research is not

20 fully integrated for their claims. I'm going to share

21 one other thing with you. I'm a Peer Review Associate

22 Editor with Elsevier. I've reviewed about over 200

23 manuscripts pre-publication in oncology, toxicology,

24 immunology. Everything works on a molecular level,

25 and what you're seeing is the studies that you're

2   reading and the reports of these building bio people

3   that just showed up overnight. They actually imitated

4   my work about 15 years ago or so. I look at these

5   papers, and I say to myself, they're not showing you

6   any real mechanisms of causation. I know what the

7   mechanisms of causation are. About 18 years ago, I

8   started doing clinical environmental studies for EMF,

9   EMR, RF. What does that mean? My studies are based

10   upon the clinical indicators that my clients and

11   patients are discussing. They're talking to me.

12   They're feeling this. They're feeling that. I have

13   seen many, many cancers. I've seen malformed births.

14   I understand exactly how this works. I have a paper

15   that's almost done that's going to be quite

16   revolutionary. The point I want to make is there's a

17   lot of unnecessary fear. (TIMER CHIME)

18   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Joseph, I'm sorry.

19   Can you wrap up? Your time is up. Can you wrap up?

20   Your time's up.

21   JOSEPH DUMANOV: The point is it's not as

22   serious as it looks. It's on a case-by-case basis. I

23   hate to see all this alarmist, and people need to

24   really understand that there's much more to it.

25

2   Whenever you read anything, look at who are those

3   people, what are their medical…

4   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you. Thank

5   you. Can you please submit your testimony via email

6   if you haven't done so already? That way, we can read

7   it.

8   JOSEPH DUMANOV: I'd be glad to email, you

9   know, contribute to your efforts. It's very…

10   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you. Thank

11   you, Joseph. I'm sorry.

12   JOSEPH DUMANOV: (INAUDIBLE)

13   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you so much.

14   Our next panelist, Stanley Chan, followed by

15   Stephanie Robinson, please.

16   SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Starting time.

17   STANLEY CHAN: Good morning. Can you hear

18   me?

19   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Yes.

20   STANLEY CHAN: Okay, great. I want to say

21   thank you to the Committee for having a chance to see

22   and learn more about the mission to address digital

23   equity. I think it's an important mission, and I

24   agree with it. My name is Stanley Chan. I'm a

25   community member, a homeowner, and most importantly a

2   father in Forest Hills, Queens. The reason why I'm

3   here is I want to speak about the same tower that

4   went up on Juno Street, right outside of PS144. Can I

5   share my screen because I have a photo, just to

6   illustrate my point. Is that okay?

7   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: I don't think that

8   we can share screens. I don't think we can.

9   STANLEY CHAN: Okay, so essentially this

10   tower, it went up last Thursday, and there was

11   feedback from the community, and most people are

12   deeply unhappy about it. We feel as if OTI did not

13   take our input into consideration. If the mission is

14   to serve digital equity, Forest Hills is lucky to be

15   an affluent community, and I don't believe that it's

16   a place where this tower is best placed. If there's

17   only 200 of them, I feel like it's better placed

18   somewhere else. People are unhappy when it's placed

19   outside of their homes. This is a school with 830

20   children. There's 830 families. Some of them as young

21   as three years of age, and we don't know what the

22   health effects of 5G are. I can't say that I do, but

23   it's not something that we know conclusively. So even

24   if it were to be placed maybe 200 feet down a block,

25   that'd be a better location, because this is a place

2 where it's right outside the main entrance of the

3 school. There's hundreds of kids which walk past.

4 It's actually a place where buses will drop kids off,

5 and I don't understand how OTI made the choice to

6 place the tower in this particular place. I don't

7 think it serves the community. We're not a place that

8 is suffering from digital equity, and it literally is

9 just physically in a place that is obstructing

10 students and parents who are walking past the school,

11 not to mention health concerns. So how does OTI do

12 this? I think the Council Member that spoke from

13 Brooklyn earlier perfectly captures how we feel about

14 this tower. We feel as if there was no chance for the

15 community to give feedback on this tower being placed

16 there, and is there any way we can maybe even move it

17 down a block or somewhere else where it can be needed

18 more? That's what I wanted to say, and I thank you

19 for having the chance to express myself.

20   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you,

21 Stanley. Thank you so much.

22   Our next panelist is Stephanie Robinson

23 followed by Tracy Appleton.

24   SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

25

2   STEPHANIE ROBINSON: Hi. I represent

3   Human-I-T, a leading digital equity practitioner

4   focused on expanding access to devices, digital

5   skills training, and affordable broadband access. And

6   I'm here today because I think with the right

7   supportive policies, I believe we can significantly

8   bolster programming and outreach efforts to New

9   Yorkers still stuck on the wrong side of the digital

10 divide. Human-I-T fully supports Intros 198, 481,

11 486, and 1122, because they directly align with our

12 mission to connect low-income New Yorkers to

13 affordable internet devices and digital skills.

14 Essentially, we know that our programs work, right?

15 When we implement them, 83 percent of students see an

16 improvement in academic achievement, 57 percent are

17 now able to access social services, 47 percent are

18 able to better manage their health care and utilize

19 telehealth services, and one-third end up applying

20 for new jobs. And I think with the City backing work

21 like this, we're confident we can scale these

22 positive results across all boroughs. Human-I-T

23 stands ready to participate in the design,

24 development, and rollout of City initiatives related

25 to digital equity. This is a pressing issue in the

2   city, especially as new developments like the rapidly

3   heightening presence of AI in everyday life continue

4   to deepen the existing digital skills gap, but it is

5   a problem we can solve. So, thank you for your

6   attention to the matter. We appreciate it.

7   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you,

8   Stephanie. Thank you so much.

9   Next, we have Tracy Appleton followed by

10   Christopher Leon Johnson, and finally, Jerelyn

11   Rodriguez.

12   SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

13   TRACY APPLETON: Thank you so much to the

14   Committee for your time. Thank you, Chairperson

15   Gutiérrez. My name is Tracy Appleton. I just want to

16   echo what Mr. Chan said. I believe he captured it

17   perfectly about how the community feels. Mr. Restler

18   is my representative, and I really appreciate him

19   speaking out. We live at 54 Norman Avenue. My

20   husband, Ari Hoenig, is here as well. Outside of our

21   window, they've built one of these 5G towers. To be

22   more precise, outside my daughter's window, who's 12

23   going on 13. The tower is supposedly 10 feet away. It

24   sure doesn't look it. It has a sticker on it that

25   says, don't come in within 7 feet of this. That's for

2 people who work at it for an hour, for a few minutes.

3 She lives in that room. I fully believe that if you

4 show these systems to be healthy, or to be okay for

5 people, or there were studies done, I would have no

6 problem. But as was mentioned before, the FCC, these

7 very rules that are being applied now, were up for

8 debate in 2019. There's a case, I read, 9F4893,

9 that's Environmental Health Trust v. FCC. That's the

10 case it was referred to before, where the FCC was

11 told in 2021 to update their rules. They have done

12 nothing in the last four years. Chairwoman Gutiérrez,

13 you started this discussion about how angry you were

14 that you had to wait two or three years for something

15 to change. They haven't done anything in four years.

16 So we have regulations that were based on science 20

17 years ago. They don't know what these towers do. And

18 one of them is right outside my daughter's window.

19 And as Mr. Chan said, if they'd spoken to us, if you

20 look from our corner, you go one corner over, there's

21 a building that is only a first-floor building.

22 There's nothing above it. This tower is right outside

23 my daughter's window, directly outside. I don't think

24 there was any thought to where it was put. I'm not

25 saying let's tear down this whole system. I'm saying

2   let's put these things in places where we're not

3   putting people at risk. I do want everyone to have

4   utilities. I do think that that's important, but it

5   shouldn't be run over people who are innocent and

6   have no chance to defend themselves.

7   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you so much,

8   Tracy. Yes, thank you. I appreciate it.

9   Finally, we have Christopher Leon Johnson

10   followed by Jerelyn Rodriguez, and the final

11   panelist, one name only, Ari.

12   SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

13   CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Hello. My name

14   is Christopher Leon Johnson. I'm on a train. I just

15   got off the train, so I'm walking right now. Thank

16   you for having this hearing. I just got off the

17   train. These trains are horrible. They need to have

18   wi-fi on these. I'm on the 4 train right now. I'm

19   calling for wi-fi everywhere. We need wi-fi on these

20   damn trains, pardon my language, but we need internet

21   access on these trains, man. I'm on the 4 train right

22   now. Hello.

23   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Christopher, we

24   can hear you, but you're shouting.

25

2   CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: We need

3   internet access on these trains, all the trains,

4   because if we had this on these trains, I would not

5   have (INAUDIBLE) this right now. I could just be on a

6   train at the (INAUDIBLE), the 42nd (INAUDIBLE) on the

7   Port of Lexington. And it's funky right now. It's on

8   the train. We need to have this. Like I said,

9   (INAUDIBLE) advocating in support for these bills and

10 these regulations like that, we need this. We need it

11 for the poor. We need it for people like me that are

12 broke. People that are broke, man. Do it for the

13 broke people.

14   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you.

15   CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Do it for the

16 broke people, please.

17   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you.

18   CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: But yeah, we

19 need internet access for all. So yeah, we need

20 internet access for all (INAUDIBLE) We need to make

21 this happen.

22   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you.

23   CHRISTOPHER LEON JOHNSON: Make this

24 happen. Thank you.

25

2   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you,

3   Christopher. Thank you.

4   Next panelist, Jerelyn Rodriguez.

5   SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

6   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Jerelyn.

7   SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

8   JERELYN RODRIGUEZ: Okay, great. I was

9   waiting. Thank you. Good afternoon, Chair Gutiérrez

10 and Members of the Technology Committee. Thank you

11 for the opportunity to testify today. My name is

12 Jerelyn Rodriguez, the CEO and Co-Founder at The

13 Knowledge House. We are a non-profit with proud roots

14 in the South Bronx who deliver tech workforce

15 development programs throughout New York City,

16 Newark, Atlanta, L.A., and Washington, D.C. Our

17 mission is to empower and sustain a talent pipeline

18 of technologists and digital leaders who will uplift

19 their communities. 41 percent of households with

20 incomes below 30K per year don't own a computer. And

21 43 percent are without broadband access. Historic

22 underrepresentation in STEM workforce continues to

23 persist with only 11 percent of Blacks and 9 percent

24 of Hispanic workers in STEM roles, and we work to

25 change that. Having impacted over 2,500 students

2 through fellowships, The Knowledge House is committed

3 to changing the career trajectory of young men and

4 women across New York City and breaking the cycle of

5 poverty by providing high-paying fellowships for

6 students in the tech space. We operate three

7 programs, the Innovation Fellowship, Focus on Job

8 Training in Data Science, Web Development and

9 Cybersecurity, which ends in certification, job

10 placements, and we also offer our high school

11 program, the Karim Kharbouch Fellowship, which trains

12 high school students in foundational coding and

13 design, and we help them explore STEM careers and

14 provide college prep or opportunities for industry-

15 facing internships. And our newest program, Digital

16 Literacy, helps any New Yorker, regardless of their

17 age or background, develop basic digital literacy

18 skills and provide employable tech knowledge, which

19 helps participants understand how to use AI

20 responsibly. Our students have an average of 20K in

21 individual income, which then skyrockets to 76K after

22 taking our program. Affordable Internet connection is

23 a critical piece of our work. We are so grateful to

24 the Council Member Gutiérrez, Won, Holden, Menin,

25 Restler, and Brewer for championing legislation being

heard today to enhance connectivity opportunities for

low-income New Yorkers and ensure there is

transparency around such opportunities. We would

specifically like to uplift the following

legislation, Intro. 1122 and 486, which would provide

a roadmap to equitable internet across New York City

and urge DOE to provide necessary information on low-

cost internet options to families. (TIMER CHIME) This

year, the Knowledge House is requesting…

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Thank you. Your time's

expired.

JERELYN RODRIGUEZ: Funding from the

Speakers…

CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you,

Jerelyn.

JERELYN RODRIGUEZ: Initiative

(INAUDIBLE). Thank you.

CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you so much,

Jerelyn. You can submit your testimony online if

there's a lot left.

Our final panelist, Ari.

SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: You may begin.

ARI HOENIG: Yes, hello. My name is Ari

Hoenig. I'm sorry that I missed the last name there.

2 I am a homeowner in Greenpoint, Brooklyn, and several

3 months ago, without any warning or information, a 5G

4 tower was constructed on the corner right outside of

5 my house. This unit is seven feet from my property

6 line. It's 12 feet from the window of a bedroom, and

7 this is also the bedroom where my daughter sleeps.

8 After it was constructed, I noticed a small yellow

9 sign on the box, which is the unit, and I

10 photographed it and zoomed way in, and I could read

11 this message. This message says, it's a warning sign,

12 a yellow caution sign. It says, keep back seven feet

13 from this antenna, FCC RF, which stands for radio

14 frequency, public exposure limits may be exceeded

15 within this distance. Okay, this is, again, 12 feet

16 from the window. There is no reason why this unit

17 should be so close to residential buildings. I get

18 that everybody in the city needs access to broadband.

19 I get that the City needs revenue and needs to rent

20 out space. But this is a health concern. There are

21 studies that are showing that 3 and 4G do increase

22 risk of cancer, and that children are especially

23 susceptible to that. There are no studies or no

24 accurate studies with 5G. We can't rely on that. We

25 are essentially the test here, and I don't want to be

2   the test, and I don't want my kids to be the test. We

3   already had very, very good coverage with broadband

4   and also 4G in this neighborhood before this tower.

5   It was excellent. It's a quite affluent neighborhood,

6   in fact. It's not needed in this area. It's needed

7   somewhere else, and it shouldn't be so close. And I

8   just want to end this to be able to show the panel

9   here, the view from my window so that you can

10   actually see it for yourselves. That's the tower, and

11   this is the box.

12   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: We see it. Thank

13   you.

14   ARI HOENIG: Okay. Thank you very much for

15   your time.

16   CHAIRPERSON GUTIÉRREZ: Thank you, Ari.

17   Thank you for testifying. Thank you so much.

18   Okay. If we have inadvertently missed

19   anyone who has registered to testify today and has

20   yet to have been called, please use the Zoom hand

21   function, and you'll be called in that order that

22   your hand was raised.

23   Okay. No hands. I want to thank everyone

24   for your testimonies today.

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2   The hearing is now adjourned. Thank you.

3   [GAVEL]

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the

foregoing transcript is a true and accurate

record of the proceedings. We further certify that

there is no relation to any of the parties to

this action by blood or marriage, and that there

is interest in the outcome of this matter.

Date _____ June 23, 2025 _____