

**DEPARTMENT OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY AND TELECOMMUNICATIONS TESTIMONY  
BEFORE THE CITY COUNCIL COMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY  
OVERSIGHT ON PARKS WIFI AND INTRO. NO. 428 / FIVE-YEAR PLAN TO EXPAND WIFI IN CITY PARKS  
MONDAY, NOVEMBER 2, 2015**

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Good afternoon Chair Vacca and members of the City Council's Technology Committee. I am Stanley Shor, Assistant Commissioner for Franchise Administration at the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications, or DoITT. I am pleased to join the Department of Parks and Recreation today to testify on the topic of parks WiFi, and Intro. No. 428, which would require issuance of a five-year plan to expand WiFi access in City parks.

~~Mayor de Blasio – and prior to that, Public Advocate de Blasio – has long been a vocal~~ proponent of increased access to broadband as a means of attaining greater equality and inclusion for all New Yorkers. In one of his first major technology addresses as mayor, during Internet Week in May 2014, he echoed this theme:

***“The goal is quite simple – we must have universal, affordable, high-speed internet access throughout this city...It's essential for everything we need to do to be a fair and just city, because we can't continue to have a digital divide that holds back so many of our citizens.”***

The de Blasio Administration committed to delivering upon this vision last April in *One New York: The Plan for a Strong and Just City*. To close New York City's digital divide once and for all, OneNYC sets forth a goal that **every resident and business will have access to affordable, reliable, high-speed broadband service everywhere by 2025**. To that end, the Mayor has committed to a \$70 million investment in broadband infrastructure over the coming years; he has also announced a \$10 million program to bring free, high-speed broadband service to more than 16,000 New Yorkers in five public housing developments in Queens, Brooklyn, and the Bronx. The Administration's goal of broadband, everywhere, by 2025 also encompasses City parks as contemplated in Intro. 428. As we work to develop a plan for ubiquitous broadband coverage, parks and public spaces will figure within the larger framework of a coordinated, equitable citywide rollout.

Working closely with Counsel to the Mayor Maya Wiley and her staff, and partners across the city, DoITT works daily toward the goal of universal broadband through a host of initiatives. These range from promoting competition in the residential and commercial broadband markets; to investing in networks for free or low-cost, high-speed residential access for low-income communities; to successful citywide implementation of the LinkNYC network, which will replace payphones with free, high-speed WiFi access points in neighborhoods across the five boroughs.

The vision for a more digitally-inclusive New York City espoused by the top levels of this Administration is indicative of the priority that Mayor de Blasio and his leadership team have made the expansion of affordable broadband access, and empowers DoITT to continue its multi-year efforts in this regard – primarily through our role in administering the City's telecommunications franchises. The expansion of WiFi in parks and public spaces is a prominent part of these efforts and one on which we have made substantial progress to date.

The vast reliance on mobile devices by many New Yorkers – indeed, by many Americans generally – makes availability of WiFi in the city's public spaces an increasing necessity. According to a recent Pew Research Center study on the country's smartphone use,<sup>1</sup> nearly two-thirds of Americans (64 percent) own a smartphone – up from 35 percent just four years earlier – and for many of these users, mobile devices serve as a main means of access to the digital world. Furthermore, the study revealed that 10 percent of Americans own a smartphone but do not have any other means of broadband access aside from their phone's data plan.

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<sup>1</sup> *“U.S. Smartphone Use in 2015,”* Pew Research Center: Internet, Science & Tech, April 1, 2015

The study further revealed that certain groups are smartphone-dependent at even higher levels – 13 percent of Americans in households earning less than \$30,000 annually (against just 1% of those earning more than \$75,000); as well as 12 percent of African Americans and 13 percent of Latinos (as compared to just 4 percent of whites).

It was in anticipation of this continuous upward trend that DoITT negotiated for the implementation of WiFi in dozens of City parks as a condition of cable television franchise renewal agreements with Time Warner Cable and Cablevision in 2011. Pursuant to these agreements, the companies were to invest \$10 million to install and maintain public WiFi in approximately 32 parks across all five boroughs through 2020. Four years on, as these companies complete their build and additional partners (which I will describe below) continue to roll out service in additional parks, that number has expanded substantially. Today there are approximately 200 sites in 116 parks equipped for WiFi across all five boroughs, with service currently projected to extend to 125 parks overall.

Including parks WiFi as part of the City's cable franchise renewals placed the responsibility of designing, building, installing, and maintaining these networks with entities with proven track records of doing so – both in New York City and across the country. And it did so at no taxpayer cost, without granting Cablevision or Time Warner Cable exclusivity to any section of any park, or any group of parks.

The WiFi service in these parks is free at all times to Cablevision's Optimum Online and Time Warner Cable broadband subscribers. Non-subscribers can connect for three free, 10-minute sessions per month and, beyond that, at anytime for 99 cents per day. The Parks Department worked closely with DoITT and the franchisees to identify the chosen parks based upon a number of factors, including use potential, viability of buildout, siting of trees and facilities, and access to infrastructure for backend connectivity.

This approach allowed the City to identify and direct installation in parks in communities that have been traditionally underserved – not just in the most-visited or popular parks. Prior to the cable franchise agreements, New Yorkers and visitors had WiFi access in more than a dozen parks and public spaces, including Times Square, Union Square, Bryant Park, and City Hall Park. The availability of WiFi in these spaces was made possible by partnerships with nonprofit and private sector sponsors, including Business Improvement Districts (BIDs) and, while available to all, these services were predominantly in the most heavily-trafficked parks. Incorporating WiFi provision into our cable franchise agreements allowed the City to build on these previous efforts while affecting more direct allocation of resources to new areas.

In addition to BID- and cable-provided WiFi, AT&T also announced in 2011 that it would install free WiFi in City parks as part of a five-year initiative. That network now spans 27 locations in 21 parks across the city, and I will shortly be turning it over to my colleague, Robert Garafola, Deputy Commissioner for Management and Budget at the Parks Department, to describe that and other programs in more detail.

Thank you for the opportunity to discuss the City's efforts on parks WiFi implementation as part of the de Blasio Administration's commitment to affordable, reliable, high-speed broadband service everywhere over the next decade. We look forward to continuing our work with the Council and partners citywide to deliver upon this promise.

I will now turn it over to the Parks Department for further remarks, after which we would both be pleased to answer any questions you may have.

Thank you.



Hearing before the New York City Council Committee on Parks & Recreation  
Int 428-2015- Int. No. 428 - In relation to requiring the issuance of a five year plan to  
expand Wi-Fi access in city parks  
November 2, 2015

Testimony By: Robert Garafola, Deputy Commissioner for Management and Budget,  
New York City Parks and Recreation

Good afternoon, Chairman Vacca and members of the Technology Committee. I am Robert Garafola, the Deputy Commissioner for Management and Budget for the New York City Department of Parks and Recreation. Joining me on this panel are Stanley Shor, Assistant Commissioner for Franchise Administration at the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications and Matt Drury, Director of Government Relations. Thank you for inviting me to testify today regarding Intro 428, which amends Chapter One of Title 18 of the administrative code of the city of New York.

To begin, I would like to say a few words about my role at NYC Parks. As the Deputy Commissioner for Management, Budget and Public Programs, I oversee a number of our Agency's divisions. A few of them include our IT and Telecommunications units who are responsible for the efficient deployment and maintenance of our Agency's electronic infrastructure. I also oversee our Recreation and Public Programs Division which house our 32 Computer Resource Centers. These Computer Resource Centers provide free digital learning resources for recreation center members of all ages and aim to increase community technology resources by providing internet access and technology education in New York City communities. In addition, my office oversees the Wi-Fi in the Parks deployment in collaboration with NYC DoITT.

Countless New Yorkers and visitors have come to depend on wireless devices to manage many aspects of their lives. The result has been an increase in dependence on wireless fidelity – or “Wi-Fi” – hotspots throughout the City. Since 2011, we have been engaged in a series of Wi-Fi deployment efforts - one with AT&T, and the other with Time Warner Cable (TWC) and Cablevision (CV) through their Franchise Commitment negotiated by NYC DoITT. We also have WiFi coverage at several parks provided through partner organizations, such as the Downtown Brooklyn Partnership and the Bryant Park Corporation. Between both these city projects and external partners, we expect to provide Wi-Fi coverage at close to 200 locations within NYC Parks throughout the city.

In June 2011, the City and AT&T announced a five-year agreement to provide free Wi-Fi service at 27 locations in 21 New York City parks across the five boroughs, and park visitors are currently enjoying free Wi-Fi access at those locations. We're pleased to provide a great amenity at these parks, and appreciate AT&T's partnership in this effort.

Also in the summer of 2011, DoITT announced a range of public benefits associated with renewal of the City's cable television franchise contracts with Time Warner Cable and Cablevision Systems, worth approximately \$60 million. One of these benefits was a \$10 million investment in parks and public spaces across the five boroughs for Wi-Fi service. The project began in February 2012 with the initial formulation and surveying of potential sites, and we announced the completion of

Phase I of the project in 2013, with 32 sites covered between both cable providers across the five boroughs. Since the initial launch, Cablevision has recently fulfilled its commitment to establish Wi-Fi by deploying 222 access points across 58 sites within 34 parks. We soon expect completion of Time Warner's commitment, totaling 408 access points across 103 sites in 65 parks by early 2016. The service is completely free to Cablevision and Time Warner Cable broadband subscribers. Any non-subscriber is able to enjoy three ten-minute Wi-Fi sessions per month for free, or access the service for an entire day for 99 cents.

To select the most appropriate park location for Wi-Fi coverage, NYC Parks and DoITT worked closely with local elected officials, community leaders, and the cable providers to identify potential sites for deployment. And then, we developed a target list of sites based on a number of factors, including usage potential, viability of construction, siting of trees and facilities, and access to infrastructure for backend connectivity. The sites selected throughout all five boroughs serve a diversity of park users, both geographically and economically. Utilizing the funding from the franchise agreements with Cablevision and Time Warner, the city has been able to target park sites that would not otherwise be provided for by BIDs or public/private partnerships.

The availability of public Wi-Fi in our parks has been well utilized citywide. In fact, in calendar year 2014, parks users made over 8 million connections to networks implemented through the Wi-Fi in the Parks project.

Further, Cablevision and Time Warner agree to provide free video service in the vicinity of 28 NYC Parks' facilities that have been designated as Emergency Evacuation Sites - 25 Recreation Centers and 3 Borough Headquarters where people may gather in the event of an emergency. The free video service provided by the companies is separate from their Wi-Fi commitment, but since the companies had already installed infrastructure at these sites, the cost to also install Wi-Fi service at these locations was minimal.

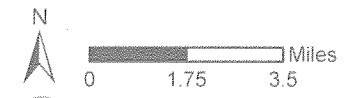
As my colleagues at DoITT have helpfully outlined, the administration is committed to increasing access to affordable, reliable, high-speed broadband service at public spaces throughout the city, including parks. As access to the Internet becomes an increasingly important element of our daily lives, a comprehensive citywide strategy that looks at all of the city's public spaces will be the best way to build on the initiatives that we have outlined for you today in order to fulfill the Mayor's goal of closing the digital divide by 2025. We look forward to continuing to work with the City Council on this topic.

Thank you for the opportunity to testify before you this afternoon. My colleagues and I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

# NYC Parks WiFi Initiative

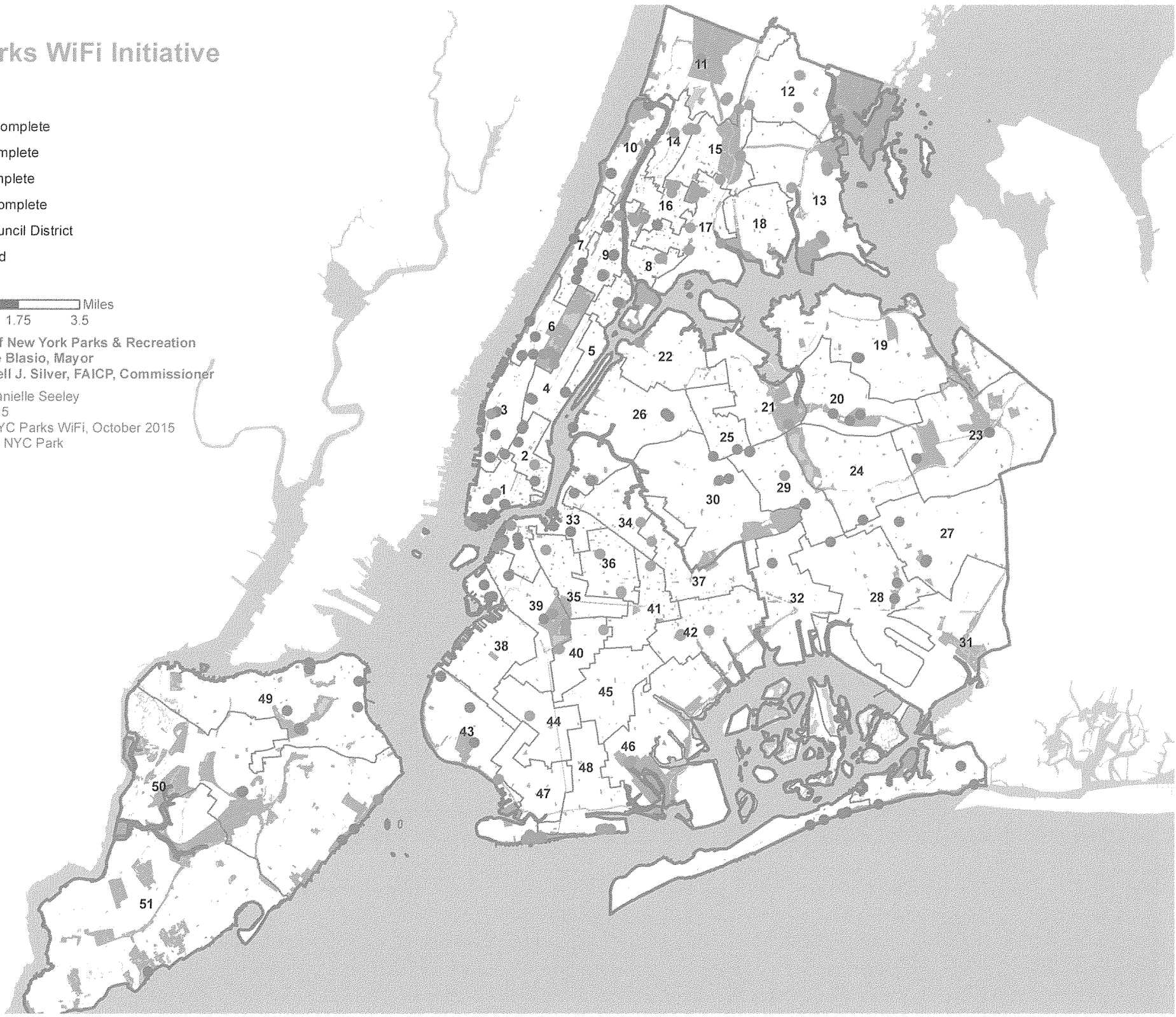
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City of New York Parks & Recreation  
Bill de Blasio, Mayor  
Mitchell J. Silver, FAICP, Commissioner

Prepared by: Danielle Seeley  
October 29, 2015  
Data Source: NYC Parks WiFi, October 2015  
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