

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the

COMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY

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February 24, 2014  
Start: 01:45 p.m.  
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HELD AT: 250 Broadway - Committee Rm,  
14th Fl.

B E F O R E:  
JAMES VACCA  
Chairperson

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

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

[gavel]

CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Good afternoon

everyone. I welcome you today. My name is James Vacca and I'm Chair of the Committee on Technology. Today is February 24<sup>th</sup> and we're having our oversight hearing and a hearing on legislation and I thank you all for coming and I apologize for the delay in starting the meeting. I want to welcome you to the first meeting of this committee during this session and my first hearing as Committee Chair. I'm looking very forward to working with everyone; my colleagues, and others in the public on technology related issues that concern our city. It's a new experience for me I want you to know so I'll be learning a great deal. But I'll be learning from people throughout our city who have input and I welcome it. I begin my tenor as Chairman with Intro 34, a bill that I'm sponsoring which would require that all Community Board full meeting, full board meeting be webcast. And we will hear to, also hear testimony concerning the implementation of Local Law 103 of 2013 which requires that all public meetings be webcast. Having been a District Manager of a Community Board for 26 years prior to

1 joining the council, I can tell you I'm  
2 particularly in tune with the needs of Community  
3 Boards across the city. When I first became a DM  
4 technology to broadcast full board meetings wasn't  
5 even a thought, it didn't exist. Today with the  
6 prevalence of simpler and less expensive hardware  
7 in addition to high-speed internet to support it  
8 webcasting is evermore present in government. As  
9 many of you know webcasting is the distribution of  
10 video and audio via the internet to any personal  
11 computer or video capable device connected to the  
12 internet. There are many advantages associated  
13 with, with webcasting of Community Board meetings.  
14 First webcasting increases public access to  
15 government by allowing persons who cannot otherwise  
16 attend a community board meeting to stay informed  
17 about the board's activities. Also on-demand video  
18 allows people to have complete access to these  
19 meetings according to their own schedules and at no  
20 cost. Webcasting and archival video permits people  
21 who are interested in these meetings but who do not  
22 wish to actively participate to save time and  
23 money. Finally webcasting enhances New York City's  
24 image as open, accessible, transparent, and  
25

1  
2 accountable. I understand that this webcasting  
3 requirement may appear burdensome on Community  
4 Boards. I understand that there are logistical  
5 issues and budget issues. Believe me, I'm not  
6 looking to implement legislation that cannot be  
7 implemented. And I will say that over and over  
8 again today because I know others who want to  
9 testify are not here yet, so I will reiterate that.  
10 I'm only looking to bring this level of government,  
11 the Community Board level of government is the  
12 little City Hall nearest to the people of our  
13 community. I'm only looking to bring that level of  
14 government nearest to the public into the public's  
15 living room. How do we do that, the logistics of  
16 it, the financial considerations, those are things  
17 we can work on after we have our hearing today  
18 where we get your input before the bill is passed  
19 if it is passed. You know we have an open meetings  
20 law in New York State. It requires all state  
21 agencies and public authorities subject to the open  
22 meetings law to webcast their meetings and the New  
23 York City Council has been webcasting their  
24 meetings for several years. I'm being webcast right  
25 now. So if I say it I can't deny it. I still may

1  
2 say it though by the way. All covered entities are  
3 required to webcast their meetings before March  
4 1<sup>st</sup>, 2014. And we're going to hear from the  
5 Administration how we are implementing that right  
6 now the law requires all public agencies but the  
7 Community Boards are not included. So the  
8 Administration will be testifying today on where  
9 are we in meeting the March 1<sup>st</sup> deadline for  
10 webcasting of all agencies separate from the  
11 Community Boards. And then we will also have  
12 testimony on my legislation which seeks to include  
13 the Community Boards. Okay, without further being  
14 said I want to introduce my fellow Committee  
15 Member, my colleague from the Bronx, Annabel Palma  
16 who is with us and I thank her. I'm sure more  
17 Committee Members will arrive. This is a very busy  
18 day for the City Council that I'm sure you've  
19 noticed. We have several committees meeting all  
20 over the place, that's why I, again I apologize for  
21 the lines downstairs and the security demands that  
22 we've implemented, did require that lines be  
23 instituted based on all the hearings we have today.  
24 Okay, so why don't we lead off, our first panelist  
25 is Jeff Merritt, Senior Advisor to the Mayor and he

1  
2 will give us the Administration position and give  
3 us input from the Administration. Mr. Merritt.

4 JEFF MERRITT: There we go. Good  
5 afternoon Councilman Vacca, Council Member Palma,  
6 all the guests here today. I'm pleased to be here  
7 for the first of these committee meetings and I'm  
8 looking forward to working more together with the  
9 council in the weeks and months ahead. My name's  
10 Jeff Merritt. I'm a Senior Advisor at the Office of  
11 Mayor Bill de Blasio. On behalf of the  
12 Administration I'm pleased to testify regarding the  
13 implementation of both Local Law 103 of 2013 and  
14 also regarding Introductory 28 of 2014. As you're  
15 aware Local Law 103 of 2013 was signed into law on  
16 December 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2013 and it requires that public  
17 meetings and hearings held by city agencies,  
18 commissions, and task forces, forces are digitally  
19 recorded and webcast live where practical beginning  
20 March 1<sup>st</sup>. In the event that these meetings cannot  
21 be webcast the recording would be made available on  
22 the internet within 72 hours of the meeting taking  
23 place. Now this is a significant undertaking but  
24 it's clearly an, very important one. At present the  
25 city of New York is involved in the work of more

1  
2 than 200 boards and commissions. According to  
3 preliminary research that we have less than five  
4 percent of these boards and commissions currently  
5 webcast their meetings. Now we have a lot of work  
6 ahead of us to make the city more transparent and  
7 accessible and I'm confident that our city agencies  
8 are up for this challenge. In recent years the  
9 Mayor's office of media and entertainment and the  
10 Department for Information Technology and  
11 Telecommunications has worked hand in hand with the  
12 City Council to bring live broadcast and streaming  
13 capabilities to the City Council Chambers and the  
14 City Council's 250 Broadway Committee Rooms like we  
15 sit in today. The City of New York now has the  
16 largest municipal, is the largest municipality to  
17 carry live legislative hearings and the city has  
18 also made these proceedings available on the air of  
19 the city's government television network NYC Gov.  
20 Now these accomplishments are the result of  
21 significant planning, investments, and  
22 infrastructure, and strategic use of personnel. The  
23 investments being made for the City Council are now  
24 being considered at many public meetings and  
25 commission hearings as the city undertakes us on



1 these meetings on a daily basis. The Mayor's office  
2 is currently working with the law department to  
3 determine which public meetings pursuant to article  
4 seven of the public officers law will fall under  
5 the guidelines set forth in Local Law 103 of 2013.  
6 As we work with city agencies, boards, and  
7 commissions to implement this law there's a number  
8 of challenges that we're currently working through  
9 to carry out this major public policy initiative.  
10 First, equipment may vary significantly based on  
11 the set up and capabilities of each meeting  
12 location. Regardless of the hearing or meeting that  
13 is to be covered basic technical needs must be  
14 established including but not limited to a  
15 dedicated broadband connection, and encoding  
16 device, a hosting platform, and a storage solution.  
17 In addition the city is reviewing the equipment  
18 investment that must be made for each city agency  
19 to ensure high quality digital recordings that can  
20 be useful to all New Yorkers. Lastly, in order to  
21 make this service easily accessible for New Yorkers  
22 it's important that the city develop a centralized  
23 and use, user friendly web portal for these  
24 webcasts. Now Introductory number 28 of 2014 is

1  
2 being considered before the committee today and  
3 would require that each Community Board in New York  
4 City webcast their meetings live where practicable  
5 and that the recordings be archived and made  
6 available to the public within three days. The  
7 Administration shares the goals of the City Council  
8 in ensuring that the meetings of the city's  
9 Community Boards are fully accessible to the  
10 public. As the Administration works with agencies  
11 to implement Local Law 103 we'll review the ability  
12 of the city to provide assistance to community  
13 boards to carry out this legislation. At the  
14 outside, outset we do see challenges in being able  
15 to fully implement and carry out this legislation.  
16 For example nearly all of the city's Community  
17 Borodes[phonetic], excuse me, Boards, hold their  
18 monthly meetings in the evenings. If these are  
19 events to be webcast by a city agency this would  
20 require a significant investment both in equipment  
21 and personnel to travel to each of these community  
22 districts after business hours to record the  
23 meetings. The Administration proposes that DoITT,  
24 MOME, and the Mayor's Office of Operations conduct  
25 a study that will enable us to make realistic

1  
2 assessment of the needs and costs associated with  
3 making Community Board hearings more accessible to  
4 the public in the coming weeks as the city begins  
5 to implement Local Law 103. We look forward to  
6 updating you Chairman Vacca and members of the  
7 Council on the progress and we are committed to  
8 ensuring that New York remains a national lead,  
9 national leader and making sure the business of the  
10 city is accessible to all New Yorkers.

11 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: I thank you for your  
12 testimony and you did allude to some of the  
13 challenges that we faced but I appreciate the  
14 Mayor's office being open to working on a, a plan  
15 to see what has to be done and how we can do it. I  
16 do know that there would probably be a financial  
17 commitment incurred and I'd be willing to advocate  
18 for that money to be allocated to the boards should  
19 that be needed to, to have this type of webcasting  
20 take place. Let me ask you some questions.

21 JEFF MERRITT: Sure.

22 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Can you explain how,  
23 how the cameras and hardware would be brought to a  
24 meeting. Are these, is this equipment portable or  
25 can you explain how that would work say if a

1  
2 Community Board wanted to be, have, wanted to have  
3 a meeting webcast.

4 JEFF MERRITT: Sure, I think a lot of  
5 these questions will need to be worked out in sort  
6 of the, the weeks and months ahead. There is no one  
7 way to webcast a meeting obviously. We have these  
8 nice, this nice equipment here in the City Council.  
9 I believe the budget on, on this was about 1.5  
10 million dollars in equipment and infrastructure  
11 cost and it cost the city about 500 thousand  
12 dollars a year to operate. Now when we're talking  
13 about boards that are, Community Boards across the  
14 city each of these meeting locations can vary  
15 dramatically in terms of the infrastructure. I  
16 think we want to be looking at all options. Some of  
17 them may be portable and, but in most cases you  
18 know we're going to want to use whatever  
19 infrastructure currently exists at those Community  
20 Board locations. So it is difficult to sort of  
21 outline what would be the best method until we do  
22 that full assessment. And then it, ultimately that  
23 assessment's going to have a major impact on a, on  
24 the cost.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: We, we now have some  
3 city agencies and commissions that are having their  
4 meetings webcast don't we? What agencies are  
5 currently having their meetings webcast?

6 JEFF MERRITT: We do have some. I think  
7 we're going to hear from the Community Finance  
8 Board which is a great example. I was  
9 representative on the Voter Assistance Advisory  
10 Committee and that was one that we would broadcast  
11 those. And I think that what we'll hear is that  
12 there's a lot of you know ways that you can  
13 broadcast these challenges. Even within CFB I can  
14 tell you that often times we would have to make a  
15 last minute change of a room and something like  
16 that can cause a lot of chaos when it comes to  
17 actually hardware that you need to webcast these  
18 meetings. So there's definitely challenges. I think  
19 we want to learn from the best practices of the  
20 agencies, boards, and commissions that have already  
21 begun webcasting. We want to take those all in  
22 consideration.

23 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: I did want to go  
24 into the agency that you think would be responsible  
25 to working, for working with the Community Boards.

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2 You did say several agencies would be meeting to  
3 assess it. Where, who would be the lead agency? And  
4 what, are we looking to do it? I know at this point  
5 some agencies don't have commissioners yet so tell  
6 me about... what agency do you think would be the  
7 lead agency and what time table for this group of  
8 agencies coming back are we looking toward?

9           JEFF MERRITT: I do think it's a little  
10 early to tell which agency will be the lead here.  
11 Definitely we know that the DoITT Department of  
12 Information Technology and Telecommunications will  
13 be critical in terms of their technical and issue  
14 expertise here. Also the Department of Media and  
15 Entertainment, MOME, currently webcast a lot of the  
16 large city events. And so we want to make sure that  
17 we're gathering the input. However it is unclear  
18 the extent and also this is going to I think calm  
19 down to issues of cost the extent to which we will  
20 have one agency that would be overseeing a lot of  
21 this versus sort of doing technical assistance and  
22 training and the burden may get spread across  
23 multiple agencies. But it is hard to say.

24           CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Okay, thank you. Any  
25 questions Council Member Palma? Thank you so much.

1  
2 And now I'm going to call upon Gale Brewer,  
3 Manhattan Borough President, former colleague,  
4 although I think she's still a colleague, she's  
5 always here, she's always present. And we have Eric  
6 Friedman, Campaign Finance Board. And we have Elisa  
7 Velazquez representing Queens Borough President  
8 Melinda Katz. Okay, we'll start off with Gale  
9 Brewer okay?

10 BOROUGH PRESIDENT BREWER: Sure. Thank  
11 you very much. I'm honored to be here with, with  
12 your Chairman and with Council Member Palma so  
13 thank you very much...[crosstalk]

14 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: And, and, and we,  
15 and we've been joined by Council Member Greenfield...  
16 [crosstalk]

17 BOROUGH PRESIDENT BREWER: And Council  
18 Member Greenfield. I think you know that I served  
19 for 12 years in the City Council before becoming  
20 Borough President and eight years as chair of this  
21 wonderful committee so it's a particular honor to  
22 be here today. And I was also the prime sponsor of  
23 Local Law 103 of 2013 which was referenced earlier  
24 and which requires that all public meetings be  
25 webcast. And I believe the only other agency that's

1 somewhat similar Taxi and Limousine Commission does  
2 webcast. And in fact just after passing my law then  
3 David Yassky Commissioner called me before I left  
4 the room, texted me and reminded me. So I want to  
5 thank you for this. I want to thank Colin Powell  
6 who's council who worked hard to pass Local Law 103  
7 and I think it, it is exciting that it will require  
8 all public meetings by city agencies, committees,  
9 commissions, or task forces be webcast. It's an  
10 unprecedented level of transparency to municipal  
11 government. As we all know the vast majority of  
12 public meetings take place during the standard work  
13 day when many New Yorkers are working at their  
14 jobs. So by simultaneously webcasting or publicly  
15 posting video of important meetings the New Yorkers  
16 and others will be able to view proceedings after  
17 the fact. This provides an important level of  
18 transparency in oversight and I hope it leads to a  
19 more informed electra[phonetic] which is all of our  
20 goals. Although I believe strongly in the mission  
21 of webcasting all public hearings as we heard  
22 earlier this undertaking is not without its  
23 challenges. And as Borough President I am now  
24 responsible for my own small agency that must  
25



1  
2 webcast its Borough Board hearings. So we've been  
3 grappling with this. There are three facets to the  
4 challenge; one, the video capture of the event,  
5 two, closed captioning of the event which is  
6 required to conform to the ADA, Americans for  
7 Disability Act, and the online video distribution  
8 of the event. So just to give you an example of  
9 some of the challenges because I love specifics. So  
10 obviously you'll capture the event which currently  
11 is done by the amazing staff of the Mayor's Office  
12 of Media and Entertainment known as MOAM. And now  
13 currently you have two choices. Here in the City  
14 Council thanks to the funding that came from the  
15 franchise agreement. Earlier you heard some  
16 numbers. I think 1. something million for capital  
17 and a expense. The capital money came from the Time  
18 Warner agreement of 2011, Time Warner and Cable  
19 Vision and the Verizon agreement of 2008. That's  
20 where the money comes for, for these amazing  
21 facilities here and at City Hall. But currently for  
22 a new entity like the Borough Board or like City  
23 Planning Commission the event would be captured,  
24 would take place if DoITT would be then involved to  
25 transmit. However here at City Hall or here at 250

1  
2 Broadway there's a live stream from here to 34  
3 Street, basically cable. It is not such  
4 availability at, for instance, 1 Center Street  
5 where soon City Planning Commission relocated,  
6 Landmarks Preservation Commission is located there.  
7 So if you're going to do a video so to speak, if  
8 you're going to do webcasting from 1 Center Street  
9 right now there's no path that DoITT can use to be  
10 able to do the webcasting. So it wouldn't be real  
11 time or wouldn't be, it would be after the event.  
12 And that might mean, according to DoITT putting it  
13 on YouTube and not actually on the website. So  
14 these are some of the issues that we're dealing  
15 with and I would be interested to know what the  
16 Taxi and Limousine Commission, and we'll certainly  
17 here from Campaign Finance. Neither our conference  
18 room at 1 Center Street nor the conference room in  
19 the state office building in Harlem were designed  
20 as television studios. So with the fantastic  
21 assistance of the Mayor's Office of Media and  
22 Entertainment we are in the process of identifying  
23 the necessary equipment to successfully capture our  
24 public proceedings. The equipment is not  
25 inexpensive however and I think small agencies are

1  
2 struggling with whether to invest in expensive  
3 technology and they'll certainly need the help of  
4 the Mayor's Office to do that. It's about 20  
5 thousand dollars to purchase the hardware just for  
6 one Borough Board for the entire year but for the  
7 Borough Board. When we started Local Law 103 we  
8 envisioned many small agencies implementing simple  
9 webcasting arrangements where they would have one  
10 camcorder recording a hearing. I think that we know  
11 to date looking at the amazing hardware that's here  
12 that we need something more of a higher quality  
13 with good sound and not every agency has meeting  
14 rooms like this at their disposal which makes  
15 webcasting more difficult. And we all know that  
16 another challenge is archiving. I actually don't  
17 know what the City Council's, and I should,  
18 webcasting archiving protocols are. The state  
19 protocols are four months. Now I don't know that  
20 they keep it longer or they just follow their  
21 protocols. And I don't know what Campaign Finance  
22 Board does but the whole issue of protocol on  
23 archiving is another challenge that we need to  
24 address. So as we move forward with implementation  
25 of this law I would ask that the, the Mayor's

1  
2 Office of Media and Entertainment and DoITT, the  
3 Department of Information Technology, and  
4 Telecommunications serve a more hands on role  
5 working with the various agencies on implementation  
6 as I think they will. I know MOME has the expertise  
7 to assist with webcasting and I believe we are  
8 stretched to the limits. I know they are stretched  
9 to the limits given their staff levels currently.  
10 DoITT has a great staff and I know they're dealing  
11 with their own logistical challenges. As I  
12 indicated earlier we had been told that as an  
13 agency on the city's internet connection as the  
14 Borough President we use Citynet. And we cannot  
15 live stream our hearings over this connection.  
16 Instead we are being asked to procure a private  
17 broadband provider if we want a live feed because  
18 we are at One Center Street. And again the issue of  
19 stressed bandwidth is not your need to do it. But  
20 if New York City wants to continue to be a leader  
21 in the tech sector and municipal transparency  
22 expanding our broadband capabilities, to me, is a  
23 wise investment. And that would mean figuring out  
24 maybe part of the survey where we have meetings and  
25 making sure that we have a connection to that

1 building. So as we enter budget negotiations as  
2 everyone who supports the goal of webcasting  
3 consider increase funding for MOAM and DoITT so we  
4 can make this, this law in compliance. In the end  
5 the benefits of webcasting far outweigh the cost. I  
6 think you know that. But agencies do, do deserve  
7 assistance with a capital investment. And they also  
8 need some initial hand holding to make it happen.  
9 We have spoken at length with the New York State  
10 government who are webcasting in Albany. In fact, I  
11 remember there was a gentleman when they first  
12 started webcasting in Albany he had a little red  
13 wagon. I'm not making this up. And he would pull  
14 his equipment in the red wagon to the meeting. I  
15 met him, he's alive and well, and he lives in like  
16 Saratoga. And he had a red wagon and it, it came to  
17 the meeting and he set it up and then out went the  
18 material on the red wagon. A little red wagon. I  
19 hope that's not true today. But there are  
20 struggling with some of the same issues. They  
21 started a long ago in the state and in particular  
22 smaller meetings in rooms that were not designed  
23 for audio or video recording. However overall it  
24 appears that many state agencies have found ways to  
25

1  
2 webcast. Once initial equipment investments have  
3 been made and at least one dedicated technical  
4 staff were identified there's not a lot of ongoing  
5 support needed. For example in the past two weeks  
6 they have been webcast meeting of the Cemetery  
7 Board, the Public Authorities Control Board, Empire  
8 State Stem Cell Board, the Dormitory Authority. And  
9 I always watch the Hudson Park, Hudson River Park  
10 Advisory Board. I'm an addict to that one. Although  
11 we must recognize the difficulties faced by  
12 agencies in their initial compliance with the  
13 webcasting requirement I think the state's relative  
14 success indicates it's possible to comply. So now I  
15 want to talk about Chairman Vacca's bill. I'll just  
16 close with a brief mention on that bill Intro 28 of  
17 2014. We know that it talks about Community Boards'  
18 full board meetings being webcast and you hear from  
19 still phenomenal District Managers today. I  
20 certainly agree with this and I think that this is  
21 where I would find the challenges. First of all you  
22 should know that Community Board 6 in Manhattan,  
23 thanks to the support of funding from then Council  
24 Member Jessica Lappin does do webcasting. I talked  
25 to the Chair and to the District Manager and it is

1  
2 a last, full board meeting, for instance they could  
3 get audio but not video because of the nature of  
4 the room even though they had the equipment. And  
5 they found that out during the proceedings. So  
6 there are lots of glitches. And I think as the  
7 Community Boards get more sophisticated and most  
8 generally working on that in Manhattan with  
9 technology it will make a big difference. I know  
10 that other boards are working with staff  
11 particularly graduate students, to be able to  
12 figure out how to help them with anything they can  
13 do in terms of webcasting. So I do think that the  
14 Community Boards and you hear have a particular  
15 challenge because of how do you lug the equipment  
16 to the full board meetings which are not  
17 necessarily on sight? And then how do you make sure  
18 that there is not only the full board meetings but  
19 perhaps even some of the more interesting  
20 discussions that take place at the committee  
21 meetings which again require constant vigilance in  
22 terms of support financially and training? So this  
23 is all hopefully something that we're going to get  
24 done in 2014. I certainly look forward to working  
25 with you and I hope this provided some sunlight on

1 the issues that we're all working on together.

2 Thank you very much.

3  
4 ERIC FRIEDMAN: Thank you Chairman Vacca  
5 and, and Council Members Palma and Greenfield. I'm  
6 especially pleased to be sitting on such a  
7 distinguished panel. Borough President Brewer who I  
8 guess I've, I've, I've been with her on, on this  
9 side of... but sitting next to her on, on this issue  
10 she's been a leader on, on this issue for a while  
11 so I'm very pleased to be here. My name is Eric  
12 Friedman. I am Assistant Executive Director for  
13 Public Affairs at the New York City Campaign  
14 Finance Board. My colleagues at the CFB and I thank  
15 you for the opportunity to testify here today about  
16 our experiences webcasting public meetings with the  
17 board. Essential aim of the, of the Campaign  
18 Finance Board is to encourage more New Yorkers to  
19 access the political process. Our work amplifies  
20 the voice of average New Yorkers by making their  
21 small contributions to candidates more meaningful  
22 and offers New Yorkers a window into the political  
23 process by providing a trusted source of  
24 information about candidates, campaigns, and  
25 elections. So disclosure and openness is



1  
2 fundamental to our work. Since our inception we  
3 have sought to apply new technologies to the  
4 mission of greater transparency. We have provided  
5 online access to campaign finance information for  
6 example followed by campaigns long before open data  
7 became a rallying cry for those seeking information  
8 about the workings of government. When it became  
9 clear to us that readily available technology could  
10 help us provide greater access to our meetings,  
11 hearings, and events we moved ahead. Since March of  
12 2011 the CFB has been webcasting public meetings  
13 and hearings of our board of our Voter Assistance  
14 Advisory Committee as Mr. Merritt alluded to and  
15 other events of interest. The demand for the  
16 service became immediately clear. Over the past  
17 three years nearly 3,000 viewers have logged more  
18 than 100,000 minutes watching more than 60 events  
19 over our live stream. The audience is significant  
20 but it is certainly modest as of our, our needs. We  
21 broadcast a standing monthly meeting of our Board  
22 and a limited number of other events spread  
23 throughout the year. Thankfully we found we are  
24 able to meet our needs with a modest investment. To  
25 create the vide we purchased a camcorder and a

1  
2 dedicated computer which we use in conjunction with  
3 a previously existing sound system we've used to  
4 amplify and record our, our board meetings. To  
5 stream and archive the vide we use Livestream, a  
6 service based here in New York City. Both the live,  
7 the video stream, and the archive are embedded on a  
8 dedicated page on our agency website. And we've  
9 uploaded some of these events and videos to our  
10 agency's YouTube page as well. Borough President  
11 Brewer mentioned some of the challenges with an  
12 arrangement like this you know the quality of our  
13 stream is certainly not up to... neither the, the  
14 quality of the equipment nor the quality of the  
15 stream is, is up to the standards set by the City  
16 Council and, and it's streams. But you know since  
17 we are a Non-Mayoral agency we've had the freedom  
18 to go out and find our own solution and we found  
19 one that I think meets our needs pretty well. We  
20 commend the council for Local Law 103 of 2013 which  
21 requires that all public meetings be webcast and  
22 for today's consideration of Intro 28 which would  
23 extend the requirement to Community Boards. They  
24 are many ways for New Yorkers to engage with  
25 government but not nearly enough due. So requiring

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2 agency's commissions, City Council committees and  
3 Community Boards to conduct their business in full  
4 view of anyone with a web browser can and will help  
5 make government more understandable, accessible,  
6 and open. And it's important as you are today to  
7 get a wide range of, of comments and, and sort of  
8 on the challenges ahead. So we hope our experience  
9 can be instructive in this regard and I'm happy to  
10 answer any questions you might have.

11 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Thank you. Yes,  
12 introduce yourself please.

13 ELISA VELAZQUEZ: Hi, my name is Elisa  
14 Velazquez and I am Council to Queens Borough  
15 President Melinda Katz. And Chair Vacca and members  
16 of the Technology Committee I'd like to thank you  
17 for the opportunity to be here this afternoon to  
18 discuss Intro 28 which would amend the City Charter  
19 to require that all the full Community Board  
20 meetings be webcast online. As is been discussed  
21 here by the other members of this panel and by the  
22 Mayor's Office the Community Boards are a vital  
23 part of our government serving as local  
24 representative bodies. There are 59 Community  
25 Boards throughout the City each comprised of up to

1  
2 50 volunteer members. The boards act as independent  
3 city entities addressing the needs of their  
4 respective communities by dealing with things like  
5 land use issues, liquor license approvals, traffic  
6 noise, and other quality of life issues that  
7 concern and impact their particular districts and  
8 constituents. And despite the commitment and hard  
9 work of our Community Boards and Community Board  
10 Members many city residents are unaware of what  
11 they do or might be poorly informed. So, so the  
12 Queens Borough President who is a huge, huge fan of  
13 transparency wholly believe, whole heartedly  
14 believes that webcasting these meetings will  
15 increase public awareness and participation in the  
16 community and most importantly increase  
17 transparency within local government. Despite the  
18 benefits of webcasting there are several, several  
19 logistical and cost issues that must be addressed  
20 and those have been raised here. So just by way of  
21 quickly kind of pointing some of the things out  
22 webcasting obviously requires the equipment to  
23 capture, transmit, and store video. There are  
24 significant initial onetime expenses for equipment  
25 and for training. As Borough, as Borough President

1  
2 Brewer described the Community Board budgets are  
3 very small and many of the boards have not had  
4 technology upgrades or technology improvements for  
5 years. Second as community based organizations  
6 boards particularly in Queens use share to donated  
7 space that do not have the reliable high speed  
8 internet access required for live streaming.  
9 Furthermore many of the Community Boards hosted  
10 monthly meetings in different locations each month  
11 making the issue of streaming more complicated  
12 because they move all over the community. In  
13 addition to meeting internet access there are the  
14 costs associated with hosting and archiving video  
15 footage. So getting the footage but then archiving  
16 it is a whole other kettle of fish. So in order for  
17 there to be full compliance funding will have to be  
18 forthcoming in order to ensure that the basic  
19 infrastructure exists at the community boards to  
20 comply with the requirements of Intro 28. The  
21 Borough President also urges coordination between  
22 the Community Boards, the City Council, the Mayor's  
23 Office, CFB and other agencies that are already  
24 streaming hearings and meetings to share or  
25 leverage whatever technology solutions are already

1  
2 out the are already being utilized so that, so  
3 that, so that indeed the Borough President's Office  
4 on the Borough Board's side and the Community  
5 Boards would be able to take advantage of this. So  
6 kind of is an alternative to funding right. You  
7 know if you're, if you have a way, CFB has a way of  
8 doing something, the City Council has a way of  
9 doing something is there any opportunity to piggy  
10 back on whatever's already, whatever's already  
11 happening to make it easier and ease some of the  
12 economic burden on, on the Community Board,  
13 certainly on our office for the live webcasting of  
14 the Borough Board. So in, in, in closing the  
15 Borough Board the Borough President fully supports  
16 measures that will increase transparency,  
17 oversight, and public participation. However in  
18 order for those measures to be successful the city  
19 must also provide the financial support to achieve  
20 that goal. So we urge the Council to consider this  
21 when considering Intro 28. And thank you very much  
22 for your attention.

23 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Thank you. I have  
24 some questions from Council Members. Council Member  
25 Greenfield and then Council Member Palma.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER GREEFIELD: Thank you,  
3 thank you Mr. Chairman. I want to thank the panel  
4 for your testimony. I especially want to thank Gale  
5 Brewer who for years has been a leader on  
6 transparency and using technology in an effort to  
7 bring transparency to the city and the citizens of  
8 the city. And I want to tell you how grateful I am  
9 for that. And also I want to recognize the work  
10 that the CFB does to try to publish all of the  
11 information as quickly and transparently as  
12 possible. You guys even have a twitter feed where  
13 you're pushing out all the info. And so we're  
14 certainly grateful for that. I just want to, I just  
15 want to note a couple of things. You know today's,  
16 today's schedule is actually a good example of why  
17 we need to broadcast and archive hearings. At this  
18 current moment we have concurrent hearings going on  
19 in the New York City Council. We have this  
20 committee, we have transportation that's still  
21 going on, we have Health that's still going on, and  
22 we have Rules that's has either just started or is  
23 about to start. The reality is that we can't be in  
24 all places at once and I serve on several of those  
25 committees. So I'm going to have to hop in a

1  
2 moment. But by having it online we will have access  
3 and we have that ability and you could actually  
4 watch several of them at the same time online and  
5 you could also access them digitally. I did just  
6 want to mention on your point I think it's a good  
7 point and I'm actually reading the testimony in  
8 advance and I want to give a shout out as well to  
9 one of the Chairs of my Community Board, Alvin Berk  
10 who's a hardworking and conscientious chairman at  
11 Community Board 14 in Brooklyn and he makes many of  
12 the same points that you made which is that there  
13 are certainly financial and technical issues. And I  
14 think the answer to that is that we have to address  
15 them. And certainly we should look at how we could  
16 address those issues. But I only wish... use them as  
17 an excuse for not implementing something. I think  
18 that the City of New York with the resources we  
19 have a 75 billion dollar budget we certainly should  
20 be able to figure out a way how it's done. I hope  
21 it's better than the red cart. I actually remember  
22 that guy pushing the cart as well. So I hope we can  
23 do it better than, than the fellow with the red  
24 cart. But you know I'll tell you I recall that  
25 during the days of Occupy Wall Street where people



1  
2 literally were, were live blogging the activities.  
3 So there must be a way to do it where we should  
4 work with the appropriate offices where if we got  
5 the technology and the money we certainly could get  
6 it done. So Gale I'm kicking this to you  
7 specifically because you're our guru on all things  
8 technological. Do you see a cost efficient way  
9 where we in the city could perhaps maybe even  
10 attach to this legislation add funding and mandate  
11 to a specific office that could perhaps take on  
12 this responsibility so that way we can make it  
13 feasible. We certainly don't want to give our  
14 Community Boards an unfunded or unreasonable  
15 mandate.

16                   BOROUGH PRESIDENT BREWER: Well two  
17 things. Before you came I indicated that Council  
18 Member Lappin when she was in the City Council gave  
19 money to Community Board 6 in Manhattan and they  
20 are doing webcasting. There have been glitches,  
21 hardware glitches but they're doing it. And I've  
22 done it before this fancy equipment. We webcast all  
23 of the technology hearings with the CFB manor which  
24 is a laptop and a camera. So you can do it. The  
25 question, the question would be... to look at as the

1  
2 Mayor's Office indicated when they spoke what would  
3 be the overall Community Board dollar figure for  
4 the low cost and the higher cost. One question I  
5 have is, is there any franchise money left. This is  
6 all franchise money. And I was told nobody seems to  
7 know. So one of the questions would be could that  
8 money be used for the agencies or for the Community  
9 Boards. There may be some capital monies left and  
10 goodness knows what Comcast and Time Warner are  
11 doing. But if they have to come back to the city  
12 boy would I negotiate for money for this enterprise  
13 as well as other things. So I think we have a low  
14 cost and a higher cost option and figure out what's  
15 transferrable and transportable which is different  
16 than CFB where they can be in one location. So  
17 webcasting is not, can be not expensive. You pay  
18 for what you get. I think it's, I've seen the state  
19 hearing take place in different locations. Look at  
20 them. In a sense some of them are similar to  
21 Community Boards because they're all over the  
22 state. So I, I think there's plenty of room for  
23 flexibility in terms of the cost and can easily be  
24 done. Board 6 is doing it.

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: I, I  
3 appreciate that and I, I don't think, I mean the  
4 expense shouldn't be huge right. I mean for a  
5 thousand dollars fair to say probably can get  
6 something up and running.

7 BOROUGH PRESIDENT BREWER: Can pay a  
8 little bit more for higher quality but yes.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Yeah, well  
10 so my only point would be that I think we should  
11 find a way as the Council to actually fund these.  
12 Most of our Community Boards are already pretty  
13 strapped with the work that they do. And they're  
14 certainly working overtime. It doesn't seem like a  
15 massive expense for us to invest and possibly come  
16 up with training as well so that we have the  
17 ability to get that done.

18 ELISA VELAZQUEZ: Again just to  
19 piggyback on that. It, it's important to keep in  
20 mind that this whole notion that a lot of the  
21 Community Boards travel and they go to different  
22 locations. So while it might be, there might be an  
23 inexpensive alternative for a Community Board that  
24 stays put every month. There, there, there, it

1  
2 could be a little different for a Community Board  
3 that travels.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: Yeah.

5 ELISA VELAZQUEZ: So that's, that's  
6 important to keep in mind. And also to, in terms  
7 of, of budgeting and funding, you know the Borough  
8 Presidents Offices, the Community Boards are not  
9 mayoral agencies. So you know depending on how  
10 money is allocated you want to make sure that it  
11 really gets directly to the boards or to the  
12 Borough Presidents Offices so that you know we're  
13 able to do what we need to do with that.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: I think my,  
15 my only, my only point that I want to make here is  
16 I think these are excellent points. I think these  
17 points are all solvable and should be addressed.

18 ELISA VELAZQUEZ: Absolutely.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER GREENFIELD: And I think  
20 in the year 2014 we certainly can figure out how we  
21 can get it done and I certainly agree with you that  
22 the responsibility should be on us rather than on  
23 you and the Community Boards to figure that out  
24 but, but we shouldn't provide you with an unfunded  
25 mandate and we, I'm sure, could try to figure out

1  
2 how we can get you the resources and the funding.  
3 But we should, when we look at it from that  
4 perspective I think it's something that certainly  
5 should be doable. And I have to tell you one final  
6 point which is I think that the work the Community  
7 Boards do by and large are underappreciated. They  
8 do phenomenal work and folks would be very  
9 impressed to see the, the professionalism in the  
10 way the dedication these folks run especially  
11 considering that these are unpaid volunteers. And  
12 so like I said I speak from personal experience  
13 including experience of Chair of Community Board 14  
14 who's here on the work that he does. I know there  
15 are many other members of the Community Board and  
16 Chairs who are here today and I want to thank them  
17 for their service as well. Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Thank you. Council  
19 Member Palma.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: Thank you Mr.  
21 Chair. I also want to recognize the, the good work  
22 Madam Borough President Brewer that you've done on  
23 this issuing and your leadership and for continuing  
24 to collaborate with the City Council to make sure  
25 that we can get this done in, in a way that's not

1  
2 going to be burdensome to, to offices like yours  
3 and, and Community Boards. In your testimony you  
4 raised the issue that, for your borough board  
5 you're looking about 20 thousand dollars in capital  
6 costs. And I'm just curious to know is that to  
7 equip a one specific room or would... what, what  
8 would, what would that 20 thousand dollars entail?

9           BOROUGH PRESIDENT BREWER: It would  
10 equip two rooms. One at 1 Center Street and another  
11 one in Harlem where we have a district office. So  
12 it'll be two rooms and the equipment would be you  
13 know somewhat flexible but you do need cameras that  
14 have this kind of quality to a large extent and you  
15 can see what's here. So that's, that's the, what  
16 is... [crosstalk]

17           COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: And when you say  
18 flexible meaning flexible to that location...  
19 [crosstalk] you... [crosstalk]

20           BOROUGH PRESIDENT BREWER: Or, in, in  
21 some cases it might be able to be moved. I don't  
22 know. Obviously when you have a town hall meeting  
23 you have other... [crosstalk]

24           COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: Right.  
25

1  
2                   BOROUGH PRESIDENT BREWER:

3 ...opportunities for engaging the public. And that's  
4 what we would like to see, something that's  
5 somewhat flexible... [crosstalk]

6                   COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: And..

7                   BOROUGH PRESIDENT BREWER: But one of  
8 the biggest problems is the lack of fiber coming to  
9 1 Center Street.

10                  COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: And then given  
11 the limited resources that you're office faces  
12 right the financial constraints that you're office  
13 faces as well. Has there been an assessment done on  
14 the ongoing cost to maintain like the equipment or..

15                  BOROUGH PRESIDENT BREWER: Yeah, I don't  
16 think there's too much. I think we can handle that  
17 staff wise. It's mostly the upfront cost.

18                  COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: And then...

19                  BOROUGH PRESIDENT BREWER: Since I don't  
20 know how to do it myself. But we can find staff to  
21 run it. That's not the problem. It's just the  
22 upfront cost and then making sure that it's  
23 flexible enough to go elsewhere if we have meetings  
24 that are town halls.

25

1  
2 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: And so you know  
3 in Community Board 6 with the startup money that  
4 Council, former Council Member Lappin gave worth  
5 was the Community Board required to go through any  
6 training..

7 BOROUGH PRESIDENT BREWER: It turns out  
8 the Chair works for an IT company and is totally  
9 comfortable with all technology. I will say that it  
10 is true that if, there is some in the room here to,  
11 some District Managers who are similar or Chairs,  
12 you do need somebody on staff, you need to do  
13 training also but it does help to have a volunteer  
14 member or staff who's knowledgeable. At this point  
15 that's kind of where we're at but training will be  
16 necessary. This is an unusual search, situation.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: But I'm, I'm glad  
18 to see some of the District Managers and Board  
19 Members from, from the Bronx. [crosstalk]

20 BOROUGH PRESIDENT BREWER: Exactly.  
21 Exactly.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER PALMA: I'm looking  
23 forward to hearing their testimony. Thank you so  
24 much for your great testimony.  
25



1  
2                   BOROUGH PRESIDENT BREWER: Thank you  
3 very much.

4                   CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Thank you, want to  
5 thank our panel. Our next panel is Craig Hammerman  
6 Community Board 6 in Brooklyn, Alvin Berk Brooklyn  
7 Community Board 14, Wally Rubin Community Board 5,  
8 Manhattan. Mr. Hammerman would you want to start  
9 please?

10                   CRAIG HAMMERMAN: Thank you. Good  
11 afternoon Mr. Chair and Council Member Palma down  
12 there. My name is Craig Hammerman. I'm the District  
13 Manager for Brooklyn Community Board 6. At its  
14 general meeting on February 12<sup>th</sup>, our board  
15 resolved unanimously to conditionally support City  
16 Council's Intro 28 which would require Community  
17 Boards to webcast their meetings. Our conditions  
18 simply put is that the City Council either provides  
19 us with the resources to pay for this mandate or  
20 find a way for us to get it done. You can't mandate  
21 that the Community Board serve as a planning entity  
22 without giving all of us access to planning  
23 resources. Despite our repeated requests for  
24 assistance over the years with the exception of  
25 trailblazers like former Manhattan Borough

1  
2 President now City Controller Scott Stringer are  
3 pleased of consistently falling on deaf ears. You  
4 can't mandate that the Community Boards disseminate  
5 important information to our communities without  
6 cost of living increases to keep up with postage  
7 and other increased expenses which enable us to  
8 maintain an active internet presence. The value of  
9 the information that agencies entrust us with to  
10 disseminate raises importance over time while our  
11 budgets lag further and further behind. You can't,  
12 you certainly can't mandate that the Community  
13 Boards record and webcast our meetings as Intro 28  
14 would require without providing technical support  
15 and resources. You can change the Charter to  
16 mandate that the Community Boards perform brain  
17 surgery but you'd be setting us up all to fail.  
18 It's unwise and unfair. Personally I would love to  
19 see board meetings webcast, probably more than most  
20 of you. I'm confident that many of my colleagues  
21 feel the same way. I've agonized about it and only  
22 dreamed of it until now. Community Boards deserve  
23 to join the ranks of the rest of government. But if  
24 you're going to legislate this as a mandate that  
25 makes you culpable for getting us there. There's

1 really only two ways we can do this, the hard way  
2 and the smart way. You can cost out the amount it  
3 would take for us to provide this service including  
4 the acquisition of equipment, production, editing,  
5 and storage costs, additional staff, and other  
6 unforeseen incidentals. Incorporating this new  
7 responsibility will disrupt our existing functions  
8 and responsibilities and will involve an  
9 opportunity cost. Expenses across the 59 boards  
10 will range, so too will the quality and the format  
11 of the products. In the end this option will  
12 guarantee the loss of any economies of scale in  
13 addition to the loss of both efficiency and  
14 effectiveness. That's the hard way. If we do it the  
15 smart way the Council would use its powers to  
16 require that the franchisees holding  
17 telecommunications agreements with the city be  
18 mandated to broadcast Community Board general  
19 meetings. We would also ask that the full, unedited  
20 products be made publically accessible as official  
21 records of our proceedings. All public bodies  
22 should be assured a consistent high quality  
23 professional record of their meeting. Let the  
24 professionals do it. The public deserves no less.  
25

1  
2 Intro 28 places us at a crossroads. It seems to me  
3 the rational thing would be to consider the  
4 following course of action. First withdrawal or  
5 delay adoption of Intro 28 until we have an  
6 executable implementation planned. I for one would  
7 love the opportunity to work with you to develop  
8 that plan and I have some experience to offer. From  
9 2007 to 2011 I had the honor of serving as a  
10 commissioner appointed by then public advocate  
11 Betsy Gotbaum to the city's Commission on Public  
12 Information and Communications. One of my  
13 responsibilities was to make recommendations  
14 regarding the application of new communications  
15 technology to improve public access to city  
16 produced or maintained information. It starts with  
17 a plan. Second, legislatively it's worth revisiting  
18 section 10-63 of the City Charter which outlines  
19 the franchisee's responsibilities to the city  
20 regarding cable casting and broadcasting of public  
21 proceedings of city government. This section of the  
22 City Charter enacted more than a generation ago  
23 must be brought into the 21<sup>st</sup> century to require  
24 live streaming and web, webcasting options. In this  
25 age of open data it is government's job to

1  
2 safeguard the rights of the public to free access  
3 to proceedings through popular and available  
4 transmission media. Third, it is worth revisiting  
5 section 10-63 B of the City Charter which says that  
6 the Council and its committees and the City  
7 Planning Commission shall make their public  
8 meetings and hearings available for cable casting  
9 and broadcasting. Instead of inserting the  
10 requirement that Community Board Meetings be  
11 webcast within section 2800 which defines Community  
12 Board's duties and responsibilities as Intro 28  
13 suggests it would make more sense to insert the  
14 requirement within section 10-63 B. This would  
15 reinforce the notion that Community Boards are not  
16 and should not have to become professional  
17 broadcasters. Lastly, let's commit to getting this  
18 done now instead of back burner-ing it because the  
19 road you're on may have just gotten a little  
20 bumpier. We shouldn't have to wait one moment  
21 longer for the public to have access to our  
22 proceedings. Let's get this done now and let's get  
23 this done quickly so we can turn our attention to  
24 finding the supplements necessary to cover our  
25 unfunded planning mandate, our unfunded cost of

1  
2 living increases and any other unfunded mandates we  
3 are expected to perform. In the words of Benjamin  
4 Franklin we must all hang together or assuredly we  
5 shall all hang separately. So let's work together  
6 on this. Let's get this done and let's do this the  
7 smart way not the hard way. Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: I very much want to  
9 thank you for your thoughts. They are, you put a  
10 lot of work into this and I appreciate, this is  
11 very thoughtful, you've come up with good ideas and  
12 you describe the obstacles we're against, which I  
13 know the obstacles but you've come up with some  
14 good ideas Craig. I thank you very much. Really, I  
15 appreciate that you did all this work. Thank you.

16 CRAIG HAMMERMAN: Thank you.

17 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: I want to welcome  
18 Steve Maddie, my colleague from Staten Island who  
19 has joined us. Chairman Burke.

20 ALVIN BURKE: Thank you very much  
21 Chairman Vacca, Council Members...

22 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: How many years are  
23 you Chairman Alvin?

24 ALVIN BURKE: 25. But I'm not the  
25 longest serving Chair in Brooklyn. That honor

1  
2 distinction goes to Pearl Miles Chair, Jacob  
3 Goldstein whom I believe is, has been chair for 34  
4 years.

5 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Oh boy.

6 ALVIN BURKE: And Jake is 20 years  
7 younger than I am. Having heard the, the excellent  
8 testimony my very capable colleagues Craig  
9 Hammerman, I'm going to modify my own testimony  
10 because I think that what Craig is pointing out is  
11 the Complexity of doing Community Board webcasting  
12 and telecasting. Our board conducts; we operate by  
13 the committee system as the Council does. We have  
14 23 different committees. In 2013 we had 23  
15 committee meetings. They were not held the same  
16 nights as our board meetings. They were held in  
17 addition to our 10 board meetings. We also held 20,  
18 28 public hearings spread over 9 different  
19 occasions. So in a single year we have over 40  
20 meetings that qualify under the public meetings  
21 law. And, and we would want, given that most of our  
22 business is conducted at the public hearings and  
23 our committee meetings we would want those to be  
24 telecast as well, webcast as well or cablecast as,  
25 as Craig offers us an opportunity as an

1  
2 alternative. There may be a lesson. If, if there is  
3 no recourse available through the franchise rules  
4 than there may be an opportunity to have one of the  
5 mayoral agencies or either DoITT or MOAM or both.  
6 Look at the boards and assess the boards' needs and  
7 then come up with a plan that meets each of the  
8 Community Board's individual needs. Whether they  
9 offer the technical support to implement the plan  
10 is another question. But we for example move our  
11 board meetings between two different public  
12 schools; one in a northern part of our board and  
13 one in the southern part of our board in order to  
14 avoid any appearance of regional preference. We  
15 would need to telecast a webcast from both those  
16 locations. We hold our public hearings for the most  
17 part at our centrally located board office, we  
18 would need to webcast from there. So we have at  
19 least three locations that we'd need.. We would need  
20 the technical assistance that Craig Hammerman has  
21 alluded to and Ms. Velasquez alluded to that  
22 represented the Queens Borough President in order  
23 to cover all of those. When we do public hearings  
24 on Land Use Chairman, when we do a zoning variance  
25 or a special permit a BSA special permit we have a



1  
2 detailed examination of the plans that are brought  
3 by the architect or the representative of the  
4 applicant at, at our public hearings. Those plans  
5 would have to be visible to be useful. As, as in  
6 the instance of, in the interest of transparency  
7 those plans and our examination of the plans would  
8 have to be visible to the public. We also have at  
9 our public hearings; we have people speaking from  
10 the audience. We need to be able to mic them. Audio  
11 is a terrible problem. I mean I, I'm sure you  
12 appreciate that. And so we're not here to oppose  
13 and I, I haven't, I don't have an official  
14 resolution on a part of my board. I'm speaking as  
15 an individual who's observed the practices of my  
16 board for 25 years. And what I want to do is just  
17 bring some of the complexity to it. So if we can't  
18 go the franchise route the lesson that may be  
19 applicable here may have to do with the  
20 individuality of the board's rents that individual  
21 community boards the rent is not included in the  
22 board budget. It's taken offline because of  
23 geographic variations and the rents that boards  
24 have to pay for their locations. So we would want a  
25

1  
2 solution that would be similarly flexible to that.  
3 That's all I have to say. Thank you.

4 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: And, and you raise  
5 an excellent point regarding the marking. That is  
6 an excellent point.

7 ALVIN BURKE: Thank you.

8 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Because you could  
9 have one stationary mic that would serve the  
10 chairperson and District Manager who sit together  
11 and who basically facilitate the meeting. But then  
12 you have 40 to 50 members and what do you do with  
13 the microphone system. So I dealt with meetings  
14 where there is a, a person who's hearing impaired  
15 for example who has the microphone system. And then  
16 you have to shift that microphone system to each  
17 person as they speak. And although this person has  
18 absolutely the right to hear it, it becomes  
19 distracting to people when that happens...  
20 [crosstalk] and I don't want to distract.

21 ALVIN BURKE: You have a, a major hurdle  
22 to get over here. It's a technologically...

23 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Yes.

24 ALVIN BURKE: ...challenging issue but  
25 you're up to the task.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: We're going to be up  
3 to it with your help... [crosstalk]

4 ALVIN BURKE: It's not just money, it's  
5 not just money. You have to get...

6 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: No.

7 ALVIN BURKE: ...you have to get the mayor  
8 to support it technologically.

9 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: And you, and you  
10 know what it's the mayor supporting it and I also  
11 think that it's community boards buying into it. I  
12 think you have and Craig has... You know we all just  
13 can't say it's impossible to do, it's a headache,  
14 and we don't want to be bothered, and I haven't  
15 heard that from anyone. So from you and from Craig  
16 so far. And I, I really appreciate that. I know  
17 it's not going to be easy. I know it's a challenge.  
18 But I, I think so much of what we've accomplished  
19 is challenging. Things are not going to be done for  
20 everyone overnight and we have to understand that  
21 this will be a work in progress. So I appreciate  
22 all your input.

23 ALVIN BERK: Thank you.

24 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Jon Fratter I go  
25 back with how many years but Jon Fratter was...

1  
2 JON FRATTER: Many years.

3 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: ...a former District  
4 Manager of Board 11 and he's now continuing to  
5 service them. So I thank you for coming John.

6 JON FRATTER: Thank you Councilman  
7 Vacca, Members of the Council. We're here,  
8 Community Board 11 is in total support of the  
9 concept of openness and transparency we think it's  
10 a great idea. We have some concerns like all the  
11 other boards I'm sure. You know we've come a long  
12 way. Not too long ago our Community Boards still  
13 had typewriters. And then we graduated to  
14 computers. And now Community Board has a webpage,  
15 we have a Facebook page so we're trying to get the  
16 word out. The concerns that we have with this, with  
17 Intro 28 and the implementation of this is where's  
18 the money going to come from. Where's the staffing  
19 going to come from to really handle the equipment.  
20 You know I don't have to tell you, members of the  
21 City Council, under the previous administration  
22 there wasn't a year that went by that the Mayor  
23 wasn't proposing to slash our budgets and yet it  
24 was you Council Members that saved us year after  
25 year. But our budgets had been stagnant for over 20

1  
2 years with no increase. So our, our real concerns  
3 are really the money. We also want to know, are we  
4 doing live streaming or just recording and then  
5 showing afterwards. There are a lot of questions we  
6 have and we want to work with the Council and help  
7 implement this project because we think it's a  
8 great project and it's something that the public  
9 really does have a right to see. You know many  
10 times we make decisions that the community boards  
11 and you'll hear members of the public saying they  
12 didn't know about it. Well what were we trying to  
13 hide. This way all of our decisions are open and,  
14 and are really transparent. So we look forward to  
15 working with you and do whatever we can to help  
16 implement this but we do need the money and that's  
17 the bottom line. Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: I thank you. You  
19 know I do have to tell you all a story. I remember  
20 being district manager in the 80s and I had a young  
21 lady who's no longer with us. Her name was  
22 Catherine Scott and she brought in a word  
23 processor. She said to me Jimmy I'm getting it for  
24 free and it was from the New York City Department  
25 of Salvage. So this was something that was being

1  
2 thrown away and she went there to get it for the  
3 Community Board and I told her at that time  
4 Catherine we have typewriters why are you using  
5 this. And she said to me this is going to be the  
6 future you better get with it. And I says ah, this  
7 won't last a year or two. And then of course the  
8 word processor became antiquated. But I remember  
9 her getting it from the Department of Salvage at  
10 that time. I thought it was a piece of junk.

11 JON FRATTER: Including cell phones.

12 Thank you.

13 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Okay thank you.  
14 Thank you gentleman. Thank you. Pearl Miles,  
15 Brooklyn Community Board 9, Catherine McVay Hughes,  
16 Community Board 1 in Manhattan, Ken Kearns,  
17 Community Board 10 in the Bronx.

18 NOAH PFEFFERBLIT: I'll be speaking for  
19 Catherine McVay Hughes.

20 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Identify yourself.

21 Thank you.

22 NOAH PFEFFERBLIT: I'm Noah  
23 Pfefferblit....

24 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Noer? Oh, Noah?

25 NOAH PFEFFERBLIT: Noah, yes.

1  
2 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Noah, come on up.  
3 Have a seat.

4 NOAH PFEFFERBLIT: ...very much.

5 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: And identify  
6 yourself in the microphone.

7 NOAH PFEFFERBLIT: I definitely will...

8 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: While, Ms. Miles  
9 will you go first please?

10 NOAH PFEFFERBLIT: Do you want the copy...

11 [background comments]

12 PEARL MILES: Hi Chairman Vacca, Council  
13 Member Palma, and Councilman Matteo. My colleague  
14 Craig Hammerman pretty much said all the things  
15 that needed to be said about this, this matter. My  
16 board members, my chairman and my board members,  
17 they also have those same concerns. We are really  
18 concerned about the implementation of this unfunded  
19 mandate which is our major concern. We also have  
20 the concern that where we have our board meetings  
21 it's at a school, a public school. It's centrally  
22 located but the school has the ancient wiring. Many  
23 times we take our equipment there and the, the  
24 outlets spark and, and we, we blow our fuses and  
25 things on equipment so that also is something to

1  
2 take the, into account, infrastructure where we  
3 have our meetings and probably some of my other  
4 colleagues. It's pretty much the feeling of our  
5 board that webcasting is really where we're going,  
6 where we're at and where we're moving from. We  
7 cannot move away from this. It's not going to  
8 happen. So where, where we supported but we need to  
9 be able to have the resources to implement it. So  
10 we're asking that while we're holding in favor of  
11 transparency we ask that a Committee on Technology  
12 considered delaying any action in Intro 28 so that  
13 they may be fully, they may fully address the  
14 legitimate concerns for our members regarding the  
15 lack of a well thought out implementation plan  
16 including the provision of adequate startup and  
17 ongoing funding for community boards to undertake  
18 this critical responsibility. Thank you.

19 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Thank you. Sir.

20 NOAH PFEFFERBLIT: Yes, as I mentioned  
21 my name is Noah Pfefferblit and I'm the District  
22 Manager for Community Board 1, Manhattan and our  
23 Chair just informed me she was not able to make it  
24 so I'll be giving the testimony. Similar, I think,  
25 to what some of the other people have commented



1  
2 about the proposed Intro this afternoon our  
3 Executive Committee at Community Board One  
4 discussed the proposed Intro last week on February  
5 19<sup>th</sup> and they, we did pass a resolution about it  
6 which will come before our full board at our  
7 meeting tomorrow on February 25<sup>th</sup>. We supported the  
8 principles of transparency and accessibility to  
9 government data and proceedings that would be  
10 advanced by webcasting and archiving full board  
11 meetings on Community Board websites. However we do  
12 have serious concerns that, as other people have  
13 noted this afternoon's hearing, Intro 28 does not  
14 provide resources and funding to carry out these  
15 additional responsibilities and is not clear about  
16 what process or system would be put in place to  
17 webcast the meetings and archive them on a website.  
18 We urge in our resolution that Intro 28 not be  
19 adopted unless it includes a clear requirement that  
20 the city provide the additional funding, resources  
21 and personnel that would be needed to carry out  
22 these tasks and moreover we called in our  
23 resolution for the webcasting and archiving of our,  
24 our meetings and all associated tasks that would be  
25 required by this Intro to be carried out by an

1 external agency such as the, as DoITT, the  
2 Department of Information Technology and  
3 Telecommunications so that the funding cannot be  
4 eliminated from community board budgets in the  
5 future while these new responsibilities continue to  
6 be required. And we know as, as, has been noted  
7 Chairman Vacca you're a former District Manager in  
8 the Bronx for many years so you're aware that the  
9 community boards carry out a myriad of  
10 responsibilities including many that are mandated  
11 by the City Charter and that the minimal amount of  
12 funding and resources that we receive from the city  
13 to carry out these tasks is threatened on an almost  
14 annual basis and has been for many years. So we're  
15 therefore concerned about the possibility that if  
16 Intro 28 is adopted and no external entity is  
17 required to carry out the tasks associated with it,  
18 even if additional funding to implement it is added  
19 to community board budgets that funding could  
20 thereafter be eliminated in a subsequent year due  
21 to budget cuts and we therefore believe it is  
22 essential that either, as I mentioned, an external  
23 agency be required to carry out the tasks, or that  
24 some other reliable mechanism be found that could  
25

1  
2 prevent the video and webcast requirements from  
3 becoming unfunded obligations. I think we've seen  
4 this in the past. Sometimes we have new tasks. We,  
5 they allocate a little money even for personnel... I  
6 remember this happened once with a pass along for  
7 the union increases and the next thing you know  
8 there's a recession and they're threatening to take  
9 the money out. But of course we have to continue  
10 to, to pay the money. So we don't want something  
11 like that to happen. More generally I wanted to you  
12 know just take a moment to note that with the new  
13 Administration and new Council leadership in place  
14 we hope that consideration will be given to  
15 increasing funding for community boards so that we  
16 will have the funding and resources that we need.  
17 Not only for Intro 28 which would be great but also  
18 for all the essential services that we provide to  
19 improve quality of life throughout the city. And  
20 that's what I have to say. I thank you very much  
21 for listening.

22 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Thank you. And I do  
23 want to tell you that the Mayor has indicated that  
24 the budget dance is over and that we will not be  
25 dancing anymore about the budget...

[crosstalk, background comments]

CHAIRPERSON VACCA: So the Community Board should be okay. The Community Boards, the Borough Presidents, the Fire Houses, and so many other things that we used to have a budget dance what I call it and what we all call it... those dancing days are finished.

COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: Now the Community Boards can dance on camera.

CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Now you can dance on...

[laughter]

COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: If the budget dance is over I'll do a dance at the next board meeting.

CHAIRPERSON VACCA: For the record this is my colleague from Queens. But he is right of course. Alright Mr. Kearns.

KENNETH KEARNS: Good afternoon  
Honorable Chair, Members of the City Council  
Committee on Technology. My name is Kenneth Kearns  
and I'm District Manager of Bronx Community Board  
10 and I'm joined by my colleague Xavier Rodriguez  
from Community Board 5. My purpose here today is to

1 offer comment on Intro 28. Bronx Community Board 10  
2 believes that the idea of providing open access to  
3 Community Board deliberations via webcasting to  
4 provide open, transparent government is a laudatory  
5 goal. However the boards believe that the, if  
6 webcasting became law the City Administration, City  
7 Council must allocate funding to implement the  
8 mandate. Bronx Community Board 10 recommends that  
9 DoITT or the citywide public access channel such as  
10 Bronxnet be retained and charter the responsibility  
11 of providing webcasting for all 59 boards. Now the  
12 contractor or contractors providing the webcast  
13 service must commit to travel with those boards  
14 that meet a different location then conduct webcast  
15 activities from those locations, that a training  
16 program be established for staff and board members,  
17 chairperson and secretary particularly concerning  
18 the webcasting and the laws surrounding it and by  
19 the appropriate city agency. The Community Board 10  
20 recommends that a central repository be established  
21 where the tapes, the masters can be stored with  
22 copies sent to the relevant community board.  
23 Community Board strongly urge that funding must be  
24 allocated for the boards that publicize the  
25

1  
2 webcasting operations. As other speakers before me  
3 had said we are very concerned that this could  
4 possibly become an unfunded mandate and we really  
5 do lack the funds and we haven't had an increase in  
6 many, many years and we're doing the best that we  
7 can with what little we have. So we'd be happy to  
8 help and we agree and we're more than happy to see  
9 it come. Just you know, please give us the  
10 resources to do it and you'll have it. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Thank you I, I do  
12 want to know for the record that I've raised this  
13 with Bronxnet several years ago and they didn't see  
14 fit to do it. So I think, I think there would be  
15 room on their schedule for this, this to take  
16 place. But I've been told that they don't, they're  
17 not going to do it. But the idea is good and many  
18 of your ideas are good. Any questions? Mark Weprin,  
19 yes.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: I apologize Mr.  
21 Chairman and everybody else for being late. I was  
22 at a meeting and now I have to run to another  
23 meeting. So I apologize. I just wanted to get on  
24 the record a little bit on this idea. I love the  
25 idea of, of the public being able to see the

1  
2 community boards in action. I've always been a big  
3 proponent of legislatures and judiciary and the,  
4 and the community boards to be on camera because I  
5 find it does increase the respect people have for  
6 government when they see it on camera. I also think  
7 that people tend to comport themselves in a better  
8 manor despite my comment about the dancing. And,  
9 and I just think it, it's better for the whole  
10 public in general and as long as it's done properly  
11 I agree wholeheartedly that you can't have the  
12 community boards paying for this out of their  
13 budgets and, and you need set rules on how it  
14 should be done. So we need some type of centralized  
15 form to do this if we're going to do it, that it's  
16 done by the city, they pay for it, they figure out  
17 ways to set it up or, or coordinate how to set it  
18 up. So I thank you Mr. Chairman for having this  
19 hearing because I do think it's an important issue  
20 and one that makes a lot of sense. The public has a  
21 right to see how their community boards are working  
22 and community boards in particular you know are in  
23 the middle of the week often and run long and  
24 people can watch it at home. It really would be  
25

1  
2 better for everyone that people are involved. So  
3 thank you again and thank you all for being here.

4 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: You know I should  
5 say I'm stopped constantly by people who see me on  
6 crosswalks and they watch the City Council  
7 hearings. Jimmy, we saw you on TV and I say what  
8 do, when did you see me. They said well we watch  
9 crosswalk, we watched the entire hearing. I said  
10 you did, and I'm complimented in one way but then  
11 my question to them is well were you having trouble  
12 sleeping. Because these hearings are on at 3:30 in  
13 the morning. And you know I take it personally when  
14 they say no, that hearing you had put me to sleep  
15 after all so you know. But it, it's their right and  
16 they, they often tell me how they really understood  
17 much better what my committee was doing, at that  
18 time was transportation, the issue that we were  
19 discussing, the policies, the legislation. And many  
20 people want to know more about what's going on.  
21 They want to see their Council Members interacting  
22 with agencies. And they want to see the process.  
23 And, and they're interested in government and we  
24 have to encourage that. And as I said before I  
25 believe in this. I believe the community boards



1  
2 need to be seen by the public they represent  
3 because that's your way of outreaching to those  
4 people. You know when I was a DM I, I, I often, and  
5 I also, also I should, should say shifted the  
6 meetings. Every month we went to a different  
7 meeting place. And that was an attempt to reach out  
8 to different communities. But I have to say that  
9 when we did that maybe there were 15 or 20 people  
10 in the audience that were different from the people  
11 that were there the month before. This gives  
12 community boards an opportunity, not just to shift  
13 your meetings for those 15 or 20 people, gives you  
14 an opportunity to have a much wider audience. It  
15 really gives you an opportunity to reach out more  
16 than just shifting the meeting for 15 or 20 people  
17 or to placate a certain civic association. It gives  
18 you a chance to reach people who you normally would  
19 not reach, would not attend the meeting regardless  
20 of where you held it, who work two jobs, who have  
21 kids at home, who maybe caught your, your telecast  
22 at an off hour when they were not busy doing other  
23 things in their very busy lives. And those are the  
24 people that can come forth with good suggestions.  
25 They can help, they can volunteer perhaps, they

1  
2 could be on email lists. They, you'd, you'd be  
3 developing a base of support and that's what we all  
4 need in our neighborhoods. We need average,  
5 grassroots people to be involved more. So with that  
6 said there are no further speakers and I think. Oh  
7 we have, we have two, we have two more. Oh I didn't  
8 see. We have four more. Where did you come from?  
9 Okay, Rachel Fauss, I'm sorry. Rachel Fauss,  
10 Citizens Union, Prudence Katze, is it  
11 katez[phonetic] or katz[phonetic], Reinvent Albany,  
12 oh we have a great panel, I didn't know, Robert  
13 Losquozo, Whitestone New York Media Design Company,  
14 and Nicholas Smokey representing himself from  
15 Manhattan.

16 [background comments]

17 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: That's okay.

18 [background comments]

19 RACHEL FAUSS: Thanks. So we're going to  
20 go down the line here.

21 UNKNOWN MALE: Somebody else can start.

22 RACHEL FAUSS: Okay, I'll start.

23 [background comments]

24 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: You start, identify  
25 yourself.

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RACHEL FAUSS: Good afternoon Chair  
Vacca and Council Member Palma. My name is Rachel  
Fauss and I'm the Policy and Research Manager of  
Citizens Union. We're a nonpartisan, good  
government dedicated to making democracy work for  
all New Yorkers. We're very pleased that the  
Committee on technology is focusing its first  
hearing of this new session on webcasting with the  
enactment of Local Law 103 last...

CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Can I interrupt one  
minute?

RACHEL FAUSS: ...December.

CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Your testimony looks  
great but it's very very long.

RACHEL FAUSS: I'm not going to read  
from... [crosstalk]

CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Oh, alright.

RACHEL FAUSS: Don't worry.

CHAIRPERSON VACCA: I feel better.

RACHEL FAUSS: Don't worry.

CHAIRPERSON VACCA: But thank you. It's  
very concise but I just wanted to throw that in.

RACHEL FAUSS: Okay.

CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Thank you.

1  
2 RACHEL FAUSS: No problem. I understand.  
3 So we were big supporters when the law passed so I  
4 just wanted to give that history. We've also met  
5 with the Mayor's office of Media and entertainment.  
6 On multiple occasions we found the very helpful and  
7 interested in the public in terms of how they can  
8 do a better job. We also advocated for the City  
9 Board of Elections to webcast and for those of you  
10 who may not know they have announced at their last  
11 meeting they plan to do webcasting. So that's a  
12 very important thing. And the transparency working  
13 group, I know some of the members couldn't be here  
14 today, NYPERG and DataNYC although actually we have  
15 one DataNYC person here. There are other groups,  
16 civic and technology groups that couldn't be here.  
17 So I just wanted to acknowledge them. So we also  
18 have communicated with the Mayor's office, Deputy  
19 Mayor assure us as the transparency working group  
20 and Jeff Merritt who testified about the importance  
21 of the implementation of this law. We'd like to see  
22 a, a more detailed plan presented but you know we  
23 look forward to seeing what happens after the March  
24 deadline. I wanted to provide part, as part of our  
25 testimony, we actually made our own inventory of

1  
2 the city agencies that have frequent meetings and  
3 hearings. We provided this to the committee a  
4 couple years ago when the bill was first being  
5 considered. But there's actually more than 30  
6 agencies, commissions, boards, etcetera that hold  
7 frequent meetings that aren't currently webcasting.  
8 There are some that do. I know the CFB testified  
9 today. The Council led by example which was very  
10 important. The five pension boards of the city also  
11 do webcast their hearings and meetings. So I wanted  
12 to make sure to, to mention them. I think there's a  
13 lot that can be learned from those agencies that  
14 are already doing this really important work. There  
15 are some agencies that don't webcast and I think  
16 have a very high value to the public given their  
17 frequent meetings; the City Planning Commission,  
18 Panel for Educational Policy, the Department of  
19 Transportation, Landmarks Preservation Commission,  
20 Board of Standards and Appeals, a lot of agencies  
21 that do very important land use decision making and  
22 policy decisions that don't webcast. There could a  
23 tiered approach where agencies have a high value to  
24 the public start first. The ones that have very  
25 frequent regular meetings. And then eventually

1  
2 working towards agencies that maybe only have a  
3 public hearing irregularly. So that's a possible of  
4 looking at implementing this law. We think there's  
5 possible cost savings and synergies. There could be  
6 cheaper webcasting services done if there's, the  
7 city's bulk purchasing power is leveraged. We  
8 wanted to mention, again the Mayor's Office of  
9 Media Entertainment in addition to DoITT as being  
10 an agency that could be helpful because of the  
11 great work they've done with us. And quickly I  
12 wanted to mention some best practices in  
13 webcasting. I think one of the community board  
14 members mentioned that associated materials often  
15 are very helpful for the public to understand. If  
16 they can't be in there in person they might not  
17 have the documents in front of them. But actually  
18 other cities have done this when they've done  
19 webcasting of meetings and hearings, actually even  
20 the State Assembly in Albany, not a model of  
21 transparency always. They actually have transcripts  
22 and associated materials up with the video of their  
23 hearings and meetings. So that's something to  
24 consider too, that the city should look at.  
25 Searchability of the video and the associated

1 materials is also a good best practice. And then  
2 you know also one stop shopping for, for the video  
3 is pleased to hear that Jeff Merritt mentioned that  
4 they were looking at a single portal. We think  
5 that's very important so the public can know where  
6 to look. They might not know the difference between  
7 a one board and another board but they know that  
8 they're interested in a particular topic. And if  
9 they can find it one place that makes it a lot  
10 easier. Additionally we believe that there should  
11 be a comprehensive list of the city entities that  
12 are subject to this law that is released. I know  
13 that it was mentioned the Law Department is vetting  
14 agencies on a case by case basis by Council, or  
15 excuse me Borough President Brewer. But that list  
16 of agencies that are subject to the law should be  
17 made available to the public and the council. We  
18 think that would help with oversight for the groups  
19 like ours that are interested in this issue. In  
20 terms of the policy just one thing that might be  
21 worth considering is it's not just the individual  
22 members of the public who watch, who are recorded  
23 on the tally of you know there's 14 people watching  
24 this hearing. It may not seem like a large number  
25

1  
2 but when you think about members of the press and  
3 civic organizations that gets distributed out much  
4 further. One member of the press watching an even  
5 has a, could write an article about something  
6 that's happening and have a very wide distribution  
7 range. So something to consider is that the numbers  
8 even though they may seem small are actually much,  
9 much bigger in terms of the ultimate reach. And  
10 lastly on Intro 28 we don't currently have a  
11 position on that bill but we're very glad to hear  
12 that this hearing is looking both at implementation  
13 of Local Law 103 and that bill together. I think  
14 there's a lot that can be learned from what the  
15 city agencies are doing now to help community  
16 boards. As I mentioned we don't have a position but  
17 you know we wanted to provide some initial thought  
18 that we had, obviously the costs are of potential  
19 concern. I would flag however that we support  
20 independent budgeting for community boards. I know  
21 that that's, would be certainly something that  
22 community boards would be very supportive of and  
23 would help them implement not only this initiative  
24 but also other things that they would like to do.  
25 You know community board meetings, they are in the



1  
2 evening, unlike some of the city meetings which are  
3 during the day. But again when you have archival  
4 video that provides greater accessibility even for,  
5 not everyone can come out to an evening meeting  
6 either necessarily. Again looking at possible  
7 synergies for cost savings... having the boards look  
8 at these things together I know there have been  
9 discussions about the boards looking at possibly,  
10 for example, having websites that are shared among  
11 each other so that there's a platform that they can  
12 all share and use, something similar could be done  
13 for webcasting. And the last point we wanted to  
14 make is on the implementation date, the enactment  
15 date of the legislation is 90 days depending on  
16 when the Council looks at passing this bill. That  
17 might be something you want to consider lengthening  
18 if, it's not quite ready in time to allow the plans  
19 to develop. So thank you very much. I'm happy to  
20 testify.

21 PRUDENCE KATZE: Good afternoon. Thank  
22 you Chairman Vacca, other members of the Technology  
23 Committee for holding this timely hearing. My name  
24 is Prudence Kats and I'm testifying on behalf of  
25 Reinvent Albany where I am the Policy Coordinator

1  
2 and also on behalf of the New York Public Interest  
3 Research Group. Our groups co-chair as Rachel  
4 Mentioned, the New York Transparency Working Group,  
5 we strongly support New York City's renewed efforts  
6 to make the webcasting of public meetings a regular  
7 feature of city government. So now I have some  
8 brief testimony on the two webcast initiatives the  
9 community is looking at today. Local Law 103 of  
10 2013 requires public meetings of agencies,  
11 committees, commissions, task force, and City  
12 Council's meetings to be webcast. The law was  
13 enacted on December 2<sup>nd</sup> and it's supposed to be  
14 implemented by March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2014 which is Next  
15 Sunday. The webcasting technology is relatively  
16 inexpensive and easy to deploy. 90 days is not  
17 enough time for Mayor de Blasio's newly formed  
18 administration to meet the law's requirements and  
19 to get all city government entities webcasting  
20 their meetings. Instead we would recommend that de  
21 Blasio Administration starts with the approximately  
22 30 agencies, commissions, and boards that hold  
23 regular meetings in the same location. Given the,  
24 the relatively modest expense and short timeline  
25 for implementation we recommend that the city

1 retain a vendor for this first group of agencies.  
2  
3 Based on the Campaign Finance Boards webcasting  
4 costs of 350 dollars per month we estimate that it  
5 would cost between 10, 110 thousand and 150  
6 thousand dollars a year to contract with a major  
7 commercial vendor to webcast this first group of  
8 agencies. For the roughly 40 agencies that hold  
9 irregularly scheduled public meetings at a variety  
10 of locations it may be less expensive for the city  
11 to develop its own webcasting capacity perhaps in  
12 conjunction with CUNY. We suggest that the Council  
13 ask the administration to report back on the cost  
14 and benefits of different webcasting practices and  
15 vendors for both this law and Intro 28 which  
16 requires webcasting of Community Board Meetings. I  
17 wanted to echo Rachel at the moment. No  
18 comprehensive list of all of the agencies, boards,  
19 and commissions that are subject to Local Law 103  
20 is available to the public. We join our colleagues  
21 in asking the council to request from the Law  
22 Department that comprehensive list. Citizens Union  
23 has recommended a number of good ideas for how the  
24 city's webcasting should work. We like them all but  
25 in particular we want to highlight our support for

1  
2 having all webcast archived in one location as Jeff  
3 Merritt also mentioned where they are easy to find  
4 and catalogue. That location can also be linked to,  
5 from city, from agency websites. We appreciate  
6 citizen Unions thoughtful research and thank them  
7 for their early and steadfast support for  
8 webcasting legislation. Onto Intro 28. So we are  
9 glad to see Council continue to push for more  
10 webcasting. And we support the basic intent behind  
11 Intro 28. However before the bill goes to vote we  
12 would like to see Council work with the  
13 Administration to answer a number of important  
14 questions about how it could most effectively  
15 implemented. We believe that webcasting community  
16 board meetings is completely, 100 percent  
17 practicable with some advanced planning and  
18 discussion. However at the moment we think it is  
19 fairly likely that some Community Boards not have  
20 the wherewithal or resources to successfully comply  
21 with the proposed law. Therefore we recommend that  
22 before passing this law and imposing this mandate  
23 Council asked the administration to prepare a brief  
24 feasibility study that assesses various  
25 alternatives and recommends the best process and

1  
2 technology for getting the board meetings webcast.  
3 That said, it should be completed in the next three  
4 to six months and should clarify the rules and  
5 responsibilities of the community boards, Borough  
6 President, and Mayor's Office in implementing the  
7 proposed webcasting law. The study will also answer  
8 important questions about who will pay for the  
9 webcasting and online archiving, oversee  
10 implementation, and ensure that problems are  
11 solved. The study will also inform the discussion  
12 between Council, the Mayor's Office, Borough  
13 Presidents, and the boards before this legislative  
14 mandate is imposed. By spending more time planning  
15 how to make webcasting as easy and as practical as  
16 possible for the boards Council can eliminate the  
17 where practical loophole from the webcasting  
18 requirement. We also recommend that the law takes  
19 effect 180 days, not 90 days after passage and that  
20 Council hold firm to that deadline. 90 days is too  
21 short and a short deadline can be used as an excuse  
22 by the boards or other responsible parties not to  
23 comply with the future webcasting requirement.  
24 Thank you for, again for inviting Reinvent Albany  
25 to testify today.

CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Yes sir.

NICHOLAS SMOLNEY: Sure. My name is

Nicholas Smolney, apologies for the bad penmanship.

I'm representing myself but I am a member and Chair

of the Public Safety and Environment Commission at

Manhattan Community Board Number 6 as well as a

technology professional. I was told that maybe the

Chair would come and talk so that's why I'm

representing myself. You know I like to keep tabs

on a lot of different city agencies whether it's

from my committee or just in general and it's

impossible to be in two places at once. So you know

I definitely understand that. But being a

technology professional you know many of the

organizations that I belong to they all, they all

webcast you know. They only have room for you know

100 people in a, in a room, but you know their

audience is much larger. So it's something that I'm

used to doing and something that you know people of

my generation are used to doing. One of the groups

that I'm involved with is DataNYC. It's a 1600

member organization. They've been instrumental in

getting some of the City Agency data. Once it's

released out to the general public we've you know

1  
2 built smart, smartphone apps. We've had hack-a-  
3 thons so people can you know come up with new ideas  
4 about how to get this information out there. And  
5 you know in discussing with them we are  
6 overwhelmingly in support of webcasting and  
7 particularly at the community board level. You know  
8 we, we're not sure how we're going to use the video  
9 but we definitely want to get it out there to the  
10 public. And as it's been seen in the past once it's  
11 out there you know people can ideate on it and come  
12 up with really interesting ways to use it. And then  
13 going back to just being a general community board  
14 member. You know I like to see what the other  
15 community boards are doing, you know 4, 5, 1, 2,  
16 and 3 here in Manhattan. I can't be there but it's  
17 nice to be able to see if you know if I'm ill or if  
18 one, myself or a member is travelling they can  
19 still see the meeting in real time or even after  
20 the fact is great. And it's a great way for me to  
21 like tell you know my neighbors and fellow  
22 residents what's going on, they can see it for  
23 themselves. So I'm, I'm overwhelmingly in support  
24 of Intro 28. You know, provided that it gets the  
25

1  
2 funding and support that it really needs. So, thank  
3 you.

4 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Thank you very much.  
5 Thank you. Sir.

6 ROBERT LOSQUOZO: I'm last. I'm Robert  
7 Losquozo [sp?], graduate of New York University's  
8 Film and Television Program, multiple Telly Award  
9 winning producer of corporate media and I've  
10 actually recorded numerous meetings at community  
11 boards. So I'm a person who is familiar with what  
12 it would take to go in there and get the job done.  
13 I have some ideas and questions about how this  
14 could be, could be implemented. And when you come  
15 here you have to check a box, you either support  
16 the proposition or you oppose. I kind of supported  
17 but have these grave concerns about implementation  
18 a lot of which you've, you've already heard. I  
19 think turning community boards into producers and  
20 camera people and audio technicians is not the way  
21 to go. And that New York City is the media capital  
22 of the world. We've got a pool of people that are  
23 prepared and, and equipped to do that work. And  
24 they would be willing to do that if there was a  
25 budget available. But let me just run down some of



1 the ideas that, that I had here. A lot of this has  
2 been covered but agencies other than community  
3 boards meet in their own spaces where they can  
4 preinstall the cameras, the audio systems. For  
5 example here you have multiple cameras pointing  
6 where they need to be and individual microphones  
7 for each and every speaker. And don't underestimate  
8 the importance of having a microphone right next to  
9 everyone's mouth. That delivers a reasonably high  
10 level of quality because in the end you can see and  
11 hear everything that goes on here in the hearing.  
12 By contrast community boards meet in, in places  
13 that they don't own. So any video equipment has to  
14 be brought in for each meeting and removed when  
15 it's done, the idea of the red wagon that came up a  
16 couple of hours ago here. So at what level are you  
17 going to bring in the red wagon? What qualifies as  
18 a worthwhile result considering that this would be  
19 city funded? Is it an iPhone video that's just  
20 mounted up with Velcro on the wall in the same  
21 place every time or is some better effort going to  
22 be made to actually create a situation, not as  
23 extravagant as you have in this room, but at least  
24 it would deliver some, some quality. And in  
25

1 reviewing the transcript of a hearing that was held  
2 last year for the prior legislation there was  
3 discussion of purchasing digital video cameras  
4 like, like this and training district managers or  
5 someone else on the staff of a board to set them  
6 up. And you'd have to train them to download and  
7 upload the data from the camera to wherever it  
8 needs to go. That kind of solution would give the  
9 boards a way to comply with the legislation but  
10 it's problematic and I think not the best quality.  
11 First, the community board where I live, Community  
12 Board 7 in Queens does not even maintain a website.  
13 And they have problems implementing just a  
14 functioning microphone during their meetings let  
15 alone the capacity to make digital video recordings  
16 and then manage the data that comes out of that.  
17 Second, even if a community board has the Capacity  
18 to use equipment staff would be busy during the  
19 meeting so that they will simply set up a camera in  
20 a locked off safe position with a wide view and at  
21 the speakers that are transacting business in the  
22 meeting would, would hardly be seen. They'll be the  
23 size of pin pricks on the, on the screen. And there  
24 would be no prevision to properly capture and  
25

1  
2 record the sound. That's not the way you want to do  
3 this. Most community boards by the way use a  
4 microphone and an amplifier. From what I've seen  
5 it's generally one microphone at a podium and then  
6 there's an amplifier. At the very least what you  
7 want to do to record this properly is to get a  
8 microphone like this near the loudspeaker that's  
9 emitting the sound. But invariably that will not be  
10 a good place for the camera to be. So we place a  
11 microphone with either a long cable that goes to  
12 the camera or we use a radio transmitter and a  
13 receiver on a camera to get the signal from the one  
14 place to the other. This is not something that a  
15 community board District Manager should be  
16 concerned with learning or implementing or trouble  
17 shooting when inevitably things go wrong on the  
18 day. Plus a single camera really should pan onto  
19 whoever it is that's speaking during a Board  
20 Meeting. And each Community Board is configured  
21 physically differently. I've seen horseshoe  
22 arrangements. I've seen L shaped arrangements or  
23 audience arrangements in terms of how they use the  
24 space. So recording it properly requires an  
25 assessment of the possibilities and some knowledge

1  
2 of the technical solutions that could be brought to  
3 bear. In queens you have 14 community boards,  
4 that's 14 meetings per month at least, 10 months  
5 per year. To record those meetings at a decent  
6 level of quality sparing District Managers the  
7 burden of the labor the city could hire a video  
8 specialist for each borough who would then scout  
9 the venues, liaise with the community boards and be  
10 the point of contact for community boards to call  
11 and say hey we have a meeting next month on this  
12 date and to agree in advance on the placement of  
13 equipment so it's not obtrusive and so forth. And,  
14 and then that person could record some meetings and  
15 hire additional technicians as necessary. But make  
16 an outside person or entity responsible for, for  
17 the proper implementation. I think, like Prudence  
18 said, that that would cost roughly 50, 150 thousand  
19 dollars annually for each borough. Which in the  
20 grand scheme of things to see this done right is  
21 not that much. Lastly if, if the idea here is to  
22 provide greater transparency concerning community  
23 boards why not start by requiring them to maintain  
24 websites and to post all the documents before and  
25 after meetings and all the testimony that comes in,

1  
2 that goes into a black hole and we never see,  
3 perhaps even transcripts of meetings. All of the  
4 other agencies that were required to add video,  
5 streaming, initially had, well they already had  
6 websites and they already had transcripts of their  
7 meetings. You were starting from that foundation  
8 which for many purposes is good enough. And the  
9 video is meant to enhance and embellish that. Thank  
10 you.

11 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Very good ideas.  
12 Thank you. It's a learning process and we all  
13 learn. So I thank you for all your help, your  
14 recommendations, thank you. We have one more  
15 gentleman Charlie McFee. He's our final speaker.

16 You might have seen me walk in late  
17 but, but I haven't missed a meeting because I was  
18 sitting in my office and... I came in on the DataNYC  
19 list and I was able to tune in and... So I'd been  
20 watching and even as I walked down here I was  
21 listening to it on my, my phone all the way until  
22 they made me put my phone down when I walked in  
23 downstairs. My name is Charlie McFee. I'm with the  
24 internet Society, New York Chapter. I was the, I  
25 pioneered webcasting of this committee, you know

1 first recording it and then was helped by Lou  
2 Clapner [sp?] who was the first person to put it up  
3 live followed by Sam Wong who was an intern for  
4 Gale Brewer. So I've always taken a keen interest  
5 in this. I run webcasting for the Internet Society.  
6 Globally we've got like 100 chapters. And, and so  
7 I'm dealing with chapters all over the world that  
8 have very limited resources and in all sorts of  
9 places. And my basic technique is that we have live  
10 stream channels, you know one or more. And so what  
11 I get them is I get a feed from them, I'm, I can  
12 either feed the channel but I manage what they do.  
13 You know I give them this, the client software,  
14 they can feed the channel. Sometimes things go  
15 wrong. The best I can get is someone with a phone  
16 or, or a Skype or something. I Skype them in, I  
17 capture them off the screen, I feed it into the  
18 channel. So what I'm saying is basically I'm  
19 sitting, we've got a central office where we can  
20 grab whatever we can get from these people and then  
21 put it out onto our streams and record it and deal  
22 with it and then slice it and dice it and chop it  
23 up and archive it. So all they have to do is get it  
24 to us. You know we sit there and as long as they  
25

1  
2 can... And you know if, if... The worst situation just  
3 put your phone on and we'll listen to your phones.  
4 You know what I mean or whatever. So what I'm  
5 saying is you can establish an office which  
6 basically grabs the material and puts it out.  
7 Instead of having everybody having their individual  
8 relationship to, to set it up. So that's my basic  
9 suggestion to you. A couple of anecdotes just  
10 recently you know I also webcast a lot of things  
11 in, in the city. I had to do a thing from the new  
12 media center, the city's media center down in  
13 DUMBO. They said oh, we don't have any connection,  
14 you can't webcast from here. And they said sorry no  
15 streaming, no streaming. It's not a problem we just  
16 plug in the, the, the phone, tether to the phone,  
17 away we go. You know with phones, with LTE you  
18 basically can go anywhere you want. If you don't  
19 have cameras or anything you can just set up a  
20 laptop with a you know, and plug it into a phone  
21 and you can go. There's always a way. You know  
22 where there's a will there's a way always. And so  
23 you know flex, you know there's a lot of  
24 flexibility with that. So just on the general  
25 comment on webcasting. Live, the thing about live

1  
2 is you don't always get many viewers but most of  
3 the people who want to see the thing will watch  
4 within 12 hours to 24 hours. They're aware of it,  
5 they miss it, they want to catch up. And that's  
6 where you know... And then after that it's like where  
7 into the distance where people are wanting to find  
8 it and that's where transcripts come in as well  
9 that people can search transcripts and go back and  
10 find something and look. And as far as  
11 accessibility goes for the disabled and all this..  
12 thing you've got to build transcription into your  
13 budget, you know to have, to have that there for  
14 both reasons, for accessibility and for search  
15 ability. And that's my lot.

16 CHAIRPERSON VACCA: Thank you. Thank you  
17 very much. I want to thank Annabel Palma for  
18 staying the entire time and thank her very much for  
19 that. There are no further witnesses so therefore  
20 it is now 3:25 approximately and this hearing is  
21 now adjourned. I thank you all.

22 [gavel]

23

24

25



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           March 4, 2014