

CITY COUNCIL
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

Of the
COMMITTEE ON FINANCE

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September 17, 2019
Start: 10:22 a.m.
Recess: 11:21 a.m.

HELD AT: Committee Room - City Hall

B E F O R E: DANIEL DROMM
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:

Adrienne Adams
Robert Cornegy, Jr.
Laurie Cumbo
Vanessa Gibson
Mark Gjonaj
Barry Grodenchik
Rory Lancman
Farah Louis
Steven Matteo
Francisco Moya
Keith Powers
Helen Rosenthal
Jimmy Van Bramer

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

Michael Hyman, First Deputy Commissioner
Department of Finance

Leslie Zimmerman, Assistant Commission of
Payment Operations
Department of Finance

Sheelah Feinberg, Director of
Intergovernmental Affairs
Department of Finance

Jenna Gladfelter
Live On New York

2 SERGEANT-AT-ARMS: Mic check. Mic check.

3 Today's date is September 17, 2019 on the committee
4 of finance recorded by Stephen Sudowski (sp?).

5 [Background comments]

6 [Gavel]

7 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. Good morning
8 and welcome to today's finance committee meeting. My
9 name is cab Council member Daniel Dromm and I am the
10 Chair of the committee. We have been joined by our
11 colleagues, Council member Farah Louis, Council
12 member Helen Rosenthal, Council member Barry
13 Grodenchik. Today, the committee will be considering
14 four pieces of legislation, all with the aim of
15 improving communication and outrage between the
16 Department of Finance and property owners throughout
17 the city. The four bills are Intro 952, sponsored by
18 Council member Vallone, which would require DOF to
19 provide notice by telephone to property owners who
20 need to renew their senior citizen and disabled
21 homeowner property tax exemption. Intro 1225, which
22 I have sponsored, which would require DOF to make
23 best efforts to collect and maintain the name,
24 telephone number, and email addresses of every
25 property owner in the city or that same information

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2 for an individual authorized to receive
3 communications about the property on behalf of the
4 owner. Three, Intro number 1702, sponsored by
5 Council member Koslowitz, which would require DOF to
6 put a notice on the July 1 property tax bill when
7 such bill is calculated using a tax rate for her
8 prior fiscal year. Then, four, Intros 1705,
9 sponsored by Council member Matteo, which would
10 require DOF to establish and maintain an opt-in
11 system for property owners to receive a receipt when
12 a payment is made toward their statement of account
13 and to notify owners about the availability of such a
14 system. In recent years, under the leadership of
15 Commissioner Jacques Jiha, the Department of Finance
16 has placed a clear emphasis on customer service.
17 This is evidenced in the agency's mission statement
18 to administer the tax and revenue laws fairly,
19 efficiently, and transparently to instill public
20 confidence and encourage compliance while providing
21 exceptional customer service. Because of this focus,
22 DOF has enacted many customer friendly reforms in the
23 past several years. Often times in collaboration
24 with the Council. These initiatives have been wide
25 ranging in scope from the launch of the Office of

2 Taxpayer Advocate to help taxpayers solve their tax
3 issues after they had tried to fix them with DOF on
4 their own to the ability to complete many property
5 tax exemption forms and applications on my to the
6 property tax and interest of furl program that allows
7 low income taxpayers to defer or reduce property tax
8 payments. Nevertheless, the city's property tax
9 system remains a complicated and difficult-- it is
10 complicated and difficult to understand. So, when it
11 comes to providing clarity and transparency to
12 property owners and ensuring that communication is
13 clear and efficient, there is always room for
14 improvement. On intro 1225, in particular, which I
15 have sponsored, I want to stress the importance of
16 being able to communicate with property owners, not
17 just through physical mailings, but to make use of
18 all methods available. When there are time sensitive
19 notices, like information about the lien sale or tax
20 benefit renewals, and it is imperative that we have
21 the ability to get in touch quickly. We have all
22 heard the anecdotes of the constituents who won't
23 open that envelope from the tax collection agency or
24 who have moved or haven't alerted DOF to their new
25 mailing address and, therefore, not received their

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2 notices. I understand that collecting email and
3 telephone information is also a priority for the
4 commissioner and I look forward to continuing to work
5 with him on this effort and on the other issues
6 addressed by the bills under consideration today. Do
7 any of the other bill sponsors wish to make a
8 statement about their legislation? I don't--
9 Council member Vallone? Yep. Would you like to make
10 a statement?

11 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Yes. Chair
12 Dromm. Good morning. Thank you very much,
13 especially for including Intro 952 in today's
14 hearing. As we know, the cost of living in New York
15 City rises every year and every one of our homeowners
16 has called every one of our councilmembers to say we
17 need some help. Every two years, the homeowner's
18 exemption must be renewed and, especially at these
19 times we are trying to defend our most vulnerable
20 population, seniors and disabled homeowners.
21 Currently, the Department of Finance mails out there
22 renewal for every other year, however, if that piece
23 of mail is misplaced, constituents can lose their
24 exemption without any additional notice. For the
25 2019-2020 tax year, of the 39,000 property owners who

2 needed to renew SCHE, which [inaudible 00:5:10] 9.8
3 percent of the benefit recipients failed to renew.
4 So, almost 10 percent of our seniors did not read new
5 because they misplaced-- when I saw back, about was
6 the nuance for this bill. This alarming statistic--
7 trying to take steps to take the next step to see how
8 we can prevent that from happening. Communication is
9 always the key and I believe this bill will address
10 the issue profoundly. We aim to expand the notice
11 requirements to include a simple phone call from the
12 department so as not to leave an eligible senior
13 behind. Intro 952 would require the department of
14 Finance, by no later than November 15 of every year,
15 to provide notice of renewal by phone to property
16 owners required to renew their benefits. Such notice
17 would include, at a minimum, information regarding
18 the mailing of the renewal application to the
19 property owner, the filing deadline for the renewal
20 application, and contact information in the event the
21 renewal application is not received. Once again,
22 thank you, Chair Dromm, and I look forward to hearing
23 the testimonies today.

24 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. Thank you
25 very much. We have been joined by Minority Leader,

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2 Steve Matteo, as well. And we will now hear from the

3 Department of Finance after they are sworn in by

4 counsel.

5 LEGAL COUNSEL: Do you affirm that your

6 testimony will be truthful to the best of your

7 knowledge, information, and belief?

8 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: I do.

9 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you. You may

10 begin.

11 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: Good

12 morning, Chair Dromm, and members of the Committee on

13 Finance. I am Michael Hyman, First Deputy

14 Commissioner of the New York City Department of

15 Finance. I am joined by Leslie Zimmerman and,

16 Assistant Commissioner for Payment Operations and

17 Sheelah Feinberg, Director of Intergovernmental

18 Affairs.

19 DOF's mission is to administer the tax

20 and revenue laws of the city fairly, efficiently, and

21 transparently to instill public confidence and

22 encourage compliance while providing exceptional

23 customer service. This package of bills is in

24 alignment with our mission and we appreciate the

25 Council's desire to help us improve our service and

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2 provide more New Yorkers with the support and the

3 benefits they need. We would like to discuss

4 opportunities to achieve some of the bill's

5 objectives by building on recent DOF initiatives,

6 including the launch of DOF's new property tax system

7 and the expansion of its customer relationship

8 management program. These initiatives have helped us

9 to a better job serving the hundreds of thousands of

10 homeowners, entrepreneurs, motorists, and others who

11 interact with our agency. We welcome the opportunity

12 to work with the Council to refine these bills and

13 leverage existing customer service programs and

14 initiatives at the Department of Finance. I will now

15 address each bill before the committee today.

16 Into 1225. This bill will require the

17 department of finance to make its best efforts to

18 collect contact information for all owners of real

19 property and ensure the information is housed in a

20 computer database to administer the real property

21 tax. The bill further stipulates that these, quote,

22 best efforts shall include, at a minimum, a field

23 soliciting the above listed contact information on

24 all hardcopy and online forms, applications, and

25 other documents related to the recording of any deed

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2 related or mortgage related document or the
3 administration of the real property tax, end quote,
4 and on forms from other property owned interactions
5 with the department. In compliance with Local Law 26
6 of 2018, DOF currently mails new homeowners welcome
7 packages which include information about property
8 taxation, assessment, and the exemptions available to
9 eligible homeowners. This mailing also includes an
10 invitation to sign up for an electronic DOF customer
11 service account. Property owners provide email
12 addresses and telephone numbers as part of
13 registration and owners can use the account to update
14 mailing address information. Approximately 10,000
15 new homeowners receive this mailing each month. The
16 customer relationship management system was
17 established to allow DOF to better serve and satisfy
18 its customers. The nearly 60,000 customers who have
19 created customer service accounts are now able to
20 submit questions and request to DOF online, upload
21 documents related to their inquiries, and track the
22 status of their cases 24 hours a day, seven days a
23 week. Once we have resolved a customer's inquiry,
24 DOF works to update our system based on information
25 provided by the customer to ensure that his or her

2 record is up to date. We are open to exploring new
3 ways to encourage property owners to update their
4 contact information, but we want to steer owners to
5 our customer services portal.

6 Intro 952. This bill will require the
7 Department of Finance to provide notice of SCHE and
8 DHE renewals by telephone no later than November 15th
9 of each year. DOF already conducts a very robust
10 outreach effort to help owners renew their benefits
11 and this, combined with the redesigned and
12 simplification of our renewal application mailings
13 does achieve and 94 percent renewal rate last year.
14 We regularly partner with elected officials and
15 community organizations to host enrollment events and
16 we share lists with Council staff so that you can
17 help us reach constituents who still need to renew.
18 In addition, with the launch of the Department of
19 Finance new property tax system, homeowners can now
20 apply for or renew their tax exemptions online. DOF
21 believes that adding a Robo call will present
22 operational challenges for the agency without
23 reducing commensurate benefits for the customer.
24 Most importantly, DOF is concerned that some
25 homeowners may be alarmed by the calls if they are

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2 perceived as scams as many Robo call scammers prey on

3 seniors and people with disabilities. As such, DOF

4 is opposed to this bill, that we help to continue

5 with the Council increasing the-- to increase the

6 renewal rate even beyond its current 94 percent rate

7 so that no homeowner entitled to property tax

8 exemptions are left behind.

9 Intro 1702. This legislation requires

10 the Department of Finance to send property owners a

11 statement of account with a new language making clear

12 on the July 1 bill that the taxes are based on the

13 calculation used in the tax rate from the prior

14 fiscal year. When prior-year rates are used, which

15 is frequently the case, that the taxes are subject to

16 adjustment upon the adoption of the tax rate for the

17 new fiscal year and that a subsequent bill, issued

18 during the cores of the new tax year a reflect the

19 adjusted amount of tax due in the new tax rate. DOF

20 supports this bill and believes it will increase

21 transparency for taxpayers. We will need to work

22 with Council on language that will be included on the

23 bill so that we do not overwhelm customers with

24 information or add additional pages to the bill.

2 Intro 1705. This legislation would
3 require that Department of Finance provide email or
4 print receipts when customers pay their property tax
5 bills. DOF would also be required to notify owners
6 of the availability of the receipt on their statement
7 of account.

8 I would like to share with the Council
9 what we currently do to notify taxpayers that their
10 payments have been received. Currently, if anyone
11 makes a payment at a DOF business center, the
12 customer will receive a receipt with detailed
13 information about the amount of the payment and the
14 BBL associated with the payment. If a taxpayer
15 chooses to make a payment online, he or she will
16 receive an email receipt of the payment.
17 Furthermore, customers can view their payments and
18 account history's online via the Department of
19 Finances new property tax system at
20 www.nyc.gov/newyorkcityproperty. DOF is working on
21 ways to make it easier for property owners to view
22 and download info on property tax payments made.
23 Finally, DOF is working to enhance the customer
24 service portal, as I referenced earlier. We are
25 working they give customers the option of receiving

2 ongoing updates from the Department on subjects that
3 interest them in the area of property tax exemptions,
4 business taxes, and more. We also plan to introduce
5 a chat feature to answer customer's questions in real
6 time. We believe that this system provides the tool
7 that we need to communicate important information
8 with customers and we can develop ways to give
9 property owners user-friendly access to the
10 information on their property tax payments through
11 the system. We will be continuing to market and
12 improve the portal so that more customers create
13 accounts and build relationships with the department
14 in this way. In summary, the Department of Finance
15 shares the Council's goal to provide better, more
16 efficient, and more transparent service to our
17 customers. Many of these bills build upon the work
18 we have already done to enhance our service and we
19 look forward to partnering with the Council to
20 improve and implement them. Thank you for your
21 continued commitment and partnership and for the
22 opportunity to testify today. I'll be happy to take
23 any questions you have.

24 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you very
25 much, Deputy Commissioner, for that information and

2 we see that you are in agreement with a number of the
3 pieces of legislation. Although, as you said you
4 want to fine tune some of it. So, let me start off
5 by asking you just a couple of questions on the
6 contact information collection. What does DOF
7 currently do to try to collect telephone and email
8 address of property owners or their [inaudible
9 01:13:58]. I know you mentioned one item in your
10 testimony and I think, in the second paragraph you
11 talked about having 60,000 people who signed up for
12 email contact. Can you tell us more? Are there
13 other areas where you have begun to collect that
14 information?

15 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: well, I
16 guess there are two main areas. We are trying to
17 encourage and improve the CRM system I mentioned.
18 So, that should be the customer service portal. I
19 guess the other basic area is that when you do pay by
20 epay, we do collect email information up front. But,
21 I think, in general, we want to work with you to
22 figure out ways to better market the customer service
23 portal because that should be the central place that
24 we are collecting that information. In that does

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2 feed directly into our databases. So, we have that

3 contact information for future purposes.

4 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So, you do pull the

5 contact information from the portal?

6 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: Yes.

7 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. And, I

8 think, in your testimony you also said that you pull

9 test-- you pull email addresses-- let me just go

10 back. Oh. In the welcome packages. Those are sent

11 out to every new tax payer?

12 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: Right.

13 Under the Local Law past last year, any new

14 homeowner, co-op owner, or condo owner receives the

15 welcome package and its, basically, to inform them of

16 information about the property taxes and the

17 exemptions, but we also invite them and we give them

18 a link ride on the-- in a correspondence to go to

19 the-- it's really going to the CRM portal to set up

20 an account. So, it's partially that is part of the

21 marketing to get more people to use it.

22 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Do you know how

23 many people have supplied an email address with the

24 welcome package and do you know how many system wide

25 people's emails you have in your system?

2 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: I think
3 I-- we do have different systems. Let me get back
4 to you because I think some of them overlap. Like
5 there could be people who are signing up through CRM
6 and through either the welcome letters or adjuster
7 acts and we also have, again, email information
8 through payment mechanisms. But I can get you a more
9 definitive number.

10 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: All right. On the
11 CRM application that is currently available for use
12 on the DOF's website, cannot owners register to
13 receive notices and bills or is it limited to
14 property owners or their official designee?

15 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: I'm
16 sorry. Could you say that again?

17 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Sure. On the CRM
18 application that is currently available for use on
19 DOF's website, can nonowners register to receive
20 notices and bills or is it limited to property owners
21 and or their official designee?

22 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: We do
23 have mechanisms for nonowners to receive it or you
24 can designate a representative. CRM, I think, is
25 designed primarily for the owner or direct rep. we

2 do have other-- like if you wanted to have a
3 representative, we also-- I mean, a legal
4 representative, we also need a power of attorney to
5 be submitted with it. So, there are various
6 mechanisms to sign up, you know, the nonowner. Um,
7 but we also want to make sure that the owner is
8 authenticated for direct correspondence.

9 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. So, I'll
10 just know also that when a user is prompted to update
11 their mailing address, neither the user's property
12 address or the mailing address is readily available
13 on the website or visible. Is that intentional?

14 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: You can--
15 Basically, there's two mechanisms. The property
16 address is kind of the official address. So, that
17 goes through our land records to the vet to make sure
18 of the property information is correct. Mailing
19 address is, as long as someone can authenticate that
20 they are related to the property, can be updated more
21 straightforwardly because that is, basically, just a
22 correspondence mechanism.

23 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So how does a
24 property owner no when they need to update something
25

2 as-- can they see that if-- so they know whether or
3 not to update it?

4 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: Well, I
5 guess, the-- you know, basically, where-- It's
6 proactively of people have a change of address they
7 can notify us. If we receive-- sometimes if we mail
8 it to an address and we are not getting-- we get a
9 returned mail, we will send it to the property
10 address to just notify them that there is some-- you
11 know, were not getting-- the mailing address may not
12 be correct.

13 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. Good. Are
14 there any hurdles that the DOF has identified with
15 respect to collecting and maintaining the
16 information?

17 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: I'm
18 sorry. I need you to repeat it.

19 LESLIE ZIMMERMAN: Any hurdles that we have
20 for collecting the information.

21 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: You know,
22 basically, it's, basically, marketing it. We are
23 trying to improve the portals to- You know, look, for
24 the change of address, for example, we are trying to
25 make it a much more automated process, but part of

2 that would also be having filters to make sure that a
3 new address is-- if we're doing it automatically,
4 that it's legitimate. And the other thing we're
5 trying to do with a lot of address information is
6 upfront screening of the addresses that they meet
7 standard protocols. So, it's a really, I think, more
8 of a marketing issue to expand the knowledge that
9 this is available.

10 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thanks,
11 Commissioner. I was glad to see that you couldn't
12 hear, as well. Often times there's an echo here and
13 I feel it was me who couldn't hear, as well. So, I
14 appreciate that. Believe me.

15 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: And have
16 a little head cold with a little congestion.

17 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Yes. Let me ask
18 you some questions about the payment applications.
19 Property owners are able to pay their bills online in
20 person at a DOF business center and by mail. For
21 each of these methods, can you walk us through step-
22 by-step how the money gets from the taxpayer until it
23 is supplied to their account? So, we are interested
24 in knowing what happens, how long it takes to be
25 posted. That process.

2 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: I'll give
3 you your payment operations person.

4 LESLIE ZIMMERMAN: I'll try. Thank you.
5 So these are generalities. When somebody comes into
6 a business center, they either have a bell or they
7 present their block and lot. That information gets
8 scanned then by the cashier and it is an automatic
9 update to their account. In the taxpayer will see
10 that the next day. So, it is an overnight process.
11 The payment gets made on the Internet depending on
12 the time of day. If it's like before 3 o'clock, that
13 payment gets processed that same day and the
14 homeowner can see that payment processed immediately.
15 If it is after five, then they will say at the next
16 day. In both of those cases, they get a receipt upon
17 payment. In the case of sending us in a payment,
18 they mail in the payment to the lockbox which
19 process-- opens and sorts and processes the mail.
20 It generally takes about two days to get to the--
21 from the post office to the lockbox and it probably
22 takes a day to process. And so, then, that payment
23 gets data captured using the date on the envelope and
24 within the day-- in the day that they got-- that
25 the postmark is credited as the day they get the

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2 credit for the money. And then there canceled check
3 is the receipt.

4 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Are there times of
5 the year where it takes longer? Where there is a
6 higher volume of checks coming in or emails or
7 payments being made online?

8 LESLIE ZIMMERMAN: Maybe not so much online
9 because I think that that process works whether it is
10 peak season or not peak season. But I'm sure the
11 human touch slows down a wee bit when it is a peak
12 season and there is a lot of mail coming in.

13 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: At the third-party
14 transfer hearing that the Council held in July, we
15 heard testimony from a gentleman who made a property
16 tax payment by mail on behalf of his mother. He
17 testified that the DOF deposited the check and that
18 the money was deducted from his bank account, but
19 that the money was not applied to his mother's
20 property account. Can you explain why this might
21 have occurred there and are there ever times when you
22 will accept money, but delay applying it to an
23 account?

24 LESLIE ZIMMERMAN: So, I'm thinking the
25 only way that would happen is if there was a human

2 error or the borough block and lot was not visible on
3 the coupon or on the check and nobody knew where to
4 put-- where to deposit it properly.

5 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. Can you
6 please provide the committee with an update on the
7 rollout of the new property tax system?

8 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: Okay.

9 So, I think, as you know, we launched a new property
10 tax system last spring and the one big milestone was
11 our most recent billing cycle. This statement of
12 account that went out in June. And, generally, we
13 were very pleased with the rollout. There have been
14 transition issues. I think one of the things we are
15 trying to do is just respond to any issues that come
16 up as quickly as possible. But, systematically, we
17 think it's been a success and, you know, the main
18 feature that this will provide for finance going
19 forward is that this is an enterprise system. So,
20 it's something we can build on. We can, you know,
21 develop more interactions with our other systems.
22 You know, it's a multi-step process, but we feel that
23 the initial launch went successfully.

24 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So, are there any
25 significant milestones that have not yet been

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2 achieved in the planned rollout? And, if so, can you
3 describe the timeline for those?

4 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: Oh, yeah.

5 The main milestones for operational are kind of
6 driven by the calendar of when payments are needed to
7 go out. The notice of property value will have to go
8 out in January. So, you know, we're both the
9 quarterly and semiannual billings and that-- and the
10 other thing is the enhancements of functionality.

11 So, we think it is a major success that now we have
12 e-filing capability for exemption programs so that
13 people can go online. I mean, there's two friends to
14 that. One is the technology. The other part is we
15 are working to simplify a lot of the application
16 processes so that documents that are submitted become
17 minimized. You know, a lot of that is through
18 backend checking. That if we have information from
19 other sources, like personal income tax returns on
20 income, then we can do some pre-vetting that we know
21 certain populations are eligible. They just have to,
22 then, check a box. But as far as PTS has allowed it
23 to be any filing process.

24 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Do you plan on
25 putting back the data that used to be available

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2 publicly on the new system currently and OPV

3 information only goes back to fiscal 2011, tax bill

4 information only goes back to fiscal 2010, and

5 assessment role information only goes back to fiscal

6 2014.

7 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: Well,

8 well working on two fronts. One too, you know, make

9 sure data is available. As far as going back, we are

10 trying to analyze where we can go back and provide

11 information that, you know, customers may have been

12 used to getting in the past. One feature we are now

13 unrolling is more AV historical information that

14 could be available. I mean, so, yes. There are some

15 issues. We are in transition. We are trying to

16 provide-- You know, we're both trying to evaluate

17 what customers really need, not just historically

18 what was given. And so, we are trying to get

19 feedback from a lot of interest groups as to the data

20 they need. And then, the other front is we are

21 moving data to the open data portal so that everyone

22 can use it. I mean, I think, the one hurdle with the

23 open data portal is it needs good indexing. So, we

24 are also trying to make sure that if you need

25 information and it is available and it is not

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2 directly on PTS, you can go to it open data portal
3 and get it. But as far as specifics, we are
4 currently evaluating and working with interest groups
5 to try to provide more information.

6 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So, is that how you
7 are soliciting feedback? By working with those
8 interest groups?

9 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: You can
10 get information through PTS directly and you can go
11 to the open data portal for historical information.

12 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: In July, the New
13 York Post ran an article that was critical of the PTS
14 rollout. One of the problems that they noted was
15 that there was an old unknown charges were popping
16 up, plus interest. This was an issue that was also
17 brought to my office's attention through a number of
18 constituent complaints. I want to thank Sheelah
19 Feinberg for helping me with the constituent cases,
20 as well. But did you identify this as a problem that
21 was related to the PTS rollout and, if so, how
22 widespread was that issue and what is being done to
23 correct it?

24 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: Well, I
25 think some of the issues we've seen with PTS actually

2 reflects data and conversion issues with the old
3 system. You know, things are popping up that we are
4 trying to clean up. So, there was a major conversion
5 data cleanup, but some of the issues that we kind of
6 dealing with right now are just cleaning up data that
7 really is historical data that had issues in the
8 first place. So, I think that we are, pretty much--
9 you know, we do have a queue. We have a regular
10 group that is going through. We've tried to be
11 attentive anytime somebody raises an issue. In fact,
12 often what we are doing is bringing in interested
13 parties to discuss with us the specifics. So, before
14 you can tell, is in an isolated issue or is it a more
15 systemic issue? And, at this point, I think we are
16 pretty fast in addressing the issues that are coming
17 up.

18 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: On this case I
19 think it was that interest was charged on a
20 retroactive payment that was made already or whatever
21 and I think we actually had actually even more than
22 one case. I think we have heard about three cases
23 over. Did you find any other case is or was it just
24 specific to those three cases?

2 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: Are you
3 familiar with this?

4 SHEELAH FEINBERG: I think I would have to
5 know more specifics, but I think what we were-- I
6 think it's just what Michael was just referring to.
7 You know, we always ask when constituents come in
8 with these kinds of cases or any other cases related
9 to PTS is is it an isolated situation or are there
10 other similar cases? And when we can take through
11 with our working group-- we have a working group
12 that has a call every morning to go through some of
13 these issues. We can fine tune our response and fine
14 tune it just where the problem is occurring. I think
15 in your case, we were finding some other cases and I
16 think, as Michael alluded to earlier, we were able to
17 solve those cases, as well.

18 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. I mean, it
19 was a minimal amount of money, but, still, taxpayers
20 did complain. So-- Okay. What was the final cost
21 of PTS and do you anticipate any additional ongoing
22 costs?

23 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: I think
24 the costs of PTS, and we're combining both the
25 capital plus personal services that includes finance

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2 staff, is currently at 41 million dollars. I think
3 the main costs going forward are just maintenance
4 costs. So, that includes the vendor charges, plus
5 personnel costs, plus any contractors that were used
6 as part of the transition. So, the bulk of the costs
7 has been, you know-- that's the money. And then,
8 ongoing there is just like ongoing maintenance costs.

9 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. With the
10 implementation of PTS and the development of the CRM
11 and the new ability to fill out forms and
12 applications online, the DOF now has much more
13 customer service functionality. When was the last
14 time you did a holistic review of the website design
15 to ensure it is customer friendly? I think sometimes
16 when you go on, you have to click one area and then
17 go to another area and then finally you wind up going
18 to a third area or a fourth area. So, is any work
19 being done on that?

20 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: take
21 that. Well, I do say-- one thing I think the CRM
22 portal needs to be highlighted more. Go ahead.

23 SHEELAH FEINBERG: So I would start off
24 with thank you for bringing that to our attention.
25 You know, we are all really excited by CRM and the

2 potential that it has to get our customer information
3 and for people to really join the 21st century and
4 for DOF to join the 21st century in meeting the
5 customers where they are. For the website
6 specifically, you know, we are always looking at it
7 to how we can improve it. There is a lot of
8 information that we need to post by laws. By local
9 law and state law. So, sometimes I think that crowds
10 the information on the website, but that the welcome
11 suggestion. I think we were just talking beforehand
12 how we could highlight CRM on the website. On the
13 homepage.

14 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And when you have
15 done website redesign in the past, did you use in-
16 house folks to do it or did you contracted out?

17 SHEELAH FEINBERG: I believe we did in-
18 house.

19 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: DOF publishes to
20 property tax guides for class I and class II
21 homeowners which were designed before much of this
22 additional functionality was added to the website.
23 Have you considered updating those guys to better
24 reflect all the tools available to property owners
25 online?

2 SHEELAH FEINBERG: So, I would just backup
3 a little bit more and say all of our materials are
4 constantly under review. We want to use plain
5 language when we are talking about our tax rates, our
6 NOPV's. We are always constantly reviewing our
7 documents and how we can make them more accessible to
8 the general public and to our customers. To your
9 question about the class I and class II guides, that
10 is something that is going through review right now.
11 I think it went through review previously. The NOPV
12 also went through some review and we launched a new
13 NOPV. So, again, that's something that we would be
14 thinking about. I'll just told there.

15 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. You recently
16 revised to the notice of property value forms in an
17 effort to increase clarity. But this also made these
18 forms three pages long rather than two pages long.
19 You spoke a little bit about that before. How much
20 did this extra page add to the mailing cost of those
21 NOPV's?

22 SHEELAH FEINBERG: We would have to go back
23 to our vendor to get an exact quote for you, but I
24 think it would affect the postage cost and it would
25 effect-- you know, and obviously we do our mailings

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2 to 1.3 properties. So, you know, I don't know
3 exactly, but it could be significant. It could not.
4 I don't know.

5 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. And is there
6 any consideration to similarly update the format of
7 the property tax bills to improve clarity?

8 SHEELAH FEINBERG: Yes. That is certainly
9 something that we want to address to improve clarity.
10 I think a lot of people have a hard time
11 understanding where the exemptions fit into the tax
12 bills and how much they currently owe. As a friendly
13 reminder, when you go to PTS, you can see your
14 current status of your account. So, you can see on
15 PTS exactly what you owe and I think there is
16 sometimes a lack of when the tax bills go out. So,
17 it is just mirroring that.

18 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. I want to
19 say that we have been joined by Majority Leader
20 Cumbo, Council members Powers, Lancman, and Gjonaj.
21 And we have questions from Council members Matteo,
22 Vallone, and Grodenchik. So we'll go now to Minority
23 Leader Matteo.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER MATTEO: Thank you, Chair
25 Dromm. I just want to talk about the receipt for

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2 payment. I think in the testimony you said

3 definitely the one time you offer a receipt is when

4 someone pays in person and they get a paper receipt,

5 I assume? Yes?

6 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: You can

7 get-- When you pay in person, you get-- When you

8 epay, you do get an acknowledgement of the payment.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER MATTEO: I'm sorry?

10 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: I guess,

11 when you pay in person, you get a receipt. When you

12 epay, you also get an email acknowledgment of the

13 payment.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER MATTEO: Is that a

15 downloadable receipt or is that just an email that

16 says you paid it?

17 LESLIE ZIMMERMAN: No. It's a downloadable

18 receipt that's electronic.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER MATTEO: That's attached to

20 the email or embedded in the email?

21 LESLIE ZIMMERMAN: It's a confirmation that

22 you've made your--

23 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Is your mic--

24 LESLIE ZIMMERMAN: Sorry. It's a

25 confirmation that you have made your payment.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER MATTEO: Is that-- but is

3 that an actual receipt--

4 LESLIE ZIMMERMAN: A payment receipt.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER MATTEO: or--

6 LESLIE ZIMMERMAN: It's a receipt.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER MATTEO: just a confi-- I

8 think conf-- I view confirmations and receipts are

9 two different things.

10 LESLIE ZIMMERMAN: What would--

11 COUNCIL MEMBER MATTEO: Is it just saying

12 like, hey, you paid 50 dollars today or is it an

13 actual I can download a receipt that says that I--

14 LESLIE ZIMMERMAN: You can download the

15 receipt and it says I paid 50 dollars today to this

16 block and lot on this time--

17 COUNCIL MEMBER MATTEO: Okay.

18 LESLIE ZIMMERMAN: on this day.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER MATTEO: So, when a mortgage

20 company or a non-property owner pays property taxes

21 on behalf of the owner, is there receipt of any

22 confirmation of the payment or you have to look

23 online once that is made?

24 LESLIE ZIMMERMAN: So, your pay by check?

25 No.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER MATTEO: Well--

3 LESLIE ZIMMERMAN: If you pay by check--

4 COUNCIL MEMBER MATTEO: the mortgage
5 company could--

6 LESLIE ZIMMERMAN: you are going to get
7 back your canceled check. If you're paying
8 electronically, then you have to go online.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER MATTEO: But I'm saying a
10 lot of homeowners, especially in my district, pay
11 their mortgage-- the mortgage pays those, so there
12 is no receipt or anything. You just have to check
13 online--

14 LESLIE ZIMMERMAN: That's correct.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER MATTEO: that it was
16 actually paid.

17 LESLIE ZIMMERMAN: That's true.

18 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: Although
19 one-- That's one thing we are working on. Like in
20 our property tax system, there is a page that you can
21 see of payments being made and where they are
22 applied. So, we are trying to convert that into a
23 receipt type document so that you can go online and
24 get a record that, for like the most recent quarter a
25 payment has been credited to that account.

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER MATTEO: But that's not

3 instant, right? That's--

4 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: Well

5 that's--

6 COUNCIL MEMBER MATTEO: Like how long can

7 you see that? Every quarter, I guess, you're saying?

8 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: Well, you

9 go into the portal. There's a page you open up.

10 Right now, if you go into a page-- I think it's the

11 account history page-- you can see that, for this

12 corner, I owed 3000 dollars. A payment was 3000

13 dollars was made. So your balance is zero. So, what

14 we're trying to do is make that into a more user-

15 friendly format so you could have a document that you

16 could download and print out.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER MATTEO: Okay. Do you

18 know-- And I don't know if you know this answer, but

19 do you know the percentage of properties that usually

20 pay taxes by their mortgage?

21 LESLIE ZIMMERMAN: Maybe half?

22 COUNCIL MEMBER MATTEO: Half?

23 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: Half.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER MATTEO: Okay. I want to

25 talk a little bit about property tax overpayments.

2 So, when someone pays an overpayment on their bill
3 may be through their mortgage or they just made an
4 overpayment, what exactly does finance do with that
5 overpayment? Do they refund it? Do they give or
6 receive that there was an overpayment? Do they apply
7 it to the next bill?

8 LESLIE ZIMMERMAN: We do all of the above.
9 So, if you owe us money for a prior period, we take
10 that overpayment and we apply it to your older debt.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER MATTEO: Automatically?

12 LESLIE ZIMMERMAN: Yeah.

13 COUNCIL MEMBER MATTEO: Okay.

14 LESLIE ZIMMERMAN: As long as you continue
15 to own the house. Right? There is no change in
16 ownership.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER MATTEO: As long as there is
18 no change in ownership, if I pay 100 dollars extra on
19 my property tax bill--

20 LESLIE ZIMMERMAN: But you owe me money
21 from two years ago, we're--

22 COUNCIL MEMBER MATTEO: You will--

23 LESLIE ZIMMERMAN: going to take that
24 money--

2 COUNCIL MEMBER MATTEO: You will add that,
3 without telling you what to do--

4 LESLIE ZIMMERMAN: I will.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER MATTEO: with that
6 overpayment.

7 LESLIE ZIMMERMAN: That's correct. And if
8 you owe us no money and you have a strict
9 overpayment, we'll refund it.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER MATTEO: And you'll-- So
11 you won't apply it to the next bill no matter what?

12 LESLIE ZIMMERMAN: Usually we'll refund it.
13 It's better.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER MATTEO: If the person says,
15 can you apply this--

16 LESLIE ZIMMERMAN: Oh, yes. We can apply
17 it.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER MATTEO: But it has to
19 come--

20 LESLIE ZIMMERMAN: Yes.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER MATTEO: from us.

22 LESLIE ZIMMERMAN: Yes.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER MATTEO: Right?

24 LESLIE ZIMMERMAN: Yes.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER MATTEO: The request comes--

3 So, if I say please put 200 dollars towards my next
4 bill--

5 LESLIE ZIMMERMAN: My next bill. Yes.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER MATTEO: Okay. Okay. Thank
7 you.

8 LESLIE ZIMMERMAN: Okay.

9 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you. Now we
10 have questions from Council member Vallone.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Thank you,
12 Chair. Good morning, everyone. I think we are all
13 on the same page. We are all trying to create user
14 accessibility on different fronts and generational
15 access as the system changes. My bill is pretty
16 simple about an additional phone call, but as we talk
17 to this morning, I think more ideas percolate on the
18 comments that you said and the Chair brought up. So,
19 the welcome package, how is the information-- How
20 are you getting the information to provide the
21 welcome package? Where has that information coming
22 from that that is being presented?

23 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: Well, the
24 welcome letter, basically, has basic information and
25

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2 links to where you can go to get additional
3 information in and--

4 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: No. I know
5 what's on the package, but how did you know to send
6 it to me?

7 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: Oh. We,
8 basically, it's for transfer ta-- transfer
9 information. You know, basically, we look at, from
10 our Acris system who is purchasing properties.
11 Again, it's co-op donors-- It started with
12 homeowners and condo owners. We expanded it to co-op
13 owners even though the p-- they are shares of--

14 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: So, is it the
15 burden or the notice on you through Acris to
16 determine that information? Because where I'm going
17 is after doing 25 years of closings, the time is a
18 very confusing time for anyone, whether they are
19 purchasing their first home or reselling their
20 lifelong home and are a seller or a senior is getting
21 additional financing or reverse mortgage. It's the
22 only time in their life you're going to have a
23 lawyer, title company, and a bank--

24 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: Uh-hm.

25

2 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: at the
3 person's disposal. And I am thinking we create a
4 mandatory document or a 30 day period that the portal
5 must be created at the time of closing and have the
6 assistance of those professional created for the
7 actual buyer--

8 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: Uh-hm.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: so that that
10 nervous process and understanding this process,
11 especially with the generation of my seniors or all
12 our seniors, can have that assistance. Because, once
13 that closing is over and once that clock is over,
14 they are on their own. And I will just tell you from
15 my years of doing elder law for 85 years with our
16 family, we may have this conversation, but time after
17 time people come in and they just are overwhelmed,
18 especially our seniors. So, no matter what we
19 create, this might be good for the new generation,
20 but those above 60 are not going to be able to handle
21 this process. So, I'm thinking we create the
22 assistance for our seniors at a time when they are
23 coming for a need, whether it is a refinance for a
24 transfer to a trust or some type of family familiar
25 situation where a power of attorney is created where

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2 DOF then has a form that we make mandatory that

3 either a title company, the banks, the lawyers, must

4 fill out similar to with Acris--

5 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: Uh-hm.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: to be part of

7 that portal system. I mean--

8 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: Uh-hm.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: your kids

10 can't even join a sports league now without

11 creating-- you can't get on the field without first

12 being part of that online system. You can go to high

13 school. You can't go to college. You can't get

14 financial assistance without being part of whatever

15 portal system you are doing. So, I think we can take

16 that staff then it wouldn't be overly burdensome if

17 we take those opportunities, like a closing, to make

18 it mandatory so that you get that email information,

19 you look at that critical information sent and then,

20 boom, the packets go out automatically. I mean, the

21 phone call was just-- I can't tell you how many

22 phone calls we all get as council members on fear of

23 losing their STAR or enhanced STAR or SCHE or the DHE

24 or whatever it is that they have held onto.

25 Disability, veterans exemptions, their spouse passed

2 away. Am I going to lose my husband's benefit? To
3 the end of time, those questions are going to come.
4 So I think what we are trying to do is not create
5 another level, the burdensome on the homeowners. We
6 are trying to assist them to this new system. And I
7 think those are some ideas. I just want to get your
8 thoughts on, maybe, taking that opportunity to make
9 this a requirement at the time of any of these
10 transactions. That the information you need for this
11 portal is created at that time.

12 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: Uh-hm. I
13 think it's an idea worth pursuing. I mean, we would
14 need to just kind of look at it the more is how do we
15 do it systematically? I mean, so, for example, the
16 welcome letter. We now have a protocol as to when a
17 transfer occurs. It has an automatic, you know,
18 process that is triggered. So, I hear your pulley of
19 expanding it to other types of transactions that are
20 being done. So, I think it is worth looking at and,
21 if we can do it systematically, we should discuss it.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: Yeah. I think
23 your hope there is making it a title requirement.
24 So, we would have to work with the title companies to
25 make that form mandatory. Because we passed

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2 legislation before and, unless the title company--

3 then it becomes mandatory within the banking

4 association and puts that part of their packets when

5 they trained their agents, it never happens.

6 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: Uh-hm.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: We did this

8 restrictive covenants. We made it mandatory that it

9 be listed. We worked on this together. It doesn't

10 happen--

11 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: Uh-hm.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER VALLONE: unless the

13 title company works with, at the time of the

14 transaction, putting it on the list for the

15 Department of Finance to see. It's a very similar

16 situation. So, I would just offer a bad and I think

17 the Chair for addressing this because it really is,

18 especially in districts like ours and all of Queens

19 and throughout the city, the number one phone call.

20 And it's a senior in a time of need and someone has

21 passed away or they can't handle things anymore and

22 they see these new forms or they didn't get the mail

23 or they didn't get a phone call. The next thing you

24 know, they are losing a key exemption that is keeping

25

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2 them in the house or their condo. And that is the

3 last thing we want to do. So, thank you, Mr. Chair.

4 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Council member

5 Grodenchik? Council member Gjonaj?

6 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: Thank you, Chair.

7 Good morning.

8 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: Good

9 morning.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: It's my

11 understanding that roughly 120,000-- 10,000 new

12 homeowners receive emails-- receive this mailing

13 each month, you age, from the Department of Finance.

14 Is that about roughly--

15 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: Well,

16 they receive a letter from us encouraging them to

17 apply for benefits and to sign up for our CRM systems

18 so we have their email address. So it just reflects

19 what our data shows as to the transfers that are

20 occurring per month.

21 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: cap of roughly the

22 120,000 mailings that go out, what is the return rate

23 where people actually take advantage of registering

24 online?

25

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2 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: Yes.

3 Well, we-- Do we have that? We can-- we will get

4 that.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: I'm sorry?

6 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: So we,

7 basically, have 120,000 going up. As far as how many

8 are responding--

9 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: Uh-hm.

10 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: on the

11 online, we need to look at the data. We just have an

12 overall number, right? Of how many accounts we have.

13 SHEELAH FEINBERG: Right. We only know the

14 current number of account holders with a CRM account.

15 We don't know how they came to us, yet. We are still

16 figuring out in fine tuning our tracking systems, but

17 I think that is something we would definitely want to

18 be interested in. You make a great point. 120,000

19 letters are going out. How many are prompted to--

20 While we prompt them, how many take action to enter

21 into a CRM account? So, we will look into that. We

22 don't have the exact number right now.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: But, Chair, this

24 would be important to figure out exactly why it is

25 the juice worth the squeeze in the form of mailings

2 and, if we are not getting the return rate that we
3 actually need, then we need to be coming up with
4 alternative ways. And Robo calls and other manners,
5 as my colleague also mentioned of mandatory portals
6 being part of the process. So--

7 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: And one
8 thing we're trying to get a closer look at is how do
9 we incentivize by having more services on the portal
10 so that-- you know, I think that at first-- Right
11 now, it's a place you can go to get certain
12 information to ask questions and get responses. As
13 we said, we want to roll out more chat mechanism man
14 we also want to make it a gateway that it is a place
15 you can go to get access to other sites and DOF that
16 might be valuable. So, we do think-- The data is
17 important, but we think that as we expand the
18 functionality, there would also be more incentives
19 for people to sign up.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: And what is your
21 position on the Robo calling or phone notifications?
22 It doesn't sound like you are very excited--

23 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: Well,
24 yeah.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: [inaudible
3 00:45:05]

4 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: We
5 certainly appreciate that phone calls can be an
6 effective way to reach people. We are concerned, as
7 most taxing jurisdictions are, with robo calling
8 because, as people know, you get a lot of robo calls
9 and they can-- some not-- they are not all
10 illegitimate, but they can be, you know, a scam
11 device. So, I think, you know, the IRS, for example,
12 will not do a Robo call as an initial correspondence
13 with someone. New York State tax and finance won't
14 do it and we, as a taxing agency, are concerned
15 about, you know, scam potential. That said, we do
16 think it could be effective to-- I mean, once we
17 target a population of noncompliant others, yeah.
18 So, basically, last year when we did the renewal, I
19 think there were four correspondences that went out.
20 We simplified the application process. This year it
21 will be online. All right? So, the SCIE or the
22 SCHE is a two year process. So, the next time we
23 renew, it will be any easier process. We tried to
24 make it very streamlined to some basic questions.
25 Are you still, you know, resident where you are and,

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2 you know, are you income eligible? And so, the
3 compliance rate was greater than 90 percent. But,
4 for the remaining population, you know, working with
5 the Council, phone calls can be effective. We are
6 concerned about upfront Robo calling tens of
7 thousands of seniors and disabled people because we
8 think there is a scam potential or they may be
9 intimidated by it.

10 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: But those scams can
11 be done with or without your Robo calling and they
12 currently are being done, as you pointed out. The
13 IRS scams and other scans that have targeted seniors.
14 This is about providing information and if it's just
15 a reminder that your renewal for the benefit that you
16 are entitled, whether it be the SCRIE or sh-- the
17 senior discount, the school tax, and whatnot, this is
18 just information that we are providing them that they
19 should know and a reminder that they have to renew
20 their forms.

21 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: No. I
22 appreciate what you're saying. I guess we are
23 concerned about recipients being a little bit
24 intimidated by getting the calls if they are not
25 clear of what it is. And, again, to us, it's like

2 the general renewal rate is high, so we should be
3 targeting the people who are not responding. I mean,
4 some of the nonresponders are no longer eligible.
5 But, for the ones that should be getting the benefit,
6 you know, we should have a more targeted outreach
7 campaign, which could involve phone calls. But it
8 won't-- But it will be after, from our perspective,
9 after we have got in the bull good people to renew.
10 Name, last year, for example, a lot of people-- we
11 were surprised, you know, when we began the outrage
12 how many people renewed early. We do attribute that
13 to the simplification of the renewal process. But it
14 wasn't like people waited until the last month. A
15 big chunk of the population renewed within the first
16 few months of the first letter.

17 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: One of the issues
18 that is constantly brought to my attention,
19 especially by those seniors who no longer-- they may
20 have mortgages that don't pay their real estate--
21 that don't have someone paying their real estate
22 taxes for them. The concern is can you please find
23 out if my payment was received and applied to my
24 account correctly? They don't receive a receipt
25 indicating that their taxes were paid. We have all

2 heard of terrible circumstances where a payment was
3 made. It was incorrectly applied to another account.
4 The block and lot didn't match or was illegible. And
5 we have seen these nightmares. Numerous seniors come
6 to me regularly asking to confirm that their tax
7 payment was applied to their homes so that they have
8 a peace of mind. Why are we mailing them receipts?

FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: Well, I

guess we're trying-- We're taking a multi-step approach. We're trying to leverage what we can do quickly and the one thing we can do quickly is to make sure that receipts are more-- look like more like receipts. That you have a document that kind of say, for a period a payment has been made. We are working longer term to try to get to a point where there could be notifications. It's just, to be honest, it's a bigger technology lift. It's not so easy to have a system that does the automatic notifications. So we are scoping out what the steps are, but as a near term, we're trying to make sure that the receipt is available to anyone who goes online. Right now, there are ways that you can see payments that are being credited. I certainly appreciate that it's not the simplest process and,

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2 for seniors, it might be confusing. So the first

3 step is to have something which is a standalone, in

4 effect, receipt that a payment has been made. It

5 will be posted on our property tax system. And then

6 we're trying to figure out ways to make it easier for

7 people to get to that site. Mailing it out is

8 something we would like to do, but it is just a

9 longer-term technology project

10 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: We'll use the

11 technology when we can, but there are those that

12 don't use technology that are concerned. My check

13 went out. My check cleared. I can see that the

14 money was pulled out of my account, but I don't--

15 I'm not sure that it was applied to my home. And we

16 have had-- I'm sure we've all heard of the

17 nightmares where tax payments were applied

18 incorrectly to a different block and lot. They just

19 need a piece of mind. And I understand their

20 concerns and it doesn't take much to make a senior

21 feel uncomfortable and uncertain, especially when

22 this is probably the single largest investment and

23 the only asset that they own.

24 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: Uh-hm.

25

2 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: To receive a simple
3 receipt I don't think would be to demand Dean or a
4 burden on the Department of Finance.

5 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: Well, as
6 I mentioned, we appreciate what you are saying and we
7 do support what you're saying. It's just going to be
8 we have to-- and we can talk to your staff about
9 her. We have to go through steps to actually
10 implement, A, having never see in a format that is
11 user-friendly, B, trying to provide access to that
12 receipt to anyone who wants it. And then the next
13 step would be having more notification process. But
14 it is, from an IT perspective, it is kind of a multi-
15 step process. So, we can give you more feedback once
16 we have the IT people we discussed, as to the
17 timeline pad it's not an overnight kind of
18 functionality we can provide. The first step we are
19 trying to provide is make sure receipts are available
20 for any payment made. And then work on ways of
21 giving people greater access to it. So, if you have
22 somebody who is working with the senior and they want
23 to just easily pull up the information from our site,
24 they can get it. And then the notification is the
25 next step from an IT perspective.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: I understand your
3 concerns, but I don't think it's this complicated as
4 you make it. Normally it just says paid.

5 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: Uh-hm.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: Payment received.
7 The dollar amount. The date it was applied and your
8 next payment due date is blank. It's a basic receipt
9 used in almost every field and industry out there in
10 the private sector.

11 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: Uh-hm.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: I don't think it's
13 that complicated from a public sector.

14 SHEELAH FEINBERG: Agreed. I would just,
15 again, mentioned for your office to know, when you
16 are working with seniors, you can go to the PTS
17 system and you can see that the accounts have been
18 made-- or excuse me. The payment has been made and
19 the current status of the seniors account. I mean, I
20 think as Michael already iterated, it is a process
21 that we have to take. It is not an overnight stop of
22 your fingers solution. We hear you and we will
23 address it.

24 COUNCIL MEMBER GJONAJ: Thank you. Thank
25 you, Chair.

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2 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you very

3 much. I want to say that we have been joined by

4 Council member Moya and Van Bramer and I want to

5 thank this panel for coming in and giving testimony

6 today. We will now hear from members of the public.

7 Thank you again for coming in.

8 FIRST DEPUTY COMMISSIONER HYMAN: Thank

9 you.

10 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Okay. Jenna

11 Gladfelter from Live On New York.

12 JENNA GLADFELTER: Hi, there. Am I the

13 only member here?

14 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Yep. That's fine.

15 JENNA GLADFELTER: All right.

16 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Whenever you are

17 ready--

18 JENNA GLADFELTER: Fantastic.

19 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: you can begin.

20 Yep.

21 JENNA GLADFELTER: Okay. Hi. Jenna

22 Gladfelter from Live On New York. Thank you, Chair

23 Dromm, and the full finance committee for the

24 opportunity to testify today. Live On New York would

25 also like to express our sincere appreciation for the

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2 Council's ongoing commitment to older New Yorkers.

3 For 40 years, live On New York has been supporting

4 community-based organizations throughout the city

5 that provide core services to older adults to allow

6 them to thrive in their communities. To better

7 support older adults and our base of more than 100

8 members, Live On New York administrators the citywide

9 outreach program that educates, screens, and enrolls

10 older New Yorkers in critical benefits and

11 entitlements such as SNAP, SCRIE, and SCHE. Our team

12 works tirelessly to help older adults through the

13 application and reenrollment process and witnesses

14 firsthand the positive impacts of these programs.

15 Due to this work, Live On New York would like to

16 specifically provide comment on Intro 952. We

17 applaud Council member Vallone for introducing

18 legislation to help ensure that all older adults, who

19 are eligible for SCHE are able to more easily

20 reenroll in the program. We recognize that this is a

21 goal that is shared by the administration, as efforts

22 to ensure older adults retain benefits such as SCHE

23 continue an earnest by many city officials, including

24 the Department of Finance's outreach team. Live On

25 New York is proud to work closely with this team, as

2 well as our numerous partners and city Council to
3 ensure client centered approach to outrage to combat
4 the historic underutilization of benefits experienced
5 by older adults. Unfortunately, our work face is
6 significant challenges. In today's digital age,
7 many, if not all of us are all too familiar with
8 receiving calls from scammers and identity thieves.
9 As a result of the spike in cybercrimes in recent
10 years, many government agencies, businesses, and
11 community-based organizations now offer education on
12 how to protect oneself from identity theft and scams,
13 directing much of its education towards older adults
14 who are viewed by scammers as particularly
15 vulnerable. According to the Federal Trade
16 Commission, the primary method by which scammers
17 initiate contact is by phone, according to 69 percent
18 of fraud reports submitted in 2018. Because of this,
19 Live On New York has found, through our outreach
20 work, that many older adults are now hesitant to
21 answer their phones unless they immediately recognize
22 the number. Further, many are wary to trust to the
23 information left in voicemail messages due to the
24 high number of government and posture scams. Live On
25 New York is happy to support increased outreach to

2 older New Yorkers, especially around such critical
3 benefits. However, recognizing the city's limited
4 resources, we thought it important to share of the
5 reluctance many older adults have to answer or
6 discuss financial matters on the phone, as a point of
7 consideration around this proposal. Live On New York
8 is proud to work with city Council in the Department
9 of Finance to continue to combat barriers to
10 reenrollment in critical benefits among older adults
11 and we are happy to support the outreach methods
12 determined successful and appropriate by both the
13 Council and the Department of Finance. Thank you so
14 much for letting me testify today.

15 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: So, it seems to
16 me-- although I don't think you are as direct, that
17 you are in opposition to legislation?

18 JENNA GLADFELTER: I think that-- I
19 actually have a benefits outreach team program
20 director here today, as well, to support this and I
21 think, from what I gathered from our team, the way
22 that the Department of Finance is initiating their
23 reenrollment process with SCRIE has been particularly
24 successful, so is there is a way that, maybe, that
25 could be considered to be replicated or something

2 along those lines, we think that might be potentially
3 more successful.

4 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Uh-hm. And the
5 concerns of the administration are valid, you
6 believe?

7 JENNA GLADFELTER: We believe so. We have
8 worked very closely with them, to my understanding
9 and, and our work, as well, we have seen those kinds
10 of barriers, as well.

11 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: And when you talk
12 about the outrage done for SCRIE and DHE, are you
13 talking about the notifications from DOF specifically
14 or and/or from Council members? Because a number of
15 Council members due to their own outrage once they
16 get the list.

17 JENNA GLADFELTER: From what I understand,
18 the way in which SCRIE renewal-- SCRIE and renewal
19 process is communicated with recipients is through
20 mail and I believe it is through several letters that
21 are sent out. And we have found that that has been
22 successful from working with clients and hearing from
23 them, as well.

24 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: You know, one of
25 the things that we've wasted my office is that we had

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2 telephone numbers for the seniors so that we could
3 call them. Do you think that if they received a
4 personal phone call from a Council member's office
5 they would not believe us or do you think that is
6 more effective than a Robo call?

7 JENNA GLADFELTER: I think that would be
8 more effective than a Robo call, for sure. Having a
9 personal-- Just across the board a lot of us tend to
10 be-- I mean, we all receive, you know, scam calls
11 and everything and Robo calls, I think, put us
12 immediately a little bit more on defense, so a more
13 personal call might be more successful.

14 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: All right. Well,
15 thank you. I appreciate you coming in and giving
16 testimony. Thank you so much.

17 JENNA GLADFELTER: Thank you.

18 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: We have been joined
19 by Council member Cornegy. And did you want to ask a
20 question?

21 COUNCIL MEMBER CORNEGY: Yeah. And at
22 the risk of it having being asked already-- I'm just
23 going to ask. A few years ago the threshold
24 increased for SCRIE.

25 JENNA GLADFELTER: Yes.

2 COUNCIL MEMBER CORNEY: Can you tell
3 me how many people are benefited from the increase?
4 Do you know at this time? And how are people being
5 informed that they may be eligible now based on the
6 increase?

7 JENNA GLADFELTER: I do not know those
8 numbers or anything off the top of my head, but I
9 would be happy to speak with our team here and get
10 back to you on that.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER CORNEY: Yeah. I'm
12 just curious because so many more New Yorkers have an
13 opportunity to benefit from the program with the
14 increase. There were teachers and people who have
15 pensions all who were excluded in the-- with the
16 prior numbers and then, I guess, from a Council
17 perspective, what can we do in collaboration with
18 your office to get the word or get the information
19 out to folks?

20 JENNA GLADFELTER: Yeah. Absolutely. I
21 think in the-- since that has happened, since the
22 threshold was raised, I know that Live On New York's
23 outreach team has worked very hard to do that
24 education, but, of course, there are so many people

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2 to be reached. So, we would be happy to speak with
3 you more about how we can get that message out.

4 COUNCIL MEMBER CORNEY: Thank you.

5 JENNA GLADFELTER: Yeah. Thank you.

6 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: All right. Thank
7 you very, very much for coming.

8 JENNA GLADFELTER: Thank you.

9 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: We appreciate it.

10 Unless there are any other questions, Council member?
11 All right. Then this meeting is adjourned at 11:26
12 in the morning.

13 [Gavel]

14 CHAIRPERSON DROMM: Thank you.

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C E R T I F I C A T E

World Wide Dictation certifies that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. We further certify that there is no relation to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that there is interest in the outcome of this matter.



Date September 19, 2019