Legislation Details (With Text)

File #:	Res 1443-2012	**Version:**	*	**Name:**	Microsoft to disclose the data sources it plans to use for its “pedestrian route production” application.
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Res. No. 1443

Resolution calling on Microsoft to disclose the data sources it plans to use for its “pedestrian route production” application.

By Council Members Wills, Vann, Rose, Koslowitz, James, Comrie, Mendez, Palma and Williams

Whereas, On January 3, 2012, Microsoft Corporation (“Microsoft”) submitted a patent application to the United States Patent and Trademark Office for a smartphone application (“app”) that would recommend walking directions for pedestrian users; and

Whereas, Labeled in the patent application as a “pedestrian route production,” this app would use a global positioning system to detect a user’s location and would incorporate weather, terrain, and neighborhood safety information when recommending a walking route to the user; and

Whereas, Shortly after the patent application was publicized, Microsoft’s pedestrian route production app was quickly named the “avoid ghetto” app for its goal of directing pedestrians away from unsafe neighborhoods; and

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Whereas, In its patent application, Microsoft did not explain what metrics the app would use to determine the safety of a neighborhood beyond defining a "safe" neighborhood as one in with "violent crime statistics below a certain threshold"; and

Whereas, Critics of the patent have expressed their concern that such an app would have a disproportionately negative impact on low-income neighborhoods and neighborhoods of color if it were released; and

Whereas, By directing pedestrians away from neighborhoods alleged to have high rates of violent crime, the proposed app risks ostracizing entire communities and perpetuating negative associations with those areas; and

Whereas, This app could also thwart the economic development of certain areas if fewer businesses were patronized due to less pedestrian traffic; and

Whereas, Crime statistics can vary from one block to the next, compromising the efficacy of such an app; and

Whereas, Since violent crime is not indigenous to any one neighborhood, Microsoft's pedestrian route production app can lure its users into a false sense of security; and

Whereas, Without knowing the data sources for the pedestrian route production app, it is impossible to know whether there are any inherent biases in the crime statistics that might favor one neighborhood over the other; and

Whereas, It is irresponsible and potentially damaging to publicize the impending release of an app that incorporates public safety data without also disclosing the source of its information; now, therefore, be it

Resolved, That the Council of the City of New York calls on Microsoft to disclose the data sources it plans to use for its "pedestrian route production" application.

DMB
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7/20/12