

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY

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February 27, 2012  
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HELD AT: 250 Broadway  
Committee Room, 16th Floor

B E F O R E:  
FERNANDO CABRERA  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:  
Gale A. Brewer  
Letitia James  
Mark S. Weprin  
Daniel R. Garodnick

## A P P E A R A N C E S

Rachel Sterne  
Chief Digital Officer  
Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment

Chris Coffey  
Assistant Commissioner  
Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment

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2 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Good morning  
3 everyone, this beautiful, beautiful morning, and  
4 welcome to this hearing on Intro 771, a bill to  
5 require that the City include a quick respond code  
6 on all permits, licenses, notice of inspection and  
7 registration that are otherwise required to be  
8 publicly posted. Quick response codes, often  
9 referred to as QR codes, are the pixel black and  
10 white square that are increasingly seen on the  
11 advertisement, which we see right over here--we  
12 have a sample one--and other forms of media around  
13 the city. For those who have not used these  
14 codes, here's how they work. When someone scans a  
15 QR code with their smart phone, the code sends the  
16 user directly to a website to get more  
17 information, view a video or do something else  
18 related to the place the QR code appears. It cuts  
19 out the need to manually type in a long and  
20 complicated web address, making the experience of  
21 getting the information the user wants quickly and  
22 easy. These codes are scanned by millions of  
23 users each month, and this bill will utilize this  
24 increasingly popular technology to improve the  
25 transparency and openness of our city's

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2 government. We're already including QR codes on  
3 building permits in New York, and other cities  
4 have come up with many other innovative uses for  
5 QR codes on city postings. For example, the  
6 Environmental Protection Agency will soon require  
7 that the gas mileage estimates on vehicles include  
8 a QR code that will allow the user to compare its  
9 mileage with other similar vehicles. Alexandria,  
10 VA, a small city outside of Washington, DC, puts  
11 QR codes on its muni meters that link the user to  
12 tourist information. The possibilities are really  
13 endless, and this bill will empower the city to  
14 come up with useful ways to embrace this  
15 technology and help New Yorkers Easily access  
16 useful information as they are out and about in  
17 the City. We look forward to hearing the  
18 testimony today on the potential for further  
19 utilizing this technology in the City. At this  
20 moment I'm going to turn it over to the sponsor,  
21 the originator of this bill, Council Member  
22 Garodnick.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: Thank  
24 you, very much Chair Cabrera, and thank you  
25 Council Member Weprin, for the jazzy hands. Today

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2 we are holding a hearing on Intro 771, which as  
3 you heard from the chairman, would require a QR  
4 code on City-issued permits, licenses,  
5 registrations and notices of inspection. This  
6 code, which you see right by the witness table,  
7 can be seen pretty much everywhere today. It can  
8 be found, for example, on food packaging, in  
9 magazine and newspaper advertisements, on business  
10 cards, and on registration bracelets that  
11 attendees at some conferences are given. The  
12 bracelet QR code is used as a means of networking  
13 with other conference participants, who can scan  
14 one another's bracelets to exchange contact  
15 information without ever needing to swap business  
16 cards. Even the Home Shopping Network displays a  
17 QR code that can be scanned on a television  
18 screen, linking a shopper to a checkout page to  
19 more quickly execute an impulse purchase. A smart  
20 phone QR code reader provides users in real time  
21 access to more detailed information that might not  
22 otherwise be displayed due to space constraints or  
23 because lots of text would mean that it would be  
24 less aesthetically appealing. The Department of  
25 Buildings has been using this code on some of its

1  
2 permits for about a year now. It links to details  
3 that are not listed on a given construction  
4 permit, like the approved scope of work, property  
5 owner contact information, and any complaints or  
6 violations related to a particular project. The  
7 Department of Sanitation is also using QR codes  
8 that link to videos on recycling. They're even  
9 posting them on the garbage trucks themselves.  
10 I'm guessing that there are probably not many New  
11 Yorkers passionate enough about recycling to chase  
12 a garbage truck in order to gain access to the  
13 videos, but we like that it is present, and we  
14 like that it is there. QR code is a terrific use  
15 of available technology to increase government  
16 accountability and to keep the public better  
17 informed about and engage with government  
18 activity. So, this is an important bill and it  
19 provides a real window into a lot of the data that  
20 we expect will be coming online, for New Yorkers  
21 to be able to be better consumers, better  
22 informed, to make better decision, and to have  
23 their government interact with them with even  
24 greater facility. So thank you, Mr. Chairman, for  
25 having this hearing.

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2 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Thank you so  
3 much, Council Member Garodnick. And let me  
4 recognize our members of our Committee who are  
5 present, Council Member Brewer and Council Member  
6 Weprin. And also let me recognize the Committee  
7 on Technology staff, David Seitzer our Law Clerk,  
8 and Crystal Gold-Pond our Policy Analyst. They do  
9 such great, wonderful work. So, let me turn it  
10 over to the panel. And if you could please  
11 identify yourself.

12 RACHEL STERNE: Good morning,  
13 Chairman Cabrera and Council Member Garodnick and  
14 members of the City Council Committee on  
15 Technology. I am Rachel Sterne, the Chief Digital  
16 Officer for the City of New York, and I'm here to  
17 talk to you about Intro 771, a bill requiring that  
18 city-issued permits, licenses, notices of  
19 inspections and registrations would require to  
20 have publicly posted Quick Response codes on them.  
21 Almost every day city agencies introduce new ideas  
22 that leverage technology to help them better serve  
23 their constituents and fulfill their goals. It is  
24 truly a thrilling time for digital innovation and  
25 there is much to celebrate across the City of New

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2 York in this regard. At NYC Digital we coordinate  
3 the development and implementation of these  
4 innovative ideas in a strategic conscientious  
5 manner that aligns with the City's digital roadmap  
6 unveiled by Mayor Bloomberg in May 2011. The  
7 roadmap's goal is to realize New York City's  
8 digital potential and to recognize that true  
9 success is based on an approach that serves all  
10 New Yorkers across all demographics and levels of  
11 access and technical ability. Today I'm here to  
12 talk about Quick Response codes, known as QR codes  
13 or 2D barcodes, which introduction 771 would  
14 mandate for all permits, licenses, notices of  
15 inspection and registrations issued by an agency  
16 and required by law to be posted. Based on a  
17 review of current practices and literature  
18 regarding QR accessibility and adoption, it is our  
19 view that while it is growing in adoption and  
20 certainly applicable for many cases, there are  
21 better ways to make the same information more  
22 universally available. Preferred approaches, for  
23 example, would not require that users own smart  
24 phones or have specific software applications  
25 preloaded on their devices. So, while QR codes



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2 are an exciting development to discuss and  
3 certainly appropriate for specific contexts, we  
4 believe that they are still in the early adopter  
5 phase, and there are other solutions beyond QR  
6 codes that would provide more universally  
7 accessible long-term cost-efficient strategies for  
8 providing additional information regarding  
9 permits, licenses, notices of inspection and  
10 registration. Deploying QR codes across  
11 permitting agencies would require additional  
12 expenses that would likely prove significant,  
13 beyond the generation of the QR code, which is  
14 fairly simple. This process would demand the  
15 creation, development and hosting of a slew of new  
16 mobile websites, as well as the staffing to  
17 facilitate a new workflow and process for the  
18 requirement. While the Department of Buildings has  
19 had great success in launching their QR program,  
20 and we applaud them for that, NYC Digital believes  
21 that there should be a more strategic goal-  
22 oriented and above all inclusive approach to the  
23 important task of expanding the City's mobile  
24 presence, and crucially, one that considers issues  
25 of smart phone ownership and QR code familiarity

1 among low-income households. Excuse me. For  
2 example, a 2011 Comscore study found that a mobile  
3 user who scans a QR code is most likely to earn  
4 over 100,000 per year. Overall, Forrester  
5 Research reported in late 2011 that just 5% of  
6 adults use QR codes within the United States.  
7 While we expect this number to increase, the  
8 technology is not yet at a point where it is  
9 adopted widely enough to justify a significant  
10 expenditure of scarce city resources to reach a  
11 fairly narrow audience. While our office strongly  
12 supports digital experimentation and innovation,  
13 at NYC Digital, we believe that as we allocate  
14 resources, we need to be ever mindful of the most  
15 effective ways of successfully reaching our public  
16 service objectives. Blanket agency requirements  
17 should always be approached strategically,  
18 weighing the needs and technical access levels of  
19 constituents. At NYC Digital, in every technology  
20 consultation that we do, we start with the brick  
21 and mortar mission of an agency and work backwards  
22 from that point. We feel that the digital medium  
23 should never be the end in and of itself.  
24 Overall, we are very supportive of different ways  
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2 of communicating and tailor our advice based on  
3 what the goal of each agency is. We would suggest  
4 the same approach for this particular bill. If  
5 the goal is to get more information about each  
6 permit license, notice of inspection and  
7 registration to the widest possible audience in a  
8 mobile context or format, there may be better,  
9 less costly, or existing ways of disseminating  
10 that same information without creating a new  
11 platform across every permitting City agency that  
12 requires substantial expenditures of time and  
13 resources to reach a fairly narrow audience. In  
14 addition to that, NYC Digital is currently working  
15 with DoITT and other city agencies on rebuilding  
16 and redesigning NYC.gov, the City's website. This  
17 is a major undertaking and I want to make it very  
18 clear that expanding the City's mobile presence is  
19 a huge priority, and it's something we absolutely  
20 have to do. It is especially a major way that  
21 many low-income individuals across the City of New  
22 York access the web. As we move forward, we  
23 welcome ideas from a variety of sources, for what  
24 the City Council and other policymakers would like  
25 to see in the next version of the City's website

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and mobile applications. Thank you, and I'm happy to answer your questions.

CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Thank you so much. I'm just going to--first of all, let me recognize Council Member Tish James. I have a couple of questions, then I'm going to pass it on to our--the rest of our members here. You mentioned preferred approaches. What--because they're not listed here, can you mention what those are?

RACHEL STERNE: So, we're in the process of developing a full strategic mobile approach. In the next iteration of the digital roadmap it will be detailed. But one technology that I would point to is SMS. So, texting, simple texting. This is something that is universal across all cell phones. So, while something like 40%, specifically looking at populations that don't have internet, high-speed broadband access, about 40% of smart phones, something close to 80% have cell phones of some sort. So, SMS texting, which especially serves those individuals who perhaps can't get online or can't have high-speed broadband access, is able to serve almost

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2 universally people across the City of New York.  
3 So, an example of what that would look like is,  
4 for example, 311629, or 311NYC, which is the  
5 ability for people to text in questions to 311,  
6 which was recently deployed, and in addition to  
7 that providing a full-fledged mobile version of  
8 the city's website will also be a priority in the  
9 redesign of NYC.gov.

10 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Do you  
11 foresee QR growing in the market? I mean, do you  
12 foresee it in the next couple of years? And if  
13 the answer is yes, why not get it? Why not be  
14 ahead of the game?

15 RACHEL STERNE: I think--I see them  
16 growing. So, prior to this year it was 1%, now  
17 it's at 5%. But, it would be at odds with our  
18 typical approach, for us to embrace a technology  
19 that only has 5% penetration in the community that  
20 we're trying to reach, and especially one that  
21 skews a wealthier demographic is not something  
22 that's at the core of the way that we approach  
23 technology. I think that if you are a private  
24 company and you're looking to reach wealthy  
25 individuals, it makes more sense, and early

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2 adopters and individuals who have the latest  
3 technology, it does make more sense to make that  
4 expenditure. But, I think that it's a more  
5 inclusive message to put a technology out there  
6 that's accessible to everyone, that everyone  
7 recognizes, that everyone knows how to interact  
8 with, rather than perhaps creating a greater  
9 divide of who has access to information and who  
10 doesn't.

11 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Let me turn  
12 it over to Council Member Garodnick, and then  
13 we're going to have Council Member Brewer.

14 COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: Thank  
15 you, Chair Cabrera, and thank you Ms. Sterne for  
16 your testimony. So, in February of 2011, Mayor  
17 Bloomberg, Deputy Mayor Goldsmith, and the  
18 Buildings Commissioner, Robert Limandri, announced  
19 the use of QR codes on all DOB permits. Do you  
20 think that they were making a mistake to do that  
21 because they were broadening a digital divide?

22 RACHEL STERNE: I absolutely do not  
23 think that they were making a mistake to do that.  
24 I think it's more about getting a better sense of  
25 who your target constituents are, and going

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2 forward in this process in a case-by-case manner.  
3 So, I'm not as specifically familiar with the end  
4 objectives of, you know, of that particular  
5 iteration, but I think that the main point that I  
6 would come back to is that agencies have a good  
7 sense of their own goals, but more broadly  
8 mandating that the medium is the goal in and of  
9 itself instead of allowing each agency to  
10 strategically weigh its end user goals is what we  
11 would advocate for.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: I don't  
13 understand the notion that the QR code could be  
14 appropriate and useful for one agency, and not  
15 deleterious to any public policy goals or access  
16 issues in that context, while in all other  
17 contexts it is brushed over by the administration  
18 as not appropriate? How can you make that claim?

19 CHRIS COFFEY: Hi, I'm Chris  
20 Coffey. I'm an Assistant Commissioner from the  
21 Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment. I  
22 would say that the Department of Buildings has had  
23 a very successful launch of this QR code plan.  
24 Rachel was at the press conference, and it's been  
25 widely successful, and we're all happy about that.

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2 The only thing, I think that mandating it across  
3 agencies on a full level without looking at each  
4 individual case is a challenging idea at this  
5 point. It's an interesting idea. There may be  
6 other agencies that may want to use QR codes  
7 because it is beneficial to them, but a one size  
8 fits all method just isn't--in this particular  
9 case we don't think that it's the best approach,  
10 but we're happy to talk about how else we can use  
11 mobile devices to get the best information and  
12 most reliable information, and some of the things  
13 NYC Digital is doing to do that.

14 RACHEL STERNE: And I would just  
15 add two points. So one, just to provide a context  
16 of that--NYC Digital, our offices, when we meet,  
17 we meet with dozens and dozens of agencies to  
18 advise them on their strategy, and we always  
19 follow that same practice, where we start with,  
20 what's your goal as an agency--not what's your  
21 goal online, but what's your goal as an agency,  
22 what are the resources that you have existing and  
23 who are you trying to reach and where do they live  
24 online. And for that reason it is very common  
25 that we'll say that several digital tools are



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2     incredibly appropriate for one agency but would  
3     not be effective for other agencies and would be a  
4     waste of their resources. So, it's a common  
5     practice, because we're constantly trying to make  
6     sure that the tools are matching and going to be  
7     the most successful way that the agency fulfills  
8     their goals. And the additional piece would be  
9     that I don't think that it's necessarily, that  
10    it's certainly not a bad technology and it's a  
11    growing technology, but it's just not at that  
12    point yet where it's at the wide enough adoption  
13    in a public capacity to deploy. And I think that,  
14    for instance, when we developed the first  
15    iteration of the digital roadmap we had an  
16    enormous amount of public input, of input from  
17    within city government, from the technology  
18    community, etcetera. And I think that the same  
19    approach should really be taken towards a mobile  
20    strategy that fully weighs all of the various  
21    methods, all of the pros and cons, so that it  
22    doesn't focus just on one specific aspect of  
23    mobile technology. And that would be the way that  
24    we feel more comfortable to be able to stand  
25    behind something and say this really is a fully

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2 strategic approach that supports all New Yorkers,  
3 that is accessible to all New Yorkers, instead of  
4 just honing in on one.

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COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: So, if  
6 this Council were to say to you that we wanted New  
7 Yorkers to be able to access data, additional  
8 data, when there is a publicly posted permit or  
9 license or registration, or notice of inspection,  
10 and we wanted to be able to do that in five years,  
11 and that that is a priority of this Council, what  
12 would be your recommendation as to how we should  
13 do that?

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RACHEL STERNE: I'd be happy to  
15 work with this Council and with other experts from  
16 within the technology community, individuals who  
17 are very well versed in issues of both access and  
18 mobile technology to develop a strategic plan to  
19 do that, and I think it's an important goal.

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COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: So, at  
21 the moment, no clear path to that at the moment as  
22 you see it, correct?

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RACHEL STERNE: Well, we're  
24 developing that for the 2012 version of the  
25 digital roadmap, and there have been some isolated

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2 steps established, but I feel more comfortable  
3 presenting that at that point when we update the  
4 roadmap.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: Right.

6 I mean, we just had an experience of course,  
7 where, you know, I asked a question of the City's  
8 Department of well DCAS, Administrative, Citywide  
9 Administrative Services, where the green book is,  
10 because the green book has not been printed in  
11 four years. And I got a letter back which said,  
12 oh, Councilman, thank you for your concern, we're  
13 looking into that and we'll be sure to do it at  
14 some point in the near future. And then they  
15 announced within a couple weeks that they had a  
16 plan to put the entire green book online. Great.  
17 Great stuff. But it was not disclosed to me. It  
18 was not disclosed to Council. So, when I hear an  
19 answer about a full digital roadmap that is coming  
20 and it does not include any clarity of whether  
21 that includes SMS texting or QR codes or both or  
22 neither, you will indulge me for being a little  
23 skeptical of that. We don't know what we're  
24 looking at or what we can expect from the  
25 administration.

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2 RACHEL STERNE: You're welcome to  
3 look at the 68-page digital roadmap that we  
4 released last May 2011. That's a good starting  
5 point. But I'm happy to answer any question you  
6 may have.

7 COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: So,  
8 there is no plan in the digital roadmap to include  
9 any access for people using mobile readers to get  
10 more information about licenses or registrations.  
11 Is that right?

12 RACHEL STERNE: It hasn't been  
13 finalized. So, I would be happy to respond to  
14 that when the updated digital roadmap comes out.

15 COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: Okay.  
16 So, on SMS texting. You said that you believe  
17 that that would be the better way to approach this  
18 problem. You gave a number of 40%, I believe, and  
19 I don't know what context that was in.

20 RACHEL STERNE: That's from the  
21 most recent Pugh Internet Study that shows that  
22 among African American and Latino individuals, I  
23 believe it's either 40% or something like 44% own  
24 smart phones. That's where that comes from.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: It was

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smart phones?

RACHEL STERNE: Smart phones.

Smart phones are required to read a QR code.

COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: Right.

Right. And we know that, and thank you. And also you should know that you don't need the software to be preloaded on the application. That's something you can download as an app for free, as Council Member Cabrera did this morning, and that we all did together just before this hearing. So-

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RACHEL STERNE: [Interposing]

Sorry. To clarify. Preloading, I mean that smart phones, there are no smart phones on the market currently that come with that software installed, so individuals have to take the additional step of going to an app store and either downloading it; some are free, some are paid. There are various levels of user tracking. The other, you know, that would also raise the question of would we be endorsing a specific QR code reader, etcetera, etcetera. I mean, I don't think that this discounts the technology in and of itself. But just to be more specific, it's meant to indicate

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2 that because smart phones do not yet have that  
3 ubiquitously on their phones--and maybe once they  
4 do, that would certainly increase the adoption  
5 rate. But at this point, preloaded, I mean when  
6 you buy your phone, when you get it, it doesn't  
7 come there so you have to load it as a user.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: Got it.

9 CHRIS COFFEY: And Councilman, just  
10 to add. We're big fans of QR codes. We put them  
11 up on the trucks. We put them on the sanitation  
12 trucks with the videos, which we realize people  
13 have to then run and chase the sanitation truck to  
14 get the video, but when they're stationary, the  
15 videos were terrific. And we're big fans of--and  
16 Rachel has been a big fan of QR codes in general.  
17 But putting them across, sort of mandating them on  
18 permits for everything, we just don't know that  
19 that's the absolute best step. What we'd like to  
20 do is look at it and look at the digital roadmap  
21 and look at the best mobile resources that  
22 Rachel's talked about, to figure out what that  
23 best step is. This administration has been about  
24 transparency and about putting all the information  
25 out that we have, and we certainly want to do as

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2 much of that as possible. Whether that's, you  
3 know, linking to 311 so people can, you know, have  
4 feedback about a permit that they don't understand  
5 or like or that they love; we just don't know that  
6 QR codes are the answer across all the agencies.  
7 There are agencies that want to put QR codes up  
8 and do those things; we could not be more  
9 supportive of that if they think that's the best  
10 fit for their agency. In fact, we have been in  
11 the past.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: By the  
13 way--

14 RACHEL STERNE: [Interposing] I  
15 would echo Chris just to say that, you know, the  
16 Mayor is a huge advocate for transparency and more  
17 information, and we're absolutely aligned in this  
18 goal of getting as much information out there as  
19 possible. It is the most important, one of the  
20 most important things we can do in terms of this  
21 City's digital goals. So, we're absolutely in  
22 line there. I think it's just the important thing  
23 for us is let's make sure we're taking the most  
24 strategic approach possible that's serving all New  
25 Yorkers. One of the criticisms of technology can

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2 be when a solution is chosen that doesn't serve  
3 all New Yorkers, and that doesn't have to be the  
4 case. It can be a unifying element.

5 COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: Got it.

6 And by the way, I'm being hard on you all, but we  
7 do recognize that the Bloomberg Administration has  
8 been a real leader on openness and technology,  
9 which is one of the reasons why there was, at  
10 least from me, I think more of an expectation that  
11 you would be more enthusiastic about this, and  
12 also, you know, recognizing that we are not  
13 looking to require it across all of the agencies.  
14 We're looking to require it where something is  
15 publicly posted. You know, so while we agree that  
16 it can't be a one size fits all, when something is  
17 actually posted and where you have the ability to  
18 put a code, which is becoming ubiquitous, and the  
19 City itself is using more and more frequently and  
20 even the other agencies, like the DOB, that are  
21 actually putting it everywhere, that this presents  
22 a, you know, an opportunity in those contexts to  
23 give people a chance to access a window to more  
24 information than they currently have. I happen to  
25 be of the view, by the way, that more and more



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2 people will be using these codes. I do not have  
3 the capacity to use one today, as I'm a  
4 BlackBerry, frustrated, BlackBerry user. But I  
5 expect that that technology will be available on  
6 whatever is the next generation of device that I  
7 end up with, and I suspect that will be the case  
8 for many New Yorkers. And by the way, I don't  
9 think that just texting the information to 311 and  
10 waiting for a response does the trick for people,  
11 because there's a gap in time, and if you want to  
12 know that information immediately, you should be  
13 able to access that information immediately, and  
14 I'm sure that you agree with that, putting aside  
15 the comments that you made. Let me just a couple  
16 more--is that okay, Mr. Chairman? There are 45  
17 mayoral agencies that are served by DoITT. Is  
18 that correct?

19 CHRIS COFFEY: It's something like  
20 that. We'd have to get you the exact--

21 COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK:  
22 [Interposing] Do you happen to know how many of  
23 them issue permits, license, registrations?

24 CHRIS COFFEY: I don't off the top  
25 of my head. I think it's between eight and ten,

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based on sort of a preliminary look last week.

COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: Okay.

CHRIS COFFEY: I can't be more exact.

COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: So, basically, so we take that and then we carve off essentially the other 35 agencies that you serve. So we're talking about eight to ten agencies that issue permits, licenses, registrations or things that are covered by this bill. Do you know--and this may be another level of detail that you don't know sitting here, but how many of those permits and licenses need to be conspicuously posted by law?

CHRIS COFFEY: Well, police permits and film permits I can think--I mean, I can start listing examples of permits that have to be posted.

COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: You don't have to list examples. I was actually just looking for the numbers, if you have that. And if not today, if you could actually let us know the answer to that, because I think that would be revealing for us. But you're right, police, film,

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you know, parking placards. You have--

CHRIS COFFEY: [Interposing] And those where we look for the expense, the potential expense of doing this without really looking at the costs and really looking at how much extra time and manpower it would take. If after looking at it, and we'll get back to you with that information.

COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: Okay. Have there been any glitches with the use of QR codes and the Department of Buildings Permits? Are there any problems with that that you know of?

CHRIS COFFEY: Not that we're aware of. They've been very happy with the QR codes. We've been happy for them. And more, the more people that can access information that way, the better.

RACHEL STERNE: I've tried them all over the City and they always work very well.

CHRIS COFFEY: Ditto with that. And you're right about the video ones too. Ditto with the sanitation trucks. The one, you know, thing people say is that, well, sanitation trucks are moving so it's harder to chase after a

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sanitation truck.

COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: Do you think this would be an appropriate technology for the Department of Health with restaurant permits-- I'm sorry, restaurant grades, letter grades? Not mobile.

RACHEL STERNE: I wouldn't want to speak on behalf of the Department of Health, but it's, you know, happy to look into it with them.

COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: I guess what I'm trying to understand is, so I accept from you all that perhaps you don't want to do everything the same way across every city agency. Okay. We can agree to that. But what I'd like to understand a little better is what would be the considerations, and let's just take the Department of Health as an example. You know, for a letter grade, which has to be publicly and prominently posted, it's immobile, you don't have to run after it, and certainly it has plenty of space for a small QR code in the bottom right hand or left hand corner, what would be the considerations for us in requiring--we're not requiring the Department of Health to do that.

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CHRIS COFFEY: What would it link you back--so the grade is prominent. You see the A or the B. Where does it link you back to?

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COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: So, I'll put the question back to you, which is, when I go to the Department of Health's website and I put in a particular restaurant, what information is available there?

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COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Rats.

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COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: Rats, says Council Member Brewer.

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CHRIS COFFEY: I don't want to answer totally, but it generally gives you the past information about inspections and how they've done.

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COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: That's it. So, link the QR code to that information.

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CHRIS COFFEY: We can certainly talk to the Health Department, and they're doing a lot to get their information out there and some of their open data that gets their information out there. If they think that that's the best way and they have the resources to do it, we would certainly be happy to talk to the Health

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Department, and it's all part of our sort of comprehensive strategy at looking across the board.

COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: So, that feels like an appropriate use of the QR code, if I'm hearing it correctly.

CHRIS COFFEY: It, you know, I'm not an expert on the Department of Health specifically, so I really--I'd rather--

COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: I know. But I'm not asking you to be an expert on the Department of Health. I'm really asking you to be a tech expert here as to whether or not there could be beneficial use of the QR code in that context where there's information waiting for you on a server somewhere, and if you had the ability to access it when you're standing in front of a restaurant, you should have the ability to access it.

RACHEL STERNE: I think that providing more information in a mobile format is absolutely ideal, especially for restaurant codes and QR codes, and it's something that's been suggested a number of times, and I think it's just

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2 important to, again, the approach that we take  
3 whenever we consult with agencies is we start with  
4 what's the goal of the specific initiative. Here  
5 it's public information. Second of all, what is  
6 your capacity to make sure it's continuously  
7 updated, because once it's launched you want to  
8 make sure that you have the resources in house to  
9 maintain this. And even though the technology  
10 might be fairly easy to deploy, there are human  
11 beings who need to make sure it's up to speed; who  
12 are you trying to reach, and how are they  
13 accessing the internet, what are the devices that  
14 they have, you know, are there specific  
15 communities that you're targeting and what are the  
16 technologies they're most familiar with, etcetera.  
17 So, that would be the process that we'd go  
18 through, and it is important, because the  
19 Department of Health--we take a strategic approach  
20 that is completely centered on the goals of the  
21 agency. We think it's the only way that we can  
22 take a strategic approach with technology in  
23 general, so we would consult with the Health  
24 Department to make sure that it's the appropriate  
25 method for their needs, whether or not it makes

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2 more sense to do that or various different mobile  
3 initiatives, whether it could be SMS related,  
4 mobile applications, things along those lines.

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COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: But I

guess what I--

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RACHEL STERNE: [Interposing] We'd

be happy to look at it.

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COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: Okay,

well, there's eight to ten agencies that would be  
applicable here, and I won't hold you to those  
particular numbers.

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CHRIS COFFEY: Sure.

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COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: But

ballpark, eight to ten agencies. So, you know,  
the overall level of investigation here is not--  
it's not huge, and within those eight to ten,  
maybe a fraction that even have a posting  
requirement at all. And by the way, you know,  
we're not looking to add additional upkeep  
responsibilities for those agencies on their data.  
They have obligations to do that already. All  
we're doing is to try to create the window for  
somebody out there to be able to access  
information which is already present, already



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2 being updated, and already accessible if you're  
3 sitting in front of a computer. So, you know,  
4 we're not looking to add additional resources on  
5 the backend for this purpose. Last question from  
6 me, and the Chairman has been extremely generous,  
7 where else does the City use QR code, other than  
8 the Department of Buildings permits, sanitation  
9 trucks, Staten Island Ferry, where else is the  
10 City officially using QR code, either for permits  
11 or for informational purposes?

12 CHRIS COFFEY: There are places  
13 that have--I don't know. But I know in the past  
14 that there have been someone--very small pilots--  
15 where someone maybe has used, or I believe the DOT  
16 has used a QR code to get you back to something.  
17 Whether they continue to do that or not, I'm--

18 COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK:  
19 [Interposing] To get you...?

20 CHRIS COFFEY: To get you back to,  
21 you know, to get you back to the website or  
22 whatever they were trying to get you back to.

23 COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: Oh,  
24 okay.

25 CHRIS COFFEY: But I don't to--

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those are the examples, the examples you listed are the ones that are certainly the most prominent citywide ones at this point.

COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: Okay.

Those as the examples to me suggest that there already is an embracing of QR code by the administration.

CHRIS COFFEY: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: Which is why I, you know, started the conversation by sort of downplaying the issue of, well, not everybody has a smart phone, so therefore we shouldn't do it. I think that the Bloomberg Administration has already acknowledged the fact that this is a-- something that will be used much more frequently. The advocates that we've spoken to believe that this is only going to be moving in the direction of much greater use, as opposed to being a technology which is going to dry up and become irrelevant. And to the credit of the Department of Buildings and the administration, it's out there; it's being used and it's being employed in a very positive way and apparently is working well. So, we like to continue this conversation

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2 with you all about those agencies, and whatever  
3 eight, ten, dozen or whatever it is, that actually  
4 issue those licenses and what, if there's any  
5 reason why it wouldn't be appropriate for that  
6 small group of agencies to include this on their  
7 publicly posted permits. So, we'll look forward  
8 to having that conversation with you further.  
9 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

10 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Thank you.

11 Council Member Brewer?

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you  
13 very much. I'm sensitive to your issue about  
14 digital divide, sort of what you're saying. But  
15 what would be the technology, and is it available,  
16 for a more universal ubiquitous QR, for lack of a  
17 better word, so everybody would be included?

18 RACHEL STERNE: There's a lot. I  
19 think one option, and I think there's no cure all.  
20 I think any mobile approach, and that's why I'm  
21 very interested and we are in the process of  
22 developing what that plan will be, any mobile  
23 approach will have a multi-faceted strategy that  
24 takes into account different ways that different  
25 people use their phones when they're on the go,

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2 but I think that SMS or text messaging is very  
3 universal, and it's something that every cell  
4 phone on the market can do. And there's been an  
5 enormous amount of sort of opportunities already  
6 established, and I think there's a lot of  
7 potential to come. So, I think that text  
8 messaging is one option. And to give an example  
9 of a successful city deployment of that, there is  
10 the 311 text messaging number, 311629, or 311NYC,  
11 where you can ask questions, something like two-  
12 thirds of 311 requests are resolved solely by  
13 providing information, that's without having a  
14 transaction that you have to enter into a system.  
15 So that's, I think that's one example of the use  
16 of SMS, of texting. And I think that there are  
17 more options. Obviously there still is a cost  
18 associated with text messaging; it's not free. So  
19 there is, you know, depending on your plan you may  
20 have to pay per text. Depending on your plan,  
21 obviously, you would also have to pay for data, if  
22 you're accessing a mobile website. But it is at  
23 least a technology that is more universally  
24 understood and deployed at this point, and adopted  
25 at this point. But that's not to say that the

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2 world of technology is constantly changing. It's  
3 a constant learning curve. So I think it's--these  
4 are the right questions to be asking, and it's the  
5 right kind of technology and probably in a number  
6 of years it will be to that point where it makes  
7 sense to deploy.

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COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: This is my  
9 lack of knowledge, because I text, but I'm much  
10 more comfortable with email. I'm older, so. My  
11 kids text. My question is, if you--I understand  
12 barcodes, which is what I would call that--I know  
13 it's got another term. I understand, you know,  
14 the concept of using it in a back and forth. You  
15 know, you get the information and you--it's  
16 available on your phone. But I don't understand  
17 how you use a text to get the information off a  
18 barcode. Am I talking the wrong...?

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RACHEL STERNE: So that so if there  
20 was text messaging there would not be a barcode  
21 present.

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COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Correct.

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RACHEL STERNE: So basically--

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COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:

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[Interposing] How would you get the information

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2 from a text about a building permit or a health  
3 permit, etcetera?

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                  RACHEL STERNE: So, for example, if  
5 there was a number listed on the permit, a number  
6 that you could understand, basically you'd be  
7 getting information in a text format instead of by  
8 going to a website and seeing it on a text format,  
9 you'd be getting it through SMS. And the way that  
10 that could work, for example, perhaps it could be  
11 an expansion of 311 NYC, just to keep things  
12 simple for the public. And you could say, can you  
13 provide me--you know, I want more information on  
14 building permit, and enter the number that's on  
15 the permit, and it would feed you back in text  
16 format. Or you could ask a specific question,  
17 what's the phone number of the contractor of this  
18 permit. And based on the way you phrase the  
19 question, you could have it be automated so that  
20 it could respond. So basically you'd get it  
21 straight back as text.

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                  COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. Is  
23 that technology available in other cities, to the  
24 best of your knowledge? Or would we be the first  
25 if we were to do that? Because obviously, what I

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2 call barcodes is available, not just the Buildings  
3 Department, but, you know, you can go to Starbucks  
4 and do that.

5 RACHEL STERNE: So, an example I'd  
6 give for New York City is that the recent  
7 deployment of Bus Time uses SMS or texting, so in  
8 Staten Island you can, you know, I believe the way  
9 that it works is you can wake up, you can say  
10 where you're located, you send a text message and  
11 you get a text back that shows here's the closest  
12 bus to you and here's when it will arrive at the  
13 station near you, so maybe you can sleep five  
14 extra minutes in the morning, or something like  
15 that. But it's delivered through text message.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. And  
17 my other question is, as you talk about your  
18 mobile strategies, do you have, like, an advisory  
19 group thinking about these things? Are you  
20 looking at other cities, other countries? How are  
21 you going about this mobile strategy?

22 RACHEL STERNE: So, similar to the  
23 way that we developed the first digital roadmap in  
24 2011, we gathered a number--a large amount of  
25 input from the general public. We looked at a lot

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2 of studies and research done in terms of the  
3 numbers available on which technology is being  
4 used, whether numbers that we're able to--from the  
5 private sector, from digital, digital companies,  
6 or from research sources, we did a lot of fact  
7 gathering, asking the public for their opinions on  
8 what they would like to see and what they would  
9 like to use. Mostly informal surveys, means of  
10 collecting information that were both voluntary  
11 and low cost; so it could be surveys, it could  
12 have been a mix of social media, and then also  
13 asking technologists, asking advocates in the open  
14 government space, in the broadband advocacy space  
15 who want to bridge the digital divide. So, really  
16 gathering as much input from as many thought  
17 leaders as possible. And we would certainly  
18 welcome your input as we continue that process.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And what's  
20 your timing in thinking about your mobile strategy  
21 as opposed to what Council Member Garodnick is  
22 talking about, which is, you know, it's possible  
23 now. But what's your timing for this more  
24 universal approach.

25 RACHEL STERNE: For establishing--



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COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:

[Interposing] Implementing, yeah.

RACHEL STERNE: --a plan? Or for connecting? I think that--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:

[Interposing] I'm better on plans, because I know it takes longer for the implementation. So, what's your timing for your mobile plan?

RACHEL STERNE: That would be coming in the spring.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. This year.

RACHEL STERNE: This year. Spring to early summer.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Then you'll have a plan for doing some of the things that you outlined here today. Is that what you're saying? I'm trying to understand.

RACHEL STERNE: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

CHRIS COFFEY: Mayor Bloomberg and Rachel unveiled the digital roadmap in May of--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:

[Interposing] I know that, Chris.

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2 CHRIS COFFEY: And so this is the  
3 update to the digital roadmap. We don't have an  
4 exact date, but if May 2011 was the--this is the  
5 second.

6 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yes, I'm  
7 aware of that. So, I can almost memorize the  
8 plan. Not as much as Rachel. But the question, I  
9 just want to know, because you know the issue is,  
10 to me this technology, it's not hard to do. I  
11 don't think it's going to be really hard on the  
12 backend either. And also it's back to this issue  
13 which I believe strongly in, the more information  
14 you give the public, I think it pays off. Because  
15 the less calls you're going to get on this topic,  
16 the less calls to the agencies, etcetera,  
17 etcetera. So, I think in the end it's like how do  
18 you--I'm hoping that the open data - - has lots of  
19 assets, but one of them is less FOILs, we hope.  
20 So, those are the ways that I look at this. So  
21 you say it costs more; I say it might be a wash or  
22 it might cost less. Thank you.

23 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Thank you so  
24 much, Council Member Brewer. Council Member  
25 Weprin?

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2 COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: Thank you,  
3 Mr. Chair. I'm at a disadvantage here. I'm the  
4 only Council Member on the panel who hasn't  
5 chaired this Committee, so, you know, you'll have  
6 to bear with me. Let me ask this question, Ms.  
7 Sterne, I'm just curious; one of the things that I  
8 had wondered about is, is this the best way for us  
9 to do this. My friend Council Member Garodnick is  
10 trying to changing the Administrative Code to  
11 codify this and to put in law that you need to put  
12 these on these permits. Is that a concern of  
13 yours, that, you know, you mentioned the  
14 technology is constantly changing. It's possible  
15 these QR codes become a thing of the past very  
16 quickly, or they may become the way of the future.  
17 Is that a concern you have?

18 RACHEL STERNE: I mean, I think  
19 that with--there's no permanent technology that  
20 stays dominant. You see it in every product  
21 that's been at the top of the market. So, I think  
22 it's something that's to be expected as to whether  
23 or not that makes the legislation, you know, puts  
24 that into question. I don't know if I'd go that  
25 far, but I mean, I think it is a given that

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2 technology changes over time, and you know,  
3 things--nothing stays at the top forever in that  
4 chain. And a lot of people are arguing now that  
5 that range of change, it just continues to  
6 accelerate even more. But I mean, I do always  
7 support ways to get more information out to the  
8 public. I mean, I agree with everything Council  
9 Member Brewer was saying, and the goals of this  
10 Council.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: You seem  
12 troubled. I look at you and I feel like you guys  
13 seem troubled, you and Mr. Coffey, in that you're  
14 the Chief Digital Officer, the first one we've  
15 ever had in the world that I know of, and you're  
16 out here saying, well, let's not move ahead so  
17 fast. I just get this feeling that you're put in  
18 a bad spot here. You don't have to sort of--  
19 that's my feeling on it. I actually, what I was  
20 saying is that to me it seems like this is not  
21 necessarily something that we need to do a bill  
22 and pass and have it made into law, because it's,  
23 you know, it can change. And I understand we can  
24 change the law again. But I am concerned,  
25 because, you know, Council Member Garodnick, the

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2 example of the restaurant ratings to me seems like  
3 a very useful use of that, no matter how many  
4 people have access to it, because a lot of people  
5 show up at a restaurant and say, oh my god, they  
6 got a B, why did they get a B. And it would be  
7 great to be able to say, oh, you know, it was just  
8 this or it was just that. You know, we don't have  
9 to worry about the rats that Ms. Brewer brought  
10 up. I mean, that seems like a useful use. And  
11 you guys are cutting edge, you know, of what's  
12 going on in the city, and it just seems to me that  
13 you should be, you know, advocating this and not  
14 being the one to say, well, let's not move ahead,  
15 not enough people use it. It doesn't seem like  
16 it's that expensive to do. You're just talking  
17 about actually putting the code on, you know, the  
18 printing of those documents. I don't think the  
19 change would cost that much.

20 CHRIS COFFEY: I would just say  
21 that, thanks for all of that, but I would say that  
22 in the case of the Health Department, for  
23 instance, they should be at the table when we talk  
24 about what's best for the Health Department, and  
25 it's a very valuable suggestion, and it may

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2 actually be the right suggestion, but our biggest  
3 concern hasn't been QR codes at all, though I  
4 should point out that QR codes, you know, QR codes  
5 have been around since the early 90s and, you  
6 know, haven't caught on until recently. And that  
7 doesn't mean that they're not going to. So, your  
8 point about whether they go out of trend, whether  
9 they should be in the law, because five years from  
10 now it's something else, is a valuable point to  
11 consider. But we are all in--given that it's the  
12 digital context, we are all in favor of as many  
13 agency putting QR codes on as many things as they  
14 think is meaningful for what their end goal is, as  
15 Rachel has said an as I have said. The Mayor is a  
16 huge fan of--and the Administration has been  
17 hugely supportive of transparency and getting more  
18 information out and trying to do just that. So  
19 it's not, again, but there are then isolated cases  
20 where I could think of QR codes and permits as  
21 maybe just not being the right fit. And so if  
22 we're going to mandate it across all city agencies  
23 by law, I would just think that we would want to  
24 take the time to look at the exact agencies that  
25 are permitting where it would cost more money,

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2 where it would cost more manpower, and look at  
3 that. And it may be, it may be very well that  
4 five of the eight or six of the eight could say,  
5 you know what, this isn't going to cost us  
6 anything and this is great. And if that's the  
7 case and it fits their end user, then I think we  
8 both, and the city would be very supportive of it.

9 COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: Ms. Sterne-

10 -

11 RACHEL STERNE: [Interposing] And I  
12 would just add to that to say, and thank you for  
13 your concern, but it is the goal of the--

14 COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN:

15 [Interposing] I'm here to help.

16 RACHEL STERNE: --Digital, you  
17 know, of the Chief Digital Officer to be pushing  
18 forward new technologies, but it actually makes--  
19 it helps to refine our mission when we always come  
20 back to the goals of the agency and to the people  
21 that we're trying to serve, because on a regular  
22 basis we are inundated by pitches for new  
23 technologies, some of them are phenomenal and they  
24 probably would in many ways completely  
25 revolutionize different aspects, but we have to

1  
2 make hundreds of decisions on a daily basis about  
3 is this the best possible way to serve New  
4 Yorkers, is the company that maybe makes this tool  
5 going to get more of a benefit. And the best way  
6 that I find to evaluate those decisions on a day-  
7 to-day basis is to say, how many New Yorkers are  
8 using the technology today, who are they, and are  
9 they the ones that we're trying to reach, and then  
10 to work backwards from that point. Because  
11 otherwise it's very easy, because there are so  
12 many exciting things happening all the time, and a  
13 lot of our decisions is saying yes and no. But I  
14 mean, I think that the good news is that there's a  
15 lot of exciting technologies out there that are  
16 very exciting, a lot of folks interested in  
17 working with us, and it's just how do we do that  
18 in the best way possible.

19 COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: Were you  
20 involved when the Buildings Department started  
21 using the QR codes on their permits?

22 RACHEL STERNE: I was thrilled to  
23 join for that announcement, but it was just about  
24 a month after I had started, so I can't take any  
25 of the credit for that, but I applaud the



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2 Buildings Department, and I think it's a very  
3 exciting an innovative use of the technology.

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COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: Have you  
5 had meetings with any other agencies about the use  
6 of the QR codes?

7

RACHEL STERNE: Not specifically,  
8 but we've had informal discussions. We also in  
9 fact right after the roadmap came out created the  
10 SMART Committee, which is the Social Media  
11 Advisory and Research Taskforce, and we have  
12 discussed QR codes on at least half a dozen  
13 occasions where various different agencies are  
14 weighing whether or not to embrace it. Pretty  
15 much it's a lot of early adopters who are in the  
16 similar position of saying, I know very intimately  
17 my constituents and what access that they have,  
18 and we're weighing this as an agency. So we've  
19 discussed it a lot, and really my position now  
20 reflects a lot of those discussions to date.

21

COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: Is it, now  
22 that Council Member Garodnick is pushing this  
23 bill, is it possible that you might reach out to  
24 some of these agencies a little more aggressively  
25 about seeing if it makes sense for these agencies,

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2 the eight or ten that we discussed, whether it  
3 makes sense in specific, you know, instances for  
4 those agencies?

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RACHEL STERNE: I think that for  
6 the mobile aspects of the digital roadmap, it's  
7 already a priority and we're certainly happy,  
8 given the interest of this Council, to really make  
9 sure that it's addressed specifically. But I  
10 think we'd certainly say it's something we already  
11 think about quite a bit and continue to weigh and  
12 something, I think, that we should continue  
13 basically to watch and measure the adoption.

14

COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: And the  
15 issue that concerned me and the argument that only  
16 a certain percentage are using these QR codes now,  
17 to me, for someone like you to use that argument  
18 is not good in that, you know, we could set the  
19 trend. I mean you, by putting these on all these  
20 documents, lots of people will say, hey, what's  
21 that, how do I get that; not to mention you could  
22 promote it and advertise it. I agree it's not;  
23 but for you to say that because more people are  
24 texting we're going to go texting, you should be  
25 the one saying start texting then more people will

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text.

CHRIS COFFEY: And certainly--

COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN:

[Interposing] You're the leader in this.

CHRIS COFFEY: Certainly, like, at the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment Rachel has been a big proponent of it. The inventory, the stuff that we have, the posters that we put up, the things that--I don't know if this counted for what he asked, when Councilman Garodnick asked what other agencies were - - it, but certainly for the bus shelters that promote made in New York films, certainly for lots of the--internally we certainly use QR codes and push them and think that they're good when it makes sense for the end result, when there is added value like taking you back to a video that you wouldn't see by looking at the billboard. Added value is something that we tend to look at. And when there are other examples we tend to look at them and advocate for them.

COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: As I started, you know, I'm trying to help you here, trying to ease your pain, and give you the excuse

1  
2 to go back to the Administration and say, look, we  
3 need--you know, look at ways we can use this  
4 without necessarily mandating it everywhere,  
5 otherwise Garodnick's going to mandate it  
6 everywhere, you know. You're saying this crazy  
7 Councilman from Manhattan is going to force us to  
8 do this unless we start looking at ways to make  
9 Gale Brewer and Fernando Cabrera and Dan Garodnick  
10 happy. You know? And it just seems to me that--  
11 I don't want you to be in a position where you're  
12 blocking, you know, a change in technology just  
13 because you're trying to defend the idea we've got  
14 to use our money wisely. You know, that's not why  
15 you guys are here. That's not why we're happy to  
16 have you; it's because you guys are cutting edge  
17 and you're supposed to be leading the way and not  
18 necessarily be the penny pincher.

19 CHRIS COFFEY: She's cutting edge.

20 COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: Okay.

21 CHRIS COFFEY: I'm not.

22 COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: That's  
23 right.

24 RACHEL STERNE: And I would say--

25 COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN:

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2 [Interposing] You've been around a while for a  
3 young man.

4 RACHEL STERNE: --we certainly want  
5 to keep--

6 COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN:

7 [Interposing] You've got good genes.

8 RACHEL STERNE: We certainly want  
9 to keep everyone happy, so that's certainly a  
10 priority. I mean, I think it just comes down to,  
11 you know, we're not in the position of, in terms  
12 of the technology space, picking winners and  
13 losers when it comes to technology programs or  
14 products, but I do think that we recognize not  
15 just from a monetary perspective, because it's not  
16 just about financial resources; it's about  
17 resources internally and the people who are  
18 expending time and energy; and it's not  
19 necessarily saying this will never be the case,  
20 but if we are going to put this plan forward,  
21 let's make sure that we have a plan that really  
22 makes sense, where we've consulted with experts,  
23 where we've looked at the goals of the different  
24 permitting agencies, who they're trying to reach,  
25 and let's make sure that we have a good return on

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2 our investment in terms of really effort and  
3 public impact, and use of city services. I think  
4 we see it more in a strategic way rather than--and  
5 of course we always want to do more with less.

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COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: Thank you,  
Mr. Chair.

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CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Thank you so  
much. I have a few questions. Do you happen to  
have the percentage of phone users, cell phone  
users, that actually use 311 to gather the same  
information that we're trying to achieve through  
the QR?

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RACHEL STERNE: So, who use QR  
codes for 311 purposes? Or you mean text  
messaging?

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CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: You suggested  
earlier that we have preferred approaches. And if  
I understood you right, the preferred approach was  
the 311 texting, correct?

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RACHEL STERNE: Well, first I would  
just say that I think it's not necessarily the end  
all be all. I think it's just one other method  
that, if for instance we're prescribing QR codes,  
should be prescribed in conjunction to make sure

1  
2 that we're addressing all aspects of the  
3 population, but I do not have the numbers for the-  
4 -I know it's relatively new, but I do not  
5 currently have the numbers for the 311692, the use  
6 of SMS texting for 311. As much information as  
7 I'm able to gather for that will be in the  
8 roadmap.

9 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: The reason  
10 why I ask is because I'm speculating it's a very  
11 small amount of people. I mean, none of us knew  
12 about it.

13 CHRIS COFFEY: Well, it's a  
14 relatively new--it is a relatively new--I know  
15 Council Member--

16 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: [Interposing]  
17 Well, Gale knows everything when it comes to  
18 technology.

19 RACHEL STERNE: I think it also,  
20 there hasn't been a very broad public awareness  
21 campaign, certainly nowhere to the degree of  
22 calling 311, because it was a new technology, they  
23 were refining the effectiveness of the tool, of  
24 the technology.

25 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: I think the

1  
2 same can be said of QR, that I think now it's  
3 catching on. To be honest with you, I think I  
4 became aware of it last year when I started to see  
5 it, you know, in certain businesses and so forth.  
6 And so wouldn't posting it restaurants or anywhere  
7 where permits are granted, wouldn't it make it  
8 more visible and therefore create higher demand,  
9 just like we have barcodes?

10 CHRIS COFFEY: It may. And, you  
11 know, I would say that again, the QR codes, and QR  
12 codes have been around since I believe the early  
13 '90s in Japan. They were not widely successful at  
14 first. Certainly in the last year, especially--I  
15 would say last year they were, just from  
16 anecdotal, I would say that a year ago they were  
17 catching on faster than they are now. But it's  
18 possible that by putting them in as many places as  
19 possible they would catch on even more. I'm not  
20 sure that that's our goal, and if we have to--

21 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: [Interposing]  
22 Well, why wouldn't it be? I mean, the whole idea  
23 is quick response. And I'm guesstimating that,  
24 I'm not going to guess what's your quick response  
25 from 311.



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RACHEL STERNE: Well, for--I mean, first--do you want to speak?

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CHRIS COFFEY: Well, I think again it may be the goal. It depends on what the agency is to get--if we're going to put something on a permit that gets you added value, there may be cases like the Department of Buildings, where they think it makes sense. As Councilman Garodnick has said, there may be others too. All we're saying is we don't know that that's the case across every permitting agency. I can think of--I mean, the police department's sound permits are done in a way where it would be challenging to continuously have them with the cell phone number of the person who is responsible, or in the Film Office's case, the person who is on the scene and responsible. We would just have to work through some of those things.

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CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: But even in the case, it's--but I think it's a good investment. It's useful, because I know what it is to deal with sound permits, and you know, just to have it readily available right there and then and to be able to show someone--you wouldn't even

1  
2 have to take the permit, you would have it  
3 straight up from--so, I mean, it might be more  
4 work. I'm starting to get the feeling that it  
5 requires more work, then we shouldn't do it. And  
6 even if it's just 5%, I'll take a wild guess, next  
7 year it's 10%. And at what percentage would it be  
8 acceptable then? I mean at what number are you  
9 looking for?

10 RACHEL STERNE: So, I mean just to  
11 respond, we completely agree. We want more people  
12 to have more information, especially in a mobile  
13 context. This is our number one priority for the  
14 next digital roadmap. So we are in alignment. We  
15 just want to make sure that we're doing it in  
16 appropriate way. The cornerstone of this is about  
17 doing it on the terms of the public, not on our  
18 own terms. And again, we often get pitched to use  
19 certain technologies, and we--I don't see--I see  
20 that our role is really to come to where people  
21 are online and engage with them on their terms and  
22 the technologies that they're comfortable using,  
23 and not to instead be the choosers and the drivers  
24 of promoting a specific technology over another;  
25 that's more of a free market function. We're here

1  
2 to serve people on their terms and not really to  
3 pick the winners and losers of technology that has  
4 not yet been served. But to do that, I think an  
5 experiment in isolated different examples does  
6 make a lot of sense. And I do, I think that we're  
7 very happy to explore this further. I think there  
8 is definitely a role, and if the growth of QR code  
9 adoption continues, it will be a big part of our  
10 mobile roadmap specifically.

11 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: But you do  
12 pick and choose. You do pick and choose when you  
13 have one contractor who's given sole source in  
14 terms of the contract. When you have Verizon--I  
15 mean Cisco, in the Board of Ed, being given a  
16 contract and the specs were made just to fit,  
17 while it could have fit somebody else, and then we  
18 could have got it at half prices. So, you know,  
19 I'm having a hard time with the whole idea that  
20 the QR somehow is going to push certain  
21 technology. The technology is already out there.  
22 It's free. I got it for free this morning. I  
23 downloaded it, it didn't cost me anything. We  
24 download a lot of free apps all the time. I just  
25 think it's useful. I think smart phones, the

1  
2 price of smart phones in the next year and so is  
3 going to drastically go down, which is going to be  
4 the technology of today. It really is. So, why  
5 not be prepared? Why not do a test? Why not have  
6 a bill that will allow it to go--I don't know how  
7 the Councilmember feels about this, but why not  
8 try it for a year or two and see what it would do?  
9 I just--look, from my point of view, we live in a  
10 society where we like things quick and we want it  
11 right now. And I just, I'm speculating here, but  
12 the average person is not going to standby, text  
13 311--it's a whole ordeal--when I could just take  
14 out my phone and take essentially a picture, and  
15 then I'm taken straight to the very source of  
16 information that is needed. It would seem to me  
17 that that makes sense, regardless if it's just 5%  
18 of adults. When you say 5% adults, what about  
19 young people? Does that include young people  
20 also?

21 RACHEL STERNE: Yeah.

22 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Because it  
23 was--

24 RACHEL STERNE: [Interposing] Yes,  
25 it does.

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2 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: I don't know  
3 if that was done there on purpose, 5% and so  
4 forth. I'd just like quick accessibility to  
5 information, even if it's 5%. Look, I'm in one of  
6 the poorest districts. If anybody here should be  
7 saying I'm concerned that this is only going to  
8 serve the rich, it should be me. But I also see  
9 what's going to come down the pike. It's coming  
10 down quickly. Why not be ready? So, let me ask  
11 you the next question. How much would it cost you  
12 to implement this plan, if you were to implement?

13 CHRIS COFFEY: I think we'd have to  
14 look across every different agency and give you a  
15 comprehensive answer.

16 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Give me an  
17 example. The Department--what is it--the  
18 Department of Buildings. I mean, you already  
19 have--

20 CHRIS COFFEY: [Interposing]  
21 They've been able to do it using their sites with  
22 relatively little cost.

23 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Little cost.  
24 So, this is not a cost issue then, right?

25 CHRIS COFFEY: Well, I think it

1  
2 varies in each case. I don't know that it's not a  
3 cost in any issue. I think you have to have a  
4 mobile site that's willing to--that can take--that  
5 adds value, that takes your information. And so I  
6 can't sort of speak for everyone's mobile sites  
7 without knowing a little bit more.

8 RACHEL STERNE: I think that it's  
9 more about--less about the cost and more about if  
10 it's not going to serve a lot of people then  
11 there's no point in expending any kind of cost and  
12 the effort there. But I think--

13 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: [Interposing]  
14 But if you follow--I'm sorry for interrupting. If  
15 you follow the same logic, then the Department of  
16 Buildings should not have done it.

17 CHRIS COFFEY: I think it's a pilot  
18 program that the Department of Buildings has done.  
19 It's been successful for them. We are happy to  
20 look at other agencies and work with the Council  
21 to figure out whether it is in fact successful for  
22 other agencies as well. But we think at initial  
23 glance, and we still think, is that mandating it  
24 across every agency, every permitting agency,  
25 without knowing the full cost, without knowing the

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full resources that would be required for something like QR codes, which haven't been as caught on as widely as other things, we just don't know that that is the appropriate step at this time.

CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: It doesn't cost--

RACHEL STERNE: [Interposing] I would just--

CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: --anything to create the image, right?

RACHEL STERNE: I would just add to that, that again, we're not against QR codes.

CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: I know you're not.

RACHEL STERNE: We have the same goal of providing more information to people on the go. The question is that if we're going to mandate something like this, we need to look at it strategically. For example, either we're requiring people to download software, or they're getting it for free. If they're getting it for free, I don't know how closely you check the terms and conditions when you downloaded that

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2 application, but probably the way that that  
3 company is monetizing the fact that they built and  
4 are hosting that QR code reader for free is that  
5 they're tracking your traffic, they're seeing  
6 where you're going online. So, we need to make  
7 sure that we have free options, so if people say,  
8 okay, there's a QR code, which reader are we  
9 supposed to use, that we can confidently suggest,  
10 here's one that you can use that protects your  
11 privacy as an individual, that's not going to be  
12 resold to marketers. That's, you know, one  
13 example. And I think we can get there,  
14 absolutely--

15 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: [Interposing]  
16 But, Rachel, that standard was not put in place  
17 when we dealt with the Department of Buildings.  
18 That was not a consideration. Why would it be a  
19 consideration for the other ones? In terms of  
20 tracking, Google, everybody is tracking. I mean,  
21 when you go to Google right now and I have a  
22 particular thing that I'm searching, in the right  
23 hand side I'm being hit big time. And QR, I don't  
24 think that I'm being pitched for anything.

25 RACHEL STERNE: I'm just saying



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2 that it should be a strategic approach. It  
3 shouldn't be focused on one silver bullet  
4 technology, and that we should make sure that we  
5 have a totally sort of solid approach that we're  
6 able to say this serves all New Yorkers, it has  
7 approaches that addresses every single access  
8 issue, it's strategic, it's not just because we're  
9 going after the shiny new technology. And I think  
10 it is great and we will continue to follow it as  
11 it grows in adoption.

12 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: For me it's  
13 choices. I mean, it's giving people choices to be  
14 able to use this technology. People have the  
15 choice to download whatever application. The fact  
16 of the matter is, the average person does not  
17 check terms and conditions. I would daresay 99.9%  
18 of people don't check the terms and conditions  
19 when they download an app, especially when it's  
20 free--99. When it's free everyone tends just to  
21 download it. They don't think they're being  
22 affected. Indirectly, for the most part they're  
23 not being directly I think affected by it. It  
24 doesn't cost anything to create that little image,  
25 right?

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2                   CHRIS COFFEY: To create this  
3 doesn't cost anything.

4                   CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Okay.

5                   CHRIS COFFEY: Maintaining and  
6 operating the mobile sites depending on what  
7 they're already doing can have costs. There can  
8 certainly be costs associated with it, and that's  
9 what we'd have to get back to you on, with the  
10 sort of more complete answer on how much each  
11 agency, an estimate for how much each agency would  
12 cost.

13                   CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Council  
14 Member Garodnick.

15                   COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: I just  
16 wanted to understand just the cost question about  
17 maintaining the mobile sites. Because again,  
18 we're not looking to create more obligations  
19 through this bill as to what information actually  
20 is kept. Other bills will do that. But if an  
21 agency is already keeping that information, like  
22 the Department of Health or the Department of  
23 Buildings, to agencies which seem kind of like  
24 right there as the perfect examples of where this  
25 might be a really easy and applicable technology,

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there's no extra cost in those examples, right?  
Because that information is being posted by the  
Department of Buildings and by the Department of  
Health for their website itself. Correct? So, to  
link it didn't create any additional cost for the  
Department of Buildings, did it?

CHRIS COFFEY: For the Buildings  
Department, no, I don't know. But the Health  
Department I assume that's right.

COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: Right?  
Because all you're doing is--it's a window that  
connects you to the site.

CHRIS COFFEY: But there are  
certainly other permitting agencies--

COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK:  
[Interposing] Put the other permitting agencies  
aside for a second, because I just--because we  
hear you on the point that you're making there.  
But for that situation there's no extra cost.

RACHEL STERNE: Okay. So there's a  
small cost associated with creating a mobile  
optimized version of a website, and there will  
likely be a, to start with probably negligible,  
but increasingly substantive increase in traffic

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2 that will come specifically on the mobile site, so  
3 there's hosting and there's development. I really  
4 don't think that the issue is specifically cost  
5 alone, because if it is a way that gets more  
6 information in peoples' hands, and mobile is a big  
7 part anyway, a big part of our strategy anyway.  
8 You know, we are embracing a mobile strategy. The  
9 new version of NYC.gov will have a widespread  
10 mobile optimized website, so that's something we  
11 absolutely support in total agreement. It's just  
12 the way we get people to those links, let's make  
13 sure we're getting them to those links in the best  
14 way possible. And, you know, today it's QR codes,  
15 tomorrow its near field communications and RFID  
16 and you're able to detect where they are. There's  
17 constantly newer cooler things. I mean, imagine  
18 if you didn't even have to scan anything, your  
19 phone can just detect that you're close to an RFID  
20 chip or through near field communications or  
21 through GPS it knows you're standing in front of  
22 this restaurant, here's the thing. There are so  
23 many cool things that can happen through  
24 technology, but it's more about is it going to  
25 reach--you were asking earlier, when do we decide

1  
2 that a technology is there. And there's no  
3 specific number, but we say, is it going to reach  
4 the majority of the people that we're trying to  
5 serve. We look at things like Facebook, which has  
6 over 8 million users within 50 miles of New York  
7 City. There is a really ubiquitous technology  
8 that touches a lot of New Yorkers. Probably, you  
9 know, everyone here is more familiar with Facebook  
10 than with QR codes, has used it more frequently  
11 than with QR codes. So that's--and we're  
12 constantly being inundated with really very  
13 exciting technologies, but the question is, if we  
14 went after each and every one of them, we probably  
15 wouldn't be serving the greatest possible number  
16 of New Yorkers. We've all got limited time, so we  
17 want to make sure that when we're advising  
18 agencies that we're advising them in a way that  
19 will help them to serve as many of their  
20 constituents as possible. And so I think that,  
21 again, the technology, I think it's possible and  
22 we hope that it will continue to grow and we'll  
23 continue to track it and make sure that we're  
24 aware of if it is the right technology to be using  
25 to serve people. But overall it's important that

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2 the end goal is not the technology in and of  
3 itself, but it's whatever we're trying to achieve,  
4 and so it's about just having a comprehensive  
5 strategy that includes both the technologies that  
6 exist today, the stuff down the line like NFC and  
7 RFID, and everything in between.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER GARODNICK: We got  
9 it. And we're not looking to have you all chasing  
10 after every new and advanced technology. In fact,  
11 it doesn't really matter from my perspective  
12 whether it is QR code or a barcode, which has been  
13 something that's been proven to last for a long,  
14 long time. What's really important is that for  
15 the applicable agencies, for you to be able to get  
16 that information immediately, particularly where  
17 there's a public benefit to doing so. And we  
18 think that in the scenarios where there's a posted  
19 license or posted permit or something that links  
20 to data somewhere in the back office, you should  
21 be able to do that. So, we hear you. We'll look  
22 forward to working with you on this, and Mr.  
23 Chairman, I appreciate the time.

24 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Thank you so  
25 much. If we don't have any other questions?

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Thank you so much for coming. Very interesting answers that we received today. Looking forward to working with you in the future on this issue and others. Have a wonderful day. This meeting comes to end.

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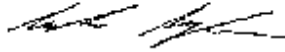
RACHEL STERNE: Thank you.

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CHRIS COFFEY: Thanks, Mr. Chair.

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, Erika Swyler, certify that the foregoing transcript is a true and accurate record of the proceedings. I further certify that I am not related to any of the parties to this action by blood or marriage, and that I am in no way interested in the outcome of this matter.



Signature

Date 3/8/2012