

CITY COUNCIL  
CITY OF NEW YORK

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TRANSCRIPT OF THE MINUTES

of the

COMMITTEE ON TECHNOLOGY

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HELD AT: Council Chambers  
City Hall

B E F O R E:  
FERNANDO CABRERA  
Chairperson

COUNCIL MEMBERS:  
Council Member Gale A. Brewer  
Council Member Letitia James  
Council Member G. Oliver Koppell  
Council Member Mark S. Weprin

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

Todd Asher  
First Deputy Commissioner  
Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment

Rachael Fauss  
Policy and Research Manager  
Citizens Union

Joly MacFie  
Vice President, New York Chapter  
Internet Society

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2 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Good morning,  
3 everyone, we're going to be getting started. I  
4 want to acknowledge the presence of Council  
5 Member, recognize Council Member Koppell and  
6 Council Member Tish James. Good morning,  
7 everyone, and welcome to this hearing concerning  
8 Intro 132, which will require that all public  
9 meetings subject to Article 7 of the Public  
10 Officer's Law, be webcast. Webcasting is the  
11 distribution of video and audio via the internet  
12 to any personal computer or video capable device  
13 connected to the internet. There are many  
14 advantages associated with municipal webcasting of  
15 open meetings: first, webcasting increases public  
16 access to government; second, on demand video  
17 allows people to have complete access to  
18 government meetings according to their own  
19 schedule and at no cost; third, webcasting an  
20 archival video permits people who are interested  
21 in their proceedings, but who do not wish to  
22 actively participate, to save time and money;  
23 finally, webcasting enhances a municipality's  
24 image as open and accountable. Since 2007, New  
25 York State has required that all state agencies

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2 and public authorities subject to the open  
3 meetings law webcast--to open meeting law, webcast  
4 their meetings, and the New York City Council  
5 currently webcasts all of its public meeting  
6 hearings. The Committee looks forward to hearing  
7 from the Mayor's Office of Media and  
8 Entertainment, DoITT, and other witnesses today  
9 about the merits of this bill, and how its  
10 requirements will be implemented. Thank you so  
11 much, and let me recognize also Council Member  
12 Weprin. You may introduce yourself and you may  
13 begin with your testimony.

14 TODD ASHER: Thank you, Council  
15 Member. Good morning, Chairperson Cabrera and  
16 Members of the City Council Committee on  
17 Technology in Government. I am Todd Asher, First  
18 Deputy Commissioner of the Mayor's Office of Media  
19 and Entertainment, and I'm pleased to be before  
20 you again today. As you know, in recent years,  
21 the Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment has  
22 worked diligently with the Council and/or  
23 colleagues of the Department of Information  
24 Technology and Telecommunications, to  
25 substantially expand New Yorker access to the

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2 proceedings of City government. This includes  
3 bringing live broadcasts and streaming  
4 capabilities to the City Council Chambers and the  
5 Council's 250 Broadway locations. The City,  
6 excuse me, the City of New York is now the largest  
7 municipality to carry live legislative hearings.  
8 We've also made the City's government channel,  
9 nyc.gov, available over the air, so that New  
10 Yorkers without cable have access to watch their  
11 government at work. Additionally, we've invested  
12 in emergency messaging equipment, which allows us  
13 to remotely broadcast important updates from the  
14 Mayor throughout the City, as evidenced by the  
15 numerous press conferences that took place during  
16 Hurricane Irene and its aftermath. These  
17 milestones, however, were the result of  
18 significant planning, investment and  
19 infrastructure, and strategic use of personnel.  
20 As it is now being considered to mandate the  
21 public hearings be streamed live, we feel that a  
22 close examination must first take place in order  
23 to understand the costs and issues involved.  
24 There are a multitude of questions that would need  
25 to be examined. For instance, is the proposal for

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2 all public hearings to be streamed? Would this  
3 include all community board meetings around the  
4 City? Presently we estimate that there are least  
5 3,500 public hearings outside of the Mayor's and  
6 the City Council's hearings that take place  
7 throughout the City each year, and more than 175  
8 different locations. The schedule of these  
9 hearings vary as do the setups and capabilities of  
10 the rooms in which they are held, making it  
11 incredibly challenging to manage streaming  
12 logistics. For context, outfitting the City  
13 Council Chambers alone for live broadcast and  
14 streaming capabilities cost over \$1.5 million in  
15 equipment and infrastructure and costs about  
16 \$500,000 per year to operate. This was done by  
17 leveraging existing functions and funding sources  
18 that were put into place for regular television  
19 broadcasts in the Chambers, thus effectively  
20 subsidizing the cost to stream. The actual cost  
21 to configure each location will be less than this,  
22 but the number of locations is much greater, and  
23 it's due in large part to the existence of the  
24 costly underlying infrastructure built at City  
25 Council locations that make the addition of less

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2 expensive streaming capabilities possible. It's  
3 likely that equipping all public hearings for live  
4 streaming could cost millions of dollars in  
5 capital to purchase the necessary equipment, on  
6 top of significant annual costs to operate and  
7 staff these live streams. These are estimates  
8 based on what limited information is currently  
9 available, but it's clear that much more needs to  
10 be known before we can move forward with the plan.  
11 Therefore, we strongly recommend that a study be  
12 commissioned to closely examine the probable costs  
13 and feasibility of mandating live streams and  
14 public hearings, and whether it makes sense  
15 logistically and financially to live stream all  
16 hearings. Having our office, the Mayor's Office  
17 of Operations, DoITT and a number of other City  
18 agencies involved in a study will enable us to  
19 make realistic assessments of the needs and costs  
20 involved, as well as to better understand the end  
21 goals of this enterprise. Live streaming and  
22 meeting for the sake of live streaming would not  
23 in the long run be in anyone's best interests if  
24 few people watched the video. A procedure would  
25 need to be put in place so the streams could be

1 promoted properly, alerting viewers to the  
2 availability to watch them. Archiving and search  
3 functions also need to be considered. If a user  
4 is unable to tune in live to a hearing, during the  
5 day when many hearings are scheduled, and when  
6 most New Yorkers are at work or in school, then  
7 it's important to factor in how viewers can access  
8 an archive of the streams after the fact. The  
9 Mayor's Office of Media and Entertainment is  
10 committed to bringing transparency in City  
11 government, and has already demonstrated this  
12 commitment with the upgrades of live broadcast and  
13 streaming technology in the Council Chambers and  
14 the Committee rooms. We currently air more than  
15 2,00 hours of annual coverage for the City Council  
16 press conferences, hearings, celebrations and  
17 other forums, as well as the Speaker's State of  
18 the City address, all Borough Presidents' State of  
19 the Borough addresses, and City Planning  
20 Commission hearings, among others. Expanding this  
21 practice to thousands of public hearings taking  
22 place throughout the City would be an extremely  
23 challenging endeavor for any City entity without  
24 additional resources in the form of equipment and  
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2 staffing. Making a commissioned study the most  
3 practical next step to determining the best course  
4 of action. Thank you again for the opportunity to  
5 testify today. We look forward to continuing to  
6 work with the Council and with other City agencies  
7 to answer the various questions posed by live  
8 streaming public hearings, and we share the  
9 Council's goal of making City government as  
10 accessible as possible. Thank you.

11 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Well, thank  
12 you so much for your testimony, and let me begin  
13 by thanking you regarding the live broadcasting  
14 and the infrastructure that was set up for live  
15 broadcasting right here in the City Council, it's  
16 top of the line. And I know many people who have  
17 share how they often watch these hearings. So--

18 TODD ASHER: Good to hear.

19 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: --tremendous  
20 job. I have a couple of questions, and first let  
21 me recognize Council Member Brewer, who has joined  
22 us, who's the sponsor of Intro 132. My first  
23 question, you came with a number of 3,500 public  
24 hearings. Who's involved in this 3--how did you  
25 come up with that number? And are you including

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school boards? Or is it just community board, taskforce? Who's included in this number?

TODD ASHER: This number comes via the City's website on nyc.gov, for all the posted public hearings. My, it does include community board hearings, I would have to check to see if school board is included in that.

CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: I'm not sure if Council Member Brewer will be able to clarify this point, if school boards will be included in this bill? They're not. So, I guess--So that would be something to check. I notice that you mention here \$1.5 million in equipment. What equipment are you referring to? For community boards, because they're mobile, I would imagine just HD camera, a laptop, and a modem. I'm just trying to figure out what the \$1.5 million--I mean, we only have, I would imagine the setup that we have here and other places, because it's going to be mobile.

TODD ASHER: Understood. In the absence of having performed a study to look at all of the locations, and the specifics, the only corollary that we had to work with was the most

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2 recent installation at the City Council Chambers,  
3 and the main chambers and the Hearing Room. And  
4 so, in that instance, that cost \$1.5 million for  
5 all the audio, video and streaming capabilities.  
6 The analogy was to say that in the case of City  
7 Council, because we are leveraging money from the  
8 City franchise for the purposes of broadcasting  
9 for TV, we were able to purchase all of the costly  
10 equipment, like the cameras and the different  
11 systems, to get the stream created. And then the  
12 addition of the streaming technology is relatively  
13 inexpensive once you already have the underlying  
14 costs. So, in the course of a study we would  
15 assess at all of the locations what would be  
16 needed, but in practicality you're right, there's  
17 the need for a camera, something related to audio,  
18 depending on what the setup, a computer, some sort  
19 of means to get to the internet and something to  
20 digitize or stream that. And then there's also  
21 the need on the, on the viewer's side, in the case  
22 of the Mayor and the Council, things are right now  
23 streamed in a sort of matter of priority, and so  
24 there's basically one stream for the Mayor and  
25 then there's, depending on how many hearings are

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2 for the Council. In the case where there might be  
3 many, we think about 14 hearings a day, then there  
4 would be the need to have some way to be able to  
5 view and search and look at all of that. Right  
6 now, Legistar , for instance, is used for the City  
7 Council, in order to create that.

8 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: The reason  
9 I'm smiling is because, you know, the setup that  
10 we have here is at the optimum level, I mean we  
11 have switchers, for cameras, we're not going to  
12 need switchers. The switchers are cameras which  
13 are HD, are very, extremely expensive. I would  
14 imagine a simple camera, again a laptop, laptops  
15 are very inexpensive nowadays, and the little  
16 modem. I just can't think of what else is going  
17 to--it just, we're comparing apples with oranges  
18 in my estimation. I mean, I have a setup in my  
19 church, and it didn't cost a whole lot money. If  
20 you're just doing one camera. If you're doing two  
21 cameras, and we're going HD, then it gets very  
22 expensive. But I think it will be, to be honest  
23 with you, a very minimum cost. And the other fact  
24 that if we're going to buy--I mean, you could go  
25 across the street, I'm not trying to give them

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2 business, you could go to B&A and do, I mean, if  
3 we're going to have all the community boards and  
4 the taskforce, we're not talking about a lot of  
5 money. And a live stream, gee, you could even  
6 get--well, regarding the page, you just create a  
7 page, all you got to do is create a simple page,  
8 for the community boards. I'm sure your tech  
9 people could figure that out, it's not a  
10 complicated thing to have that. I would imagine  
11 the only thing, maybe, that would take some  
12 funding here, probably the cost end, and help me  
13 out with this, it would be archiving them. But  
14 even that, I don't even know if that could be done  
15 automated, in an automated way, or do they need to  
16 be added. But other than that, I just, I don't  
17 know, I just can't think of why, if you guys need  
18 help with that, I'm more than willing to help you.  
19 [laughs]

20 TODD ASHER: Sure, we appreciate  
21 it. Well, we're certainly big fans of B&H and  
22 where we can, and where City contracts allow, we  
23 certainly do. Again, we will be purchasing this  
24 through standard City procurement processes.

25 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Sure.

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2 TODD ASHER: So that will, to some  
3 degree, dictate what we're able to buy and what  
4 those costs are going to be. And I think you're  
5 right to point out that there are a lot of  
6 unknowns. You know, the building out of a webpage  
7 sounds simple, but the maintenance of something  
8 with this volume is actually quite significant,  
9 and I think you want to present it in a way that  
10 people can truly access the information. Even  
11 when you are buying some of the consumer grade  
12 equipment that you're talking about, which creates  
13 other issues about reliability and durability,  
14 you're probably still talking about \$300-\$400-\$500  
15 for a camera, you're probably talking about \$800  
16 or \$1000 for the computer. We're paying \$5000  
17 this, all of this equipment is, was purchased by  
18 our agency in collaboration with the City Council.  
19 I feel very much on your side in terms of wanting  
20 to aid in the transparency of government in  
21 providing these services. And I think that very  
22 broadly speaking, streaming is great and I think  
23 Council Member Brewer knows that this is a  
24 commitment that we made very early on and  
25 fulfilled as quickly as we could. So, I'm

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2 certainly not against the idea. I do think that a  
3 study needs to take place to look at the  
4 conditions for each of those situations. And the  
5 volume is high. 3,500 is really a significant  
6 number, and we'll have to go through and see  
7 whether or not that includes anything that should  
8 be removed. But even if you cut it in half,  
9 \$1,800 is quite a significant number.

10 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Let me turn  
11 it over now to Council Member Weprin.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: Thank you,  
13 Mr. Chair. Commissioner, how are you today? I  
14 was just curious, so, let's put aside the money  
15 issue for a second. I just want to just  
16 understand, so do you think this, let's say we  
17 could set it all up for free, just for the sake of  
18 argument. Would you think this is a good thing to  
19 do in open meetings all over the City?

20 TODD ASHER: I would have no  
21 objection to doing it. I think that there's  
22 probably some value in making an assessment again  
23 of how many people will watch and what the value  
24 is? Is there any downside to having people not  
25 physically attending? Are you able to display any

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2 sort of exhibits, if somebody brings a document or  
3 a presentation? The experience for the user, I  
4 think, is very important in determining whether  
5 it's worth doing. But again, broadly speaking, I  
6 think more access is good, but I think good access  
7 is important.

8 COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: Well, you  
9 know, I do commend the sponsor of this bill for  
10 wanting to televise and to let people see what's  
11 going on. I've always been a big proponent of  
12 that. I actually think it's a good idea, even if  
13 people aren't watching it at that given moment,  
14 because I find that when you're on camera, you  
15 tend to behave in a more proper way. Things tend  
16 to run smoother, and you know, you see things,  
17 warts and all, but generally, you know, it's a  
18 good disinfectant having the public watching what  
19 does on in meetings. So, I think it's a great  
20 idea in concept. I do understand that this is an  
21 awfully big, you know, amount to chew on here. I  
22 mean, you're talking a lot of meetings throughout  
23 the City, and I don't see why local community  
24 education councils shouldn't be included in this  
25 as well. I mean, we have a right to see that in a



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2 lot of, especially those where parents very often  
3 cannot get out to those meetings, it'd be a great  
4 opportunity for parents to actually see what's  
5 going on. And if not live, be able to archive it  
6 somehow where they can watch what's going on in  
7 their local, you know, school education councils  
8 or school boards, whatever next year we have.  
9 And, but I do think this is a great idea, in  
10 theory; I'm not sure in practice. I do see the  
11 pitfalls. And I do think it needs to be studied  
12 more. But I'd like to see a scenario where we can  
13 televise as many of these as possible, not  
14 necessarily mandate it right off the bat where  
15 it's going to be difficult, but at least encourage  
16 it, for community boards and other meetings around  
17 the City to be televised, or to be put online, I  
18 mean, whatever way it is, so the public can watch,  
19 'cause we want to encourage the public to be as  
20 involved in their government as possible. That's  
21 what Council Member Brewer has been advocating in  
22 all different aspects of the City Government. So  
23 you agree with that concept.

24 TODD ASHER: I do. And I would--  
25 thank you for that, and I would also add that in

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2 February of this year, we produced a document, a  
3 best practices document for streaming. And we met  
4 with, I think in the end it was about 14 agencies,  
5 who were interested in being able to conduct live  
6 streaming. It's a roughly 18 page document and it  
7 goes through sort of the basics of how you'd put  
8 together a camera and how you connect it to the  
9 internet and how you could go to a free service,  
10 and it lists out some of the, you know, concerns.  
11 And again, a lot of this is to be determined, what  
12 are the requirements for FOIL, what are the  
13 requirements for archiving, what happens if the  
14 standard licensing agreement with one of the free  
15 providers changes. Can that content be used for  
16 something that maybe could be commercial in nature  
17 by somebody else who can go to one of these  
18 websites and access the information? But all of  
19 that notwithstanding, we thought at least let's  
20 share the information we have, and as we figure  
21 things out, we'll be able to do that. The big  
22 takeaway from the meeting was that most of the  
23 agencies said, "We don't have this equipment, we  
24 have rooms that don't have wi-fi in them, we don't  
25 have the infrastructure to be able to do it." Let

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2 along thinking through the experience when you  
3 have some rooms that are very large, some that are  
4 much smaller, how do you actually make it a useful  
5 experience? They don't have microphones like  
6 this, they'd just be using the microphone from,  
7 you know, many feet away on the camera. So, there  
8 were a lot of concerns that we've taken under  
9 advisement and we've been looking, again from a  
10 best practices standpoint, what could we do to  
11 alleviate that and work with agencies who do large  
12 amounts of public hearings to be able to allow  
13 them to do that. Things change a bit when it  
14 becomes, you know, a legal mandate to cover all  
15 these hearings, versus best practices for everyone  
16 to try and do as much as possible, and I think  
17 that's for us where the challenge comes in. And  
18 my testimony is just to say that there really is a  
19 bit more that we would need to do to examine all  
20 of the specifics of those streaming locations, to  
21 be able to say, "We promise to do it." Right now,  
22 we really want to do it, but the promising to do  
23 it I think is a bit more challenging without  
24 knowing more detail.

25 COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: Okay, well,

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2 you know, I can't disagree with that, I do think  
3 that this is a good goal to shoot for and we need  
4 to do everything we can at this point in time, to  
5 try to get people to be exposed to what's going on  
6 in their government, to open meetings all over.  
7 One last point I want to make, Mr. Chairman, I  
8 know you've been very complimentary of the system.  
9 I've often thought that this camera in particular--  
10 --can you switch to this camera right here?--is a  
11 little too high, you know. Especially those of us  
12 with big bald spots, you know, it's really the  
13 angle is--

14 TODD ASHER: I have one of those  
15 myself.

16 COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: --is, you  
17 know, a little scary over there, and I think it  
18 maybe 'cause they were afraid Bill de Blasio would  
19 walk by and hit his head.

20 TODD ASHER: [laughs]

21 COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: But that  
22 camera coming down on us is always, you watch it  
23 on TV, it's a little creepy looking, I don't know.  
24 But anyway, that being said, thank you very much,  
25 Mr. Chair.

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CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Council Member Weprin, I don't think you have to worry about that, with all--you have a good set of hair there.

COUNCIL MEMBER WEPRIN: [laughs]

CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: You're doing good, you're doing good. Council Member Brewer.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Thank you very much, thank you, Mr. Chair, thank you, Todd, because you really did live up to what you promised, and I was complaining like crazy before you took the job, and I really appreciate that you're innovative and you're trying to make New York City government more transparent. On the other hand, I am very supportive of mandating webcasting. And let me be specific. How come the state can do it and not so expensively? Have you looked at their--I watch a lot of state hearings on the web. And they are not perfect, but when I watch, for instance, the Hudson River Advisory Board, which I love watching--

TODD ASHER: Who doesn't?

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Exactly. [laughter] Only me. But it's grainy, it's edgy,

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2 in terms of it's not perfect, as is the wonderful  
3 job you've done here, but I get all the  
4 information. That's what we're looking for. And  
5 I'm just wondering, have you talked to the State  
6 as, in terms of the meeting that you had with the  
7 different agencies?

8 TODD ASHER: I must say I have not,  
9 and I would welcome that, and if you have a  
10 contact there, I would be happy to reach out to  
11 them, and we would integrate that into a study.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay,  
13 because it hasn't been excessively expensive, they  
14 may not do every single agency, but if they get  
15 down to the Hudson River Park Trust Board, that's  
16 pretty far down.

17 TODD ASHER: Okay.

18 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So, and  
19 they do the Adirondack, I watch the Adirondack  
20 whatever it is, even though I'm not there. And  
21 that's what people are looking for. I mean, they  
22 really want to see government in action. And I  
23 think if we study this too long, that it won't  
24 happen. And I don't think it's going to cost a  
25 lot. That wonderful man over there, who's got a

1  
2 camera, he and my staff in the past, before you  
3 had this wonderful system, we always, as some of  
4 you know, did our own streaming with our own  
5 laptop and our own cameras of the Technology  
6 Committee. We've been doing it for ten years.  
7 So, it's not expensive, and I would have two  
8 questions about this cost issue. First of all, I  
9 understand the franchise only covers the  
10 television.

11 TODD ASHER: That's true.

12 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: But when  
13 you are paying for this equipment, is it capital  
14 and expense? Is it a capital expense, as well as  
15 a, obviously somebody has to run it, that would be  
16 a OTPS, that would be a salary issue. But how  
17 much of this is capital as opposed to expense, in  
18 your opinion?

19 TODD ASHER: Oh, in the case of,  
20 for outfitting the, for the public hearings that  
21 are currently covered?

22 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Correct.  
23 In other words, not--in other words, all of this  
24 huge number that you're giving us, which I don't  
25 think is as large as you think it is.

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TODD ASHER: Well, it might be.

So, just for clarification, the numbers that I've used were the only ones that we had available, without performing any sort of study, which was just the cost that it--the actual capital cost that it cost to outfit the main City Council Chambers and the - -

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER:

[interposing] Right, that was--no, I understand that's what the cost is of this system.

TODD ASHER: So, the estimate that I have made as the \$2.5 million was for equipment, and that was taking, again, broadly, 175 locations and multiplying \$15,000 for costs for--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And how much do you include if we can include the CEC. I don't know if you did, you don't know if you did.

TODD ASHER: I don't, I need to--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And the community boards, also. In other words, how do we separate out community boards? Because the challenge there, to be honest with you, is that they do move around a lot. The City agencies, City Planning Commission, will be at Reed Street



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until the building falls down.

TODD ASHER: Right.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And then they'll be at 1 Center Street for the rest of the nine million years that the City Planning Commission exists. They're not moving. I guess that's my point. In other words, once it is settled, as opposed to a community board, it is not a comp--I don't think it's as complicated or as expensive as you indicate. So, I'm a little confused about this huge cost. And, if you pick certain agencies to be mandated, that's a good start. People, you know, the real agency that people want to see is the Board of Elections. If you ask what would be the number one YouTube attraction, it would be Board of Elections. But leaving that aside, I think what you need to do is we need to really quickly look at, maybe from your meeting that you had, is that document online, that streaming document that you mentioned that--

TODD ASHER: No, only because we've chosen to alter it based on the feedback.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

TODD ASHER: It didn't prove to be

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as useful because people didn't have the basic requirements to be able to observe it.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. But I think there are enough people in this town who could very quickly help with an analysis, this is a tech city. And they would really quickly be able to help you with some of your questions. I know some of the mare sitting here in the audience today.

TODD ASHER: I do, as well.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

TODD ASHER: No, certainly, certainly I think--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And I think we could really quickly make a bill that made sense and that we don't need a long study. The State is doing it, cities across this country are doing it, it's not--I mean, you got archiving, a capital, and I think that's--and a little bit of a salary. But I think many people who are already sitting in the room running the meetings, could in fact turn on any kind--I can do, as can the wonderful pastor here, in addition to being a Council Member, we all know how to do it, it is

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not a complicated procedure.

TODD ASHER: Understood.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So I'm a little concerned about this large cost and this complicated project, for meetings that are in a regular location.

TODD ASHER: So, I'm, but certainly I've not proposed that we do a long assessment of anything. I think some--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Like two weeks?

TODD ASHER: Two weeks would be a bit quick, given all of the other things. But I think something along the lines of 60 to 90 days would be a fair assessment.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: That sounds like a long time to me. Maybe we could discuss the timing of it.

TODD ASHER: It would be--okay.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Because when you have the kind of support that you had from the community at large on something like this, I think you would find that there'd be a lot of input that could make it go quite quickly.

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TODD ASHER: Great.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. The second issue is do you have any--I will get you a state contact for sure, but how--and I should know this--how is the archiving being done now of the Council?

TODD ASHER: So, currently, we archive on tape for anything that we're shooting for television, which is the vast majority, it's about 98 percent. There is a vendor arrangement that the Speaker's Office keeps with the vendor for the streaming. So, they should speak directly to how long they--it's a matter of contractual terms. My recollection is they keep six months in digital form, and then if anyone wants anything older than that, they go back to us and we keep it since the beginning of time.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. And the money that is from the franchise, which can it really only be used for, as you indicated, the broadcast, it can't be used for anything to do with streaming. Is that by a Bruce Regal law or something?

TODD ASHER: It's--Bruce Regal is

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the point of reference for it.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: And he indicates that it can't be transferred over to-- any of that franchise money cannot be transferred over to streaming.

TODD ASHER: That is correct.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Even for equipment? Even though--

TODD ASHER: The--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I mean, there might be some integration possibilities. As an example, in some cases, some hearings are shown, if of tremendous interest, I assume, at City Planning. Now, some of those hearings are shown on nyc.gov.

TODD ASHER: The requirement is--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Or on the-- yeah, on the television.

TODD ASHER: Correct. So, the requirement is that the reason for purchase is for broadcasting on the channel. If we were to argue that 51 percent would--then we probably could make that argument. But I would need--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So that's

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the cut off, 51 percent to be shown--

TODD ASHER: That's my interpretation, but I would certainly--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay.

TODD ASHER: --go to Bruce to clarify the point, but--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: 'Cause obviously there is franchise money around, no idea how much. But one assumes that that's money that's more available perhaps than any funding, that's what I'm asking.

TODD ASHER: And I, so, again, it's my understanding, but I'll consult with Mr. Regal to understand for certain, and I think that in this process, we would establish exactly what the requirement is, the prioritization as you mentioned of which hearings would be most important. Is there the opportunity to broadcast them on television, as well? And then what are the real costs, whether they're large or whether they're smaller, there will be some, and how do we cover those costs?

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Okay. And I must admit, from the Mayor's perspective, not to

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2 mention from the City Council, making this City as  
3 transparent as possible, this is a real way to do  
4 it, and it is a legacy item. It's also in  
5 keeping, I think, with the fact that, you know, we  
6 are a city that embraces technology, and I can't  
7 think of a better way to do it. I want to share  
8 the Chair's recollection that the public is really  
9 appreciative and is utilizing the streaming and  
10 obviously on the television. I think more of us  
11 are watching it streaming now than anything else.  
12 And soon, of course, we won't have cable, and then  
13 we'll all be watching it on the computer. So it  
14 makes sense to get started now. Okay.

15           TODD ASHER: I certainly agree with  
16 everything you've said in terms of access to  
17 government. We're not, we don't want to be an  
18 obstruction to this, we do just want to make sure  
19 because at the end of the day, after this hearing  
20 is over, it will be the obligation of me and my  
21 colleagues and the City and others to make sure  
22 that this happens, and we just want to make sure  
23 that we deliver on a clear promise, that's all.

24           COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Well, I  
25 appreciate it, but I'm just saying, in this

1  
2 particular case, if you're telling me to find  
3 affordable housing, I would say, "Oh, I don't know  
4 where I'm going to get help." But if you tell me  
5 that you want help on streaming New York City's  
6 hearings, there's like a New York City tech meet-  
7 up that would say, "We want to help." And there's  
8 about 1,200 people who would do it  
9 instantaneously.

10 TODD ASHER: Understood.

11 COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: So, I think  
12 that you should utilize their wonderful  
13 opportunities to get their input, but this could  
14 be done really quickly, and I really, really  
15 believe not expensively. Thank you very much, Mr.  
16 Chair.

17 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Thank you so  
18 much, Council Member Brewer. I just want to echo  
19 what Council Member Brewer just shared. Look, in  
20 my estimation, even if it costs even a little bit  
21 more than we, that I think, it's going to cost, I  
22 think it's a worthwhile goal for us to have, and  
23 you're suggesting to waste--did I hear right, 60  
24 days to 90 days, and Council Member two weeks,  
25 maybe we could do it in 15 days. [laughs]



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TODD ASHER: It's a great average.

[laughter]

CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: I agree with Council Member Brewer, I just don't think it's going to take long. I mean, from this end looking at it from outside the bowl, I would think what would take just a bit longer than even the tech part, the equipment part, just to figure out your expense side.

TODD ASHER: Right.

CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: But even that, I think that assignments could be given to somebody to do. I just don't think, again, you could look at what right now, what we're doing and see how much that costs. And then you're going to have the economy of scales, anyway, taking place here, in light of the fact that if it is \$3,500, let's just go with that number, that because we have so many of those hearings, that it's going to, you know, it's not going to be piecemeal type of work, now we got about, kind of a wholesale approach. But anyway, hopefully we could get this done quicker, quickly, and because I think it's, it is indeed going to be a legacy project in this

1 Administration and with the Council. Well, any  
2 other questions? All right, thank you so much.

3  
4 TODD ASHER: Thank you.

5 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: I'm looking  
6 forward to seeing progress in this project. Thank  
7 you very much.

8 TODD ASHER: Thank you very much  
9 for your time.

10 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Alrighty.  
11 This moment, we're going to have Rachael Fauss  
12 from Citizens Union and Joly MacKeef [background  
13 comment] MacFie, from Internet Society. Feel free  
14 to come forward. Just introduce yourselves, and  
15 you may begin.

16 [pause, background noise]

17 RACHAEL FAUSS: Good morning--  
18 that's better. Good morning, Chair Cabrera, and  
19 other members of the Committee on Technology. My  
20 name is Rachael Fauss, I'm the Policy and Research  
21 Manager of Citizens Union. We're a nonpartisan,  
22 good government group, dedicated to making  
23 democracy work for all New Yorkers. And before  
24 turning to legislation, we'd just like to  
25 acknowledge the important work of the Council with

1  
2 regard to increasing transparency in government.  
3 Both passage of the Open Data Law last year;  
4 leading by example by doing webcasting of your  
5 meetings and hearings; and of course Council  
6 Member Brewer, for your leadership on many  
7 legislative initiatives in this area. We strongly  
8 support this legislation and actually before  
9 turning to that, I would like to say we have met  
10 with the Mayor's Office of Media and  
11 Entertainment, both individually and through the  
12 transparency working group, with a collaboration  
13 of many civic technologists and government  
14 watchdog organizations like ours. So we found  
15 them to be very collaborative in the past, and we  
16 wanted to acknowledge that, that they are not here  
17 at this moment. And I'd like to say we do  
18 strongly support the legislation. Increasing  
19 accessibility to City agency hearings and meetings  
20 is incredibly important. And I'd just like to say  
21 that webcasting allows stakeholders like ours,  
22 small government, small nonprofit organizations,  
23 and members of the press to more easily monitor  
24 government proceedings, and the media and advocacy  
25 organizations can in turn relay this information

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2 to a larger audience of the public. So webcasting  
3 proceedings affect more than those just directly  
4 watching them live. And further, given that  
5 government proceedings are often during the  
6 daytime when most New Yorkers are unable to  
7 attend; archiving webcasts will allow New Yorkers  
8 to see government in action at any time, and  
9 provide an additional record of the public  
10 meetings. Many City agencies and Commissioners  
11 already webcast their meetings, among them the  
12 Campaign finance Board, the City's Pension Fund  
13 Boards, the 2010 Charter Revision Commission, and  
14 most recently, and the most recent City  
15 Districting Commission. One option for webcasting  
16 is live stream, which has been used by many  
17 government entities, including the free service  
18 actually by House Speaker Boehner, the City's  
19 Department of Education, for example. There's a  
20 paid ad-free version that's been used by New York  
21 City Campaign Finance Board, the New York City--  
22 the Voter Assistance Advisory Committee, and the  
23 Mayor's Office. Which costs about \$350 a month,  
24 and it's also been used at the State level by the  
25 New York State Senate. We believe that this low

1  
2 cost demonstrates that there is, it is feasible to  
3 do across the board webcasting for all city  
4 government entities. And we'd also like to  
5 address the issue that Council Member Brewer  
6 raised about the Board of Elections in the City of  
7 New York. You referenced, Chair Cabrera, the  
8 executive order that the Governor has signed. We  
9 believe that the Board of Elections and the City  
10 should be covered by that, as a state entity, but  
11 there's a little bit of a disagreement between us  
12 and the Board of Elections on that. So I'd like  
13 to note, we also believe the Council has authority  
14 over the Board of Elections in many areas,  
15 especially when it comes to technology in  
16 government. So, we would support amending the  
17 legislation to specifically include the Board of  
18 Elections. And there's been some recent case law  
19 that actually supports the Council doing a little  
20 bit more with the Board of Elections. So, you  
21 know, we don't believe that any government agency,  
22 whether state, city or something in between,  
23 should simply fall through the cracks of efforts  
24 to increase transparency in government. And we'd  
25 also like to note that Section 103 of the New York

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2 State Open Meetings Law allows private individuals  
3 to photograph, broadcast or webcast government  
4 proceedings that are open to the public. But it  
5 would be disappointing, obviously, to have to rely  
6 on private citizens to do this. So we believe  
7 that the Council should pass Intro 132. Thanks  
8 very much, and I'll be able to answer any  
9 questions.

10 JOLY MACFIE: Hi, I'm Joly MacFie,  
11 I'm a VP of the New York chapter of the Internet  
12 Society, which is a global organization which  
13 promotes the open and beneficent use of the  
14 internet for everybody. And as such, I found  
15 myself webcasting the account this Committee, you  
16 know, back for some years, and which means that  
17 you can, if you'd like to go either onto my old  
18 website or YouTube, you can find old hearings of  
19 the Committee, including one on this topic of  
20 webcasting in 2008. And I will say that, you  
21 know, later on with the live, I didn't do it live,  
22 I shot and I uploaded it up later, which was the  
23 cheap, you know, but labor intensive way of doing  
24 it, and later on when we went live, Gale's intern,  
25 Sam Wong, was very, partly responsible. And I

1  
2 think that first thing I'll say is that the use of  
3 interns might be something that you might want to  
4 investigate in terms of labor. As far as, you  
5 know, webcasting goes, it's, you know, I still do  
6 it, and it's a bit of a tricky business, there's  
7 many, a few slips between to make it work  
8 successfully. I haven't got prepared statements,  
9 but there's a few points that I wanted to raise.  
10 And first one is accessibility. And so trans--you  
11 know, for people who are deaf or blind, you know,  
12 but transcription is an important thing. And it's  
13 something that I would like to note that, you  
14 know, the Mayor now puts all his stuff onto  
15 YouTube, and none of it is transcribed onto  
16 YouTube, they don't transcribe it. At that  
17 webcast hearing, there was, the gent who does the  
18 State business, you know, he talked about how he's  
19 got these, they're called the transcription divas  
20 uptown, who, you know, do the transcription, and I  
21 think it's a \$1.68 an hour for like post-event  
22 transcription. So that's something. Granicus,  
23 who also presented, you know, they've, supposedly,  
24 I don't know if they still do or how much they  
25 were checked out, they do Los Angeles, they have a

1  
2 glorious system where you can text search on  
3 anything and you click it, on any word, and it  
4 will pop up videos, and you can click the video,  
5 and the video starts happening from that word.  
6 I've never actually gone and looked at--did you  
7 ever go and look at the Los Angeles website, City  
8 website, to see if--?

9 RACHAEL FAUSS: I've used it, sorry  
10 to interrupt, but it is very, it's very useful, I  
11 found.

12 JOLY MACFIE: You know, which was a  
13 complete--

14 RACHAEL FAUSS: And easy to use.

15 JOLY MACFIE: --turnkey solution.  
16 Which I don't know if it would go down to  
17 community board level. Then, so text search  
18 ability is something that you want, you know, it's  
19 certainly you want to think about. And then I'd  
20 draw you to another feature, which is if you go  
21 to, say, CNN, now and you look at hearings from  
22 Congress or whatever, they have a highlighting  
23 feature where you can go in and register and then  
24 you can just pull a bit of video, you can chop it,  
25 start and end, and then you can, you know, it'll



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2 give you a code and you can then embed that on  
3 your own webpage to like take just one little  
4 whatever bit you like out of it, you know, so it's  
5 the kind of use making the thing useful to people,  
6 is, you know, is a big part of it, in terms of  
7 outreach. And then, you know, a system of  
8 notification, you know, she talked about live  
9 stream, if you, on the new live stream, every  
10 channel you sign up and if you sign up as a  
11 subscriber on the channel, every time they go  
12 live, you not only get an email, you get an SMS  
13 text that says, you know, "They're up live now,"  
14 it's, you know, so, it's these sorts of things and  
15 I'd never actually looked at the webcasting for  
16 this until this event was coming up. And it's,  
17 you know, it's a pretty brutal interface, if you  
18 ask me, you could, even on what you're doing now,  
19 there could be a much more functional front end  
20 which would, you know, should be more like a, you  
21 know, you could get some web designers down at  
22 DoITT to like, you know, to sex up the front end  
23 at bit, you know, on what's been done already.  
24 And then just generally about, you know, how can  
25 you get at it, you know, get at it. Well, first

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2 thing I'll say is, the thing about webcasting, and  
3 video generally, is what really counts is the  
4 audio. You know, without good audio, the video is  
5 useless. And so, that's really, you have to  
6 really got to be paying attention. You could be  
7 pointing a camera at the, you know, picture on the  
8 wall, as long as you've got good audio. And even  
9 to the point where if you can't make video, you  
10 know, on every meeting, if you can get audio, and  
11 I've got a little zoom recorder there, which is,  
12 you know, they're \$100 bucks, you know, and  
13 they'll record MP3, which can be sent in, so, you  
14 know, just buying one of them for every community  
15 board and having them, you know, up, you know,  
16 upload the MP3s, would get you to another level  
17 from where you are now, especially if you had them  
18 sent to the diva, transcription divas uptown, and  
19 you know, and transcribed, you know, we'd be a  
20 whole lot further on than we are now. I will say  
21 that, you know, we now, this Internet Society, we  
22 use live stream, and we like it as a service, but  
23 I will say that you're going to have to be careful  
24 with your contracting and points of service  
25 because the CEO of live stream is married to the

1  
2 City's Chief Digital Officer, Rachael. So,  
3 something to bear in mind. And I think again,  
4 just to go a bit more into like that costs of, you  
5 know, what you were talking about, the cost of HD  
6 and HD switches, and this is the thing where, you  
7 know, I'm just going through it myself now, is  
8 like putting several H cameras into a laptop, so  
9 that I can switch. And it's not easy at all.  
10 Live stream, themselves, sell a switcher that's a  
11 whole one piece thing, which is their HD 500 model  
12 is \$8,500. \$8,500. And you know, that'll take  
13 four cameras. But then, you know, what we  
14 discovered is we got cameras and then we had to  
15 buy SDI cables, you know, and we, you have to buy  
16 \$250 HDMI to SDI converters and so on, so, it's  
17 still, you know, going up. I think that, you  
18 know, you could, even for that--and then with  
19 cameras, you know, if you were going to run a two  
20 camera set up or something, you know, like that,  
21 it's probably, or maybe 15, it could be shaved  
22 down to like, to ten, I'd say, you know, with, and  
23 again, audio, as he said, is the variable in those  
24 situations, but that is, you know, that is quite a  
25 portable system. But it's, I think that the one

1  
2 camera setups, and then again, at live stream,  
3 they do a thing called "the broadcaster," which is  
4 like \$500, which is something that you just plug  
5 into the, you plug into the camera, and it, as  
6 long as it's got a connection, a wi-fi connection,  
7 it'll feed the stream and you can dispose of the  
8 laptop altogether. You know, so, this--and, I  
9 feel that, you know, you tried being hard on the  
10 guy on saying, "You've got to like think it all  
11 out in this time," I think that there's, there  
12 are, there is quite a lot of variables to get  
13 into. But there are things where you could look  
14 at it in stages, that you should be looking at  
15 stages of what you, what can be done, rather than  
16 a total solution.

17 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Thank you so  
18 much, that was very informative. I have a couple  
19 of questions. By the way, I just met a couple of  
20 young men that came up with a switcher, that is  
21 used through their computer system, that is only  
22 \$3,000. They just came out with it, just  
23 literally a couple of months ago. I went to a  
24 conference and I was shocked, you know, I was  
25 like, "How much is this?" 'Cause I know how

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expensive they can be.

JOLY MACFIE: And you just plug the camera straight into it.

CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: And just, you plug in straight to it, and you could do live streams. So, the whole package, with exception of the camera, was \$3,000. And so, you add the camera on top of that, let's say another \$500, and watch, you need two cameras, if you're going to do two cameras. I personally think that we could begin, and I like what you're saying, we could, you know, what Council Member Brewer was stating, is that, you know, sometimes we want to go from really bad to great situation, we could go from really bad to good to better to great. And the whole idea is to get it started. And to, it might not look like, you know, like it's been looked right now, but at least if we could, like you said, the audio, some kind of a image, you know, a visual. And I think that's what people who are looking to watch, community boards and so forth, they're trying to get information. They want to be updated, because whatever people are not up on, they're down on. But in your estimation, if I

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hear right, you're saying \$10,000 to put the whole thing together, per site?

JOLY MACFIE: I think you could do that, but you have to think more about, it depends, again, on what, on the sites, I mean, with the community boards, you know, what's going to happen to the equipment when the community board isn't meeting? And to make sure it isn't, you know, you're going to have to ensure it or whatever this, you know, to like hang onto the gear and this kind of thing.

CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Good point.

JOLY MACFIE: So, there's a lot of, you know--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Yeah, I mean, I think the agencies are a good place to start. City Planning Commission never moves.

JOLY MACFIE: Yes.

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Taxi and Limousine Commission never moves. Board of Election never moves. I mean, there are some really well desired hearings that want to, the public wants to see, and they never go anywhere. And there's lots of those. So those seem to me

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like low hanging fruit, to be able to deal with.

JOLY MACFIE: Yes.

RACHAEL FAUSS: And I think even for the mobile commissions, for example, you know, Citizens Union followed the 2010 Charter Commission very carefully, as well as the Districting Commission, and they were mobile, and they managed to make it work. So, I think they would be case studies, perhaps, to look at, in terms of--

CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Good point.

RACHAEL FAUSS: --how do you ensure the accessibility and another thing to think about is if you get a lot of facilities set up, maybe those become the locations where the community boards would meet, rather than vice-versa. Maybe--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: Oh, no, they have to move around, you'll have World War III.

RACHAEL FAUSS: Oh. [laughs] But I guess the thought being that, you know, if you have, if you set up designated locations for webcasting, perhaps there are some entities that

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would seek those locations to then have their meetings rather than, you know--

COUNCIL MEMBER BREWER: I guess you haven't been at too many community board meetings [laughter]

CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Rachael, let me, and I want to come back to you, I want to ask you how many, how long you think that the Office of Media should take in coming up with an evaluation, have you guys in your studies, did you come up with that analysis? And second of all, how many hearings did you guys, the Citizens Union, estimate that you will have? Are there any discrepancy between what was reported and what, in your studies?

RACHAEL FAUSS: Well, we haven't done a study like they have, for example. But what I can say is we've looked at what agencies currently are webcasting, and which ones have public meetings. Not all the agencies do have public meetings. In the same way that some do, others do, so that's something to consider, as well. I think, you know, if there's a regulatory process, an agency might have a hearing, but they



1  
2 don't, they don't always. So, I don't think it's  
3 even every City agency that holds the type of  
4 public meetings that we're thinking about. So,  
5 that's something to consider, as well, that  
6 especially if you're doing a sort of staged  
7 approach of doing agencies first. Not all have  
8 public meetings, and we could share the  
9 information we've compiled on who started to  
10 webcast, like I mentioned, and which agencies do  
11 have meetings. That information we do have.

12 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: You were  
13 going to say, I'm so sorry.

14 JOLY MACFIE: Well, just, you know,  
15 it's, when you have switching is when it all gets  
16 much more expensive and labor intensive. You  
17 know, if you don't have switching, you know, then  
18 you don't need an operator or anything.  
19 Basically, as you say, you, all you've got to do  
20 is switch the thing on, and--

21 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: And how much  
22 you estimate if--I just want it on the record--

23 JOLY MACFIE: Say you were using,  
24 you know, you were using one camera, HD--

25 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Right.

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2 JOLY MACFIE: --going into like  
3 that standalone web broadcaster thing, which  
4 doesn't need a computer, which, but it needs wi-fi  
5 or an Ethernet connection, you know, and a decent  
6 mic, you know, maybe just a good quality, you  
7 know, shotgun mic or something on the top. So,  
8 you know, that's, then you're talking, you know,  
9 probably \$1,500 bucks and \$350 bucks, \$3,500 a  
10 year for the live stream account. You know, which  
11 would give you all notification, all that, you  
12 know, how sort of, you know, front end business,  
13 as well, you know, sort of all, you know, built  
14 in.

15 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Doesn't sound  
16 too expensive to me. Any other questions or  
17 comments?

18 JOLY MACFIE: A little bit of  
19 training, and a bit of training, obviously, you  
20 know.

21 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: And they  
22 already mentioned that all the agencies and  
23 community boards, let's say district manager, if  
24 they're going to be the ones responsible, for  
25 recording it, they will be gathered together and

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be trained one shot deal, and do it maybe twice a year or something like that. [crosstalk] And then develop the video.

JOLY MACFIE: --I don't know if you have to have union operators on this thing, or if there's any further complications like that.

CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: I would imagine that wouldn't be the case. But I would imagine also we could have, since it's the same equipment, that they could develop a video, a training video, you know, a ten minute, doesn't take long. It's really not that, as you know, it's not that complicated. It's just knowing where to plug it in, and then turn it on.

JOLY MACFIE: Well, what I've found is that, you know, is that you get into a routine with this stuff, and so if you're doing the same thing over and over, generally you solve the problems, you have a lot of teething, but once you're set, and you can just come in and switch it back on, and it's the same as it was yesterday--

CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: There you go.

JOLY MACFIE: --it works, you know, until something breaks. But it just works. Its'

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2 when you're having to move it around, go into  
3 different situations, that, you know, that you  
4 need, there's a lot of messing about, kind of  
5 thing.

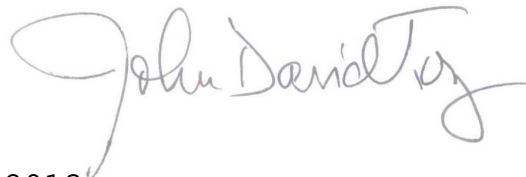
6 CHAIRPERSON CABRERA: Well, I want  
7 to thank you both. And I just want to say that  
8 I'm looking forward for this bill, Intro 132,  
9 moving forward. I think it's a great, great  
10 opportunity for the public to be able to be more  
11 connected to what is happening. As was wisely  
12 stated, a lot of these meetings take place during  
13 the day, even ourselves, we don't, sometimes we're  
14 here and we can't be watching some of these  
15 hearings. And so, be a great opportunity to have  
16 access to them. Well, this meeting comes to an  
17 end. Have a great day, everyone.

18 [pause, background noise, blank]  
19

C E R T I F I C A T E

I, JOHN DAVID TONG 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

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "John David Tong". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned to the right of the printed word "Signature".

Date May 15, 2013