



CITY OF NEW YORK

MANHATTAN COMMUNITY BOARD FOUR

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COREY JOHNSON
Chair

ROBERT J. BENFATTO, JR., ESQ.
District Manager

October 10, 2012

Mr. Stanley Shor
Assistant Commissioner
New York City Department of Information Technology and Telecommunication
2 Metrotech Center, 4th Floor
Brooklyn, N.Y. 11201

Dear Mr. Shor:

Manhattan Community Board 4 (CB4) appreciates that DOITT is requesting public comments on the Request for Information (RFI) for sidewalk based Telecommunication devices. We agree with DOITT that the current "Payphone" devices are outdated and in need of transformation in their amenities, design and placement and are pleased that DOITT is evaluating what changes to implement in the October 2014 new franchise contract.

In summary, CB4 supports telecommunication devices, provided each one has a significantly reduced footprint and modern amenities including Wi-Fi and touch screen devices, as well as telephone services.

There should be fewer Telecommunication devices that include an advertising panel (no more than one location per two-sided block). None of the existing installations should be grandfathered. Site selection should include utilize a process and guidelines similar to newsstand, including Community Board review.

Below is CB4's response to the first 5 questions in the DOITT RFI (the final 4 questions are designed for potential franchisees and technology experts):

- 1. *What alternative communication amenities would fill a need?*** CB4 supports the incorporation of free Wi-Fi services within a defined radius and for the device internet and phone service to avoid the disruptions currently caused by cable cuts due to groundwork. We envision a small computer touchscreen with one button free access to nearby mass transit, bike share and landmark locations; 911, 311 and 511 contact; and community (including Community Board) events. Amenities for charge could include telephone calls, and cell phone battery recharge - all with time limits of 3 to 4 minutes. Both coin and credit card payments should be allowed.

Understanding the city's desire to maintain advertising revenue, the screen could have advertising adjacent to touch screen information and on the full screen while battery recharge is occurring. On the telecommunication installation with advertising panels, the panels should have the capabilities to carry notifications of major emergencies such as hurricanes or evacuations.

While all installations should include basic services, including 911, 311 and 511 one touch feature, the mix of amenities might vary based on location, need and Community Board recommendations.

- 2. *Should the current designs of sidewalk payphone enclosures be substantially revised?*** CB4 requests a substantial redesign of the sidewalk telecommunication devices to a two-panel slim profile fixture, no more than one foot deep, with no pedestrian protections or other overhangs. The devices should be placed so that none of their elements projects more than three feet from the curb.

These two-sided devices should include a steel and glass design, consistent with existing Cemusa bus shelter and newsstand designs (the devices could also be integrated with them). We recommend that no more than one advertising panel be permitted per block

(including intersection). We feel strongly there should not be free standing advertising panels. At a time when the city is seeking, as stated in the DOTT RFI, to reduce sidewalk fixtures this would be a dangerous and unnecessary precedent.

3. What features should be included to make the installations accessible to people with disabilities?

Telecommunication devices should be handicapped accessible to the maximum degree possible. This should include vertical sliding display panels to enable wheelchair accessibility, brail numbers and letters, and verbal-to-type conversation features. Specific efforts should be made for any proposed installations located near residences and services for the disabled and neighborhoods that contain a higher percentage of disabled residents.

4. Should the current number of payphones on City sidewalks change and, if so, how? While there continues to be a need for payphones/Telecommunication devices, far fewer are needed than currently exist. While we could not estimate how many Telecommunication devices may be needed, the estimated 75% reduction in payphones nationally in the last 3 years might be a guiding goal.

We propose that the placement of telecommunication devices go through a process similar to newsstands, that include Community Board review and approval, as well as well as recommendations for amenities and placement of advertising panels. The new franchise contract in 2014 should not grandfather in current payphone locations and DOITT and/or franchisee recommendation for placement of telecommunications devices should be guided by:

Safety, Pedestrian Crowding and sidewalk furniture/fixtures: Several areas have sidewalks that are overcrowded with pedestrians and/or other street furniture and the benefits of the telecommunication devices would be outweighed by the additional pedestrian obstruction. An example is the major retail districts along Eighth and Ninth Avenues in CB4. On Eighth Avenue, one can routinely observe streams of pedestrians walking in the street in the Broadway/hotel midtown district, between the Port Authority and Penn Station and in the central retail corridor of Chelsea. On most of 9th Avenue, the sidewalks were narrowed and the street widened to accommodate the Lincoln Tunnel traffic. In addition many of the buildings have sidewalk trap doors that remain open during most of the day. In the spring, summer and fall there are over 50 sidewalk cafes. As a result the pedestrian path is extremely tight. Yet there are 70 installations on those two corridors. (See Attachment for list of payphones that are inappropriate to preserve beyond the current franchise term).

- a. At the same time, 10th 11th and 12th Avenues have wide sidewalks that are less travelled. If properly situated, more telecommunication devices in these areas will be a benefit from a pedestrian safety standpoint.
- b. *Avoiding corner locations:* Most vehicular/pedestrian accidents and fatalities occur while vehicles are turning onto a street or avenue. Turning speeds and pedestrian crossing decisions are often affected by momentary viewing from varying site-lines and angles from various heights and locations. There have been several accidents, including ones that lead to fatalities that occurred at intersections with payphone installations in our Community Board district. We prefer to err on the side of caution and generally restrict telecommunication devices from locations near street corners
- c. *Limiting Telecommunication device per block:* No more than one device on any block (including both sides of the street) should include an advertising panel. Any more than that creates visual clutter and likely has diminishing returns for the advertisers. There seems to be no rationale for installing more than two Telecommunication devices on any given block (including both sides of the street). That should provide sufficient availability for any emergency and sufficient access for anyone seeking information, even in high usage areas.
- d. *Need for telecommunication services:* DOITT should identify census tracts/blocks that have lower telephone ownership rates for potential placements. Also, if the increased amenities are provided, locations near (or attached to) bicycle share locations, major tourist destinations and parks (without advertisements) may be appropriate;
- e. *Current usage:* While data was not available in the DOITT RFI, we feel phone usage (and telecommunication usage in the future) should be used in determining the best need for telecommunication devices at a given location. We hope that information becomes available before the franchise renewal.

Most importantly, the location decision process should include Community Board review and recommendations, with a 60 day review period. While we understand that this might lead to a one-time relatively high volume of location reviews in advance and immediately after franchise selection in 2014, it will be well worth the effort. Community Boards, and the various businesses and block/neighborhood associations they consult with have substantial knowledge of pedestrian usage, street

furniture, areas of crime and safety concerns and specific buildings or areas that may have specific amenity or other telecommunication needs. We also feel this process should be used for recommendation for Telecommunication device removals and that there also should be a process for Community Board initiated removal of devices.

5. **Should advertising panels be limited to printed posters?** Digital panels are now the norm and are much easier to maintain and thus a logical replacement for most printed posters, provided the illumination is at a level that will not impact surrounding residences or ground floor businesses or create pedestrian or driver glare. We strongly object to including moving animation, “news zippers,” video, or frequently changing panels that do cause visual clutter and likely would increase driver (or bicyclist or pedestrian) view time to an unsafe level.

Other Recommendations

1. **Information is crucial:** It is important (and appropriate, given the agency’s mission) that DOITT make information on Telecommunication device usage (by amenity) and repair status available on-line for individual installations as well as by Community Board and other geography. This will be crucial for informed Community Board decisions and will increase public understanding about site location and improve usage efficiency. We were disappointed that individual Payphone usage information was not available for review during this RFI process, since it would have been useful in responding to question 4 regarding the number of Telecommunication devices. We hope the new Telecommunication devices will enable this information to be collected and available in real time.
2. **Continued dialogue with the public in advance of New Franchise Contract:** The current payphone amenities and design have remained largely unchanged for over 50 years. It is likely that the new design/amenities will remain in place for a substantial amount of time. Continued community discussion in the form of public hearings, charettes, and presentations should also occur. We had hoped that a design contest with public input would take place. Short of such we hope that any tentative design is brought back for public review and comment before final approval.

This is particularly important because, as evidenced by DOITT’s technical questions (questions 6-9, not addressed in our response) the available technology and thus amenities are partially unknown. In addition, we understand there may be trade-offs – for example touch-screen capacity versus brail availability – and that industry feedback is still required on which devices will be the least likely to be impacted by weather and vandalism. As more is known and the trade-offs articulated and discussed, ideas and preferences can be better defined. We hope DOITT’s process will enable such discussion and Community Board input. .

CB4 greatly appreciates that DOITT is seeking information from a wide variety of stakeholders, including the time extension provided to enable Community Board responses after the summer. We also appreciate the wide variety of options DOITT is considering on amenities, design and location decision process and the creative thinking the phrasing of the RFI reflects. We look forward to continued discussion and to a positive future for useful public Telecommunication devices.

Sincerely yours,



Corey Johnson
Chair



Christine Berthet
Co-Chair
Transportation Planning Committee



Jay Marcus
Co-Chair
Transportation Planning Committee

Cc: Gale Brewer
Christine Quinn
Scott Stringer

Attachment: Sidewalk Curbside Payphone that are Inappropriate to Preserve Beyond the Current Franchise Term.

On 9th Av, NW corner of 9th and 45th St.

On 9th Av, NE corner of 9th and 38th St

On 44th St, SW corner 44 and 9th avenue

SW corner of 10th avenue and 50th St., on 10th

E - midblock 50/49th St., on 10th Av.

SE corner of 26th St. and 9th, on 26th St

SW corner of 25th St. and 6th Av, on 25th

On 8th Avenue, SW corner of 8th and 56th St

On 8th Av, NW corner of 8th and 55th St

On 9th, NE corner of 42nd and 9th Av across from TD Bank

NW corner of 8th Av. and 44th St, on 8th

On 8th Ave, SW corner of 8th and 40th Street

W-Midblock 45/44 on 8th Av.

NE corner of 9th Av and 44th St, on 9th

NW corner of 9th Av and 43rd St., on 9th

NE corner 9th Av and 43rd St, on 9th Avenue

SE corner of 9th Av and 43rd St, on 9th

SW corner, 9th Av. and 42nd St. on 9th

NW corner of 34th St. and 9th Av, on 34th

NW corner of 9th and 37th St, on 9th

NW corner 47th St and 9th on 9th Ave

NE corner of 48th St & 9AV

On 9th avenue: SW corner 43 St.

NW corner of 45th and 9th. On 9th Av.

SE Corner of 9th and 58th, on 9th Av

On 9th, NW corner of 9th and 39th St.

On 9th Av, SW corner of 9th Av. and 35th Street

On 9th Av. SE corner of 9th and 38th St.
On 9th, NE corner of 9th and 39th
On 9th, SE corner of 9th and 37th street
On 9th NE corner of 9th and 39th street
On 9th, SE corner of 9th avenue and 40th street
On 9th, NE corner of 9th and 41st Street
On 9th Av, NW corner of 9th Av and 40th Street
On 9th Av, SW corner of 9th and 41st St.
On 9th Avenue, SE corner of 9th and 56th Street
On 37th Street, 307 West 37th, between 8th and 9th Avenues
On 8th Avenue, NW Corner of 8th and 37th
On 8th Avenue, SW corner of 8th and 38th
8th Ave, NW Corner of 8th and 38th Street
8th Ave, NW Corner of 8th and 39th Street
On 8th Ave, NW Corner of 8th and 39th
SW corner of 8th Av and 44th St., on 8th
SW corner of 8th Av. and 45th St., on 8th
NW corner of 8th Av. and 45th St, on 8th
SW corner of 8th Av. and 46th St, on 8th
NW corner of 8th Av. and 46th St, on 8th
NW corner of 8th Av. and 47th St, on 8th
SW corner of 8th Av and 48th Av, on 8th
NW corner of 8th Av and 48th St, on 8th
NW corner of 8th Av and 49th St, on 8th
SW corner of 8th ave and 50th St., on 8th
NW corner of 8th Av. and 50th St, on 8th
E - Midblock 52/53rd St. on 8th Av
SW corner of 8th Av. and 53rd St., on 8th

NW corner of 8th Av. and 53rd St, on 8th

913 Eighth Avenue @ 54 St

SW corner of 9th Av. and 54th St, on 9th

NW corner of 9th Av. and 53rd St, on 9th

SE corner of 53rd St and 9th Av., on 53rd

SW corner of 9th Av and 53rd St., on 9th

SE corner of 9th Av. and 52nd St., on 9th

SW corner of 9th Av. and 51st St., on 9th

NW corner of 9th Av and 51st St., on 9th

SE corner of 9th Av and 50th St, on 9th

NE corner of 9th Avenue and 49th St., on 9th

SW corner of 9th Av. and 49th St, on 9th

SE corner of 9th Av. and 49th St, on 9th

SW corner of 9th Av. and 48th St, on 9th

SE corner of 9th Av. and 46th St, on 9th

NW corner of 9th Av. and 46th St, on 9th

SE corner of 9th Av and 46th St, on 9th

SW corner of 9th Av and 46th St, on 9th

SW corner of 9th Av and 45th St. on 9th

NE corner of W. 44th and 10th Avenue

SE corner of W. 44th St. and 10th Avenue, on 10th

SW corner of W 15th St. and 6th Avenue, 6th

NE corner of W14th St. and

6th Avenue on 6th

Please note, many of the above listed installations are at street corners which, as stated in the above letter, are not a good location for Telecommunication devices. For some of the installations alternate locations not at the corner may be acceptable, pending Community Board review.

Sincerely,