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NEW YORK, NY 10007

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: March 3, 2021

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A RECOVERY FOR ALL OF US: MAYOR DE BLASIO ANNOUNCES MAJOR NEXT STEPS TO CLOSE THE DIGITAL DIVIDE IN NYC

City releases requesting proposals for modern, innovative, equitable broadband infrastructure for universal broadband and announces reservation process for light poles to be used for 5G installation

NEW YORK—Mayor Bill de Blasio today announced next steps on the City’s efforts to achieve affordable and universal broadband. With a historic \$157 million capital investment, the City is releasing a Request for Proposals that invites the telecommunications industry to create new affordable broadband service options through a first-ever coordinated system of access of up to 100,000 City assets, prioritizing areas identified by the Task Force on Racial Inclusion and Equity. The Mayor also announced the City will accelerate the buildout of 5G by making an unprecedented 7,500 City street poles available for mobile carriers to build out their networks, mainly in underserved areas. Combined, these initiatives will reach millions of New Yorkers across all five boroughs, expanding access to quality, high-speed, and reliable internet at home or on the go.

“All New Yorkers deserve affordable Internet access, no matter their zip code,” said **Mayor Bill de Blasio**. “With this historic effort to invest in broadband and 5G infrastructure, we are making tremendous strides toward closing the digital divide once and for all.”

“The digital divide affects how New Yorkers live, work, go to school, and connect with their communities,” said **Deputy Mayor for Operations Laura Anglin**. “We applaud the multi-agency effort to change the playing field to ensure that all New Yorkers, regardless of where they live, have access to quality, high-speed, affordable internet service.”

"Internet connectivity is a means to address inequity, combat digital redlining, and create new economic opportunities for hundreds of thousands of New Yorkers who have been historically sidelined from the benefits of digital life," said **J. Phillip Thompson, Deputy Mayor for Strategic Policy Initiatives and co-chair of the Taskforce on Racial Inclusion and Equity**. "These initiatives will bring 21st century life to underserved and low-income neighborhoods and it will provide Internet connection in a way that protects user privacy, ensures affordable rates, and delivers reliable access."

"High-speed internet facilitates online learning, career advancement, and increased employment opportunities. It is a requirement to fully participate in today's economy," said **Deputy Mayor for Housing and Economic Development Vicki Been**. "Building out access to the Internet

democratizes a critical economic development tool, especially by providing our public housing residents the same opportunities as other New York City residents and is an important milestone in our fair recovery agenda."

"New Yorkers need internet connectivity to continue to live, work, and learn," said **John Paul Farmer, Chief Technology Officer of the City of New York**. "With this RFP, we are opening the door for industry to step up and propose a range of technologies that will modernize broadband infrastructure and bring 4G and 5G connectivity to those New Yorkers who need it most. There is no one solution -- we welcome any and all ideas and the opportunity to work with all those who share our goal of closing the digital divide in New York City."

"Over the past year, we worked closely with our partners in the telecom industry and we are now poised to make New York City a leader in 5G technology," said **Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications Commissioner and Citywide Chief Information Officer Jessica Tisch**. "The 5G networks we are building out across all five boroughs will serve as an engine of economic growth and recovery for years to come."

"COVID-19 has rapidly shifted the way we work, learn, socialize and access critical services. For communities hardest-hit, the digital divide only compounds longstanding racial and socioeconomic disparities," said **Sideya Sherman, Executive Director, Taskforce on Racial Inclusion and Equity and EVP, Community Engagement & Partnerships, NYCHA**. "This multi-agency effort will benefit all New Yorkers through greater competition while accelerating access for the communities that need it the most."

REQUEST FOR PROPOSALS

The RFP represents a first in the nation approach to closing the digital divide and changing the broadband market, incentivizing companies of every size, and M/WBEs, to provide new high-performing and affordable broadband service options. The RFP is being released as a partnership between the Mayor's Office of the Chief Technology Officer (MOCTO), the Department of Small Business Services (SBS), and the New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC). Through the RFP, the City expects to engage multiple internet service providers using a range of technologies that will lower connectivity costs for New Yorkers and increase competition amongst companies while incentivizing them to reach and serve more customers with broadband starting with more than 30 target neighborhoods identified by the Task Force on Racial Inclusion and Equity as most impacted by COVID-19. The RFP will reach 600,000 New Yorkers, including 200,000 public housing residents.

The [NYC Internet Master Plan](#) indicates that 18% of New Yorkers, or 1.5 million people, have neither a home nor a mobile internet connection. New Yorkers without internet connectivity are more negatively impacted during COVID-19 without the ability to access jobs, training, education, and mental health and healthcare resources from home.

18 agencies and entities have made up to 100,000 assets available for the RFP, including: Department of Social Services (DSS), Human Resources Administration (HRA); Department of Homeless Services (DHS); New York City Economic Development Corporation (NYCEDC);

Department of Transportation (DOT); Department of Environmental Protection (DEP); Parks Department (Parks); Department of Sanitation (DSNY); Department of Citywide Administrative Services (DCAS); Department of Education (DOE); Health + Hospitals (H+H); New York City Housing Authority (NYCHA); Department of Correction (DOC); New York Public Library (NYPL); Queens Public Library (QPL); Brooklyn Public Library (BPL); the Fire Department (FDNY); and the Brooklyn Navy Yard.

Proposals for the RFP will be accepted from March 3rd, 2021 through April 19th, 2021. Details and submission information can be found online at <http://nyc.gov/broadbandrfp>.

POLE-TOP RESERVATION PLAN FOR 5G

To make New York City a leader in municipal 5G deployments, the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications (DoITT) and the Department of Transportation (DOT) will make 7,500 street poles available to mobile telecommunications franchisees through the City's new online reservation portal, which streamlines the process. About 1,500 poles will be released each quarter over the next 15 months, with the first reservation phase starting this month.

This doubles the number of City street poles currently reserved and will ensure that 5G is built out equitably by making 75 percent of the poles available in the outer boroughs or above 96th Street in Manhattan. This strategic approach will make sure that historically underserved and under-connected neighborhoods can benefit from 5G and its promise of broadband-like speeds for cellular data connections.

Wireless companies that hold one of twelve mobile telecommunications franchise agreements with DoITT will install and operate mobile equipment on City-owned light poles and privately-owned utility poles. The 5G equipment can be housed and concealed in a box that also supports 4G equipment. The Public Design Commission has approved a uniform single-tenant design, which represents an unprecedented collaboration between the City and the mobile telecommunications industry and takes the public's input into account. Additionally, after an extensive review, the Department of Buildings will issue guidance to clarify standards for siting and placement of antennas on buildings.

STATE LEGISLATION

These efforts to bridge the digital divide will be accelerated through the enactment of legislation (S. 3141 Parker) which will level the internet service provider playing field and increase competition to lower prices. The City currently administers franchises for providers of cable companies that provide internet service but is prevented by state law from similarly engaging broadband-only companies.

Providing the City with the authority to issue franchises to a broader set of companies, not just cable internet franchisees, will increase consumer choice and drive down prices of in-home broadband, enabling more lower-income households to subscribe. With this legislation, New

York City can improve upon important consumer protections to advance high-quality service standards and safeguard the rights of consumers.

"We are excited to join our agency partners to kick off an RFP process that will take us one step closer to closing the digital divide for all those New Yorkers who lack effective access to broadband" said **Department of Transportation Commissioner Hank Gutman**. "Now more than ever, New Yorkers need reliable internet to connect them to essential resources, and DOT is proud to be a part of this innovative new plan. We look forward to seeing how DOT's light poles will be creatively used to expand broadband more widely to communities across the five boroughs."

"It is essential that we expand internet access for our fellow New Yorkers and continue to bridge the digital divide," said **Department of Buildings Commissioner Melanie E. La Rocca**. "We look forward to continuing to work with the industry to modernize the siting and placement process for antennas."

"COVID-19 has profoundly changed the way we live and work, emphasizing a greater need for internet access," said **Jonnel Doris, Commissioner of the NYC Department of Small Business Services**. "These initiatives are a big step forward in providing internet connectivity across the City, particularly in underserved communities. We look forward to the industry's proposals for broadband infrastructure assets, that will ultimately help our small businesses and job seekers access the resources they need."

"As our city's economy recovers, helping more New Yorkers access broadband connections makes our city stronger and fairer," said **James Patchett, President and CEO of the New York City Economic Development Corporation**. "These innovative solutions for low-cost internet service are essential to closing the city's digital divide and strengthening the communities most impacted by COVID-19."

"Inclusivity and equity are central to our Agency's work, as demonstrated by our consistent and comprehensive efforts to level the playing field for low-income communities through a range of reforms and initiatives, strengthening services for families in need while they are in shelter so that they can get back on their feet," said **Department of Homeless Services Administrator Joslyn Carter**. "The NYC Internet Master Plan takes this commitment even further, with the critical goal of continuing to bridge the digital divide for all New Yorkers, including the young New Yorkers who we serve. Helping our clients access opportunity has been our top priority from day one — and in these extraordinary times, this mission is more important than ever, which is why we have redoubled our efforts to preserve as much stability as possible while ensuring that the school-aged children we serve have the same access to education as all other New York City children. This plan will bring us closer to realizing a future where every New Yorker has equal access to opportunity and an equal chance at achieving success."

"The COVID-19 pandemic has only further exposed the digital divide impacting too many of our low-income neighborhoods across the five boroughs," said **Department of Human Resource Administration Administrator Gary Jenkins**. "Our efforts over the past several years at the Department of Social Services-Human Resources Administration to modernize the public

benefits process and increase access to vital resources with new online tools have shown firsthand how technology can promote inclusivity and equity among our communities. Access to reliable internet connectivity should be a given in the 21st century, and today's announcement highlights this Administration's commitment to making this a reality for all New Yorkers."

"As we move further into the digital age, and as our reliance on computers and broadband increases, it is abundantly clear that internet equity is essential to a just, fair society," said **NYC Parks Commissioner Mitchell J. Silver, FAICP**. "We are proud to support the Mayor's Internet Master Plan, and pledge to do our part to bring broadband to all through internet infrastructure expansion in our parks and greenspaces."

"DSNY is proud to join with our partner agencies across City government in supporting the NYC Internet Masterplan and expanded broadband internet access," said **Commissioner Edward Grayson, New York City Department of Sanitation**.

"As we have all been reminded during the pandemic, broadband access is vital to how we work and how our children learn," said **Commissioner Lisette Camilo, New York City Department of Citywide Administrative Services**. "Expanding broadband access will strengthen our communities and ensure equity and opportunity no matter which neighborhood you live in."

"All New Yorkers should have equal access to the City's digital resources, and we welcome this opportunity to help underserved communities. If any of our infrastructure or facilities can be used to improve connectivity for our neighbors, we look forward to working with the Mayor's Office of the Chief Technology Officer to play our part in this important initiative," said **Department of Correction Commissioner Cynthia Brann**.

"Technology is the great equalizer for people with disabilities," said **Victor Calise, Commissioner of the Mayor's Office for People with Disabilities**. "Over the past few months our meetings, social gatherings and culturally significant moments have been shifted to an online space that is more readily accessible for everyone. While this has opened many doors for people with disabilities previously unable to participate in these events, it has shed light on the digital divide disproportionately cast across our city. I applaud the Mayor's Office of the CTO for their commitment to providing broadband connection to all New Yorkers and look forward to being involved in the process."

"We can no longer allow the digital divide to affect our most vulnerable populations from properly being able to work, learn and have access to high-speed broadband. As the Chair of the Energy and Telecommunications Committee in the New York State Senate I applaud Mayor De Blasio for taking a multi-prong approach to ensure we are doing all we can to provide access to high-speed internet to all New York City residents. I will continue to do my part in the state legislature to propose and pass legislation that will work to provide access and affordability to all as it relates to broadband," said **Senator Kevin Parker**.

"I applaud the Mayor and his team for creating a template to increase investment opportunities to improve the infrastructure of the broadband network throughout the city; and also provide more high quality options for residents to obtain affordable service to bridge the digital divide. This,

along with the passage of Senator Parker's Bill S3141, will create true competition for service, thereby lowering costs to the public,” said **Senator Leroy Comrie**.

"One of the most immediate and wide-ranging needs for working-class families, especially the Black and Brown communities I represent in Northern Manhattan, is to close the digital divide. The lack of access, concentrated in low-income communities, is caused by the overreliance on private companies for access to the Internet, which is a public good. COVID-19 office closures and social distancing requirements have made this problem even more acute, preventing the city's most vulnerable populations from accessing financial and food support, education, health, and behavioral health services in this time of crisis. While we still have a long way to go, I applaud these initiatives that will begin to provide underserved, low-income neighborhoods much-needed and reliable access to the Internet,” said **Senator Robert Jackson**.

"COVID-19 has further exposed how the digital divide impacts how New Yorkers learn, work, and obtain information. Expanding reliable broadband access across the city will strengthen the communities I represent in East Harlem and the Bronx, and is a positive step towards evening the playing field as we prioritize equitable technology policy into the future," said **Senator José M. Serrano**.

“Access to high speed broadband is an absolute necessity, now more than ever before. Constituents frequently experiencing outages have trouble booking vaccine appointments, applying for jobs and accessing telehealth appointments. It is a matter of life or death. I welcome the mayor's initiative to make broadband more competitive and accessible. This proposal has the potential to improve quality of life for residents across Brooklyn and to eliminate provider monopolies in socioeconomically disadvantaged neighborhoods across the borough," said **Assembly Member Rodneyse Bichotte Hermelyn**.

“Equal access to high-speed internet is a necessity, not a luxury. For Bronxites, remote learning and applying for jobs depends on the ability to 'log-on' successfully. As a city, we need to do better to make sure these basic needs are met, and with this RFP, we are one step closer to closing the digital divide in every borough," said **Assembly Member Nathalia Fernández**.

"The COVID-19 pandemic laid bare the racial disparities in technology access across our City. As we enter a new year and usher in a new decade, there is no time like the present to address this digital divide or racial tech gap. I applaud the Administration's efforts to help create affordable and universal broadband for our traditionally underserved communities. It is time to close the gap and promote equal technology access, no matter a person's zip code or income level,” said **Assembly Member Mathylde Frontus**.

“The COVID pandemic has uncovered what Black and brown communities across the city have been experience for quite a while- a digital divide. Students, seniors and the community at-large almost over night had to become virtually connected to their schools, doctors and programs, but many did not and still do not have reliable broadband access. This initiative will help address this inequity. I commend the City for their efforts on this crucial issue,” said **Assembly Member Robert Rodriguez**.

“As former chair of the Education Committee and a lifelong supporter of public education and community libraries, this initiative creates an interagency solution that will lift up and connect the New Yorkers who need it most - children and underserved communities. The last year has served to underscore that accessible broadband for our students and historically disenfranchised communities is a key component for the long-term recovery of New York City,” said **Assembly Member Catherine Nolan**.

“Having broadband service is vital for students in the N.Y.C. school system and for people who are gainfully employed. Modernizing the infrastructure for this service while safeguarding its reliability and affordability is critical,” said Assemblyman David Weprin. “The COVID-19 pandemic revealed the digital divide experienced by so many in this city. The Mayor’s NYC Internet Master plan is a multi-agency effort to close that divide and help all New Yorkers recover,” said **Assembly Member David Weprin**.

"Our current circumstances have brought to the forefront what we've long known: too many New Yorkers are in the digital dark, and if things do not change, they will be left behind," said **Anthony W. Marx, president of The New York Public Library**. "We cannot allow that to happen. Digital equity must be a top priority, and that's why the Library is proud to be a supporting partner of the NYC Internet Master Plan. We are gratified to see that it continues to move forward, and that we are moving closer to open, equitable access to what is absolutely a necessity."

“A reliable and affordable internet connection is critical for modern life—for logging into class, for searching for job opportunities, for ordering medication, or for getting a vaccine,” said **Nick Higgins, Chief Librarian, Brooklyn Public Library**. “Making broadband access readily available and providing all New Yorkers with equal access to information and opportunity is truly urgent work, and we are pleased to take the first steps to make this important initiative a reality.”

“This RFP is a promising step towards ensuring all New Yorkers will be able to go online to find information and more opportunities to find success in their lives, and towards leveling the economic and educational playing field,” said **Queens Public Library President and CEO Dennis M. Walcott**. “Just from the nearly 400,000 people who have shown up outside our locations to catch a WiFi signal using their personal devices during the pandemic, we know there is a tremendous need for affordable internet access in the communities of Queens, especially with the increasing reliance on virtual platforms. We congratulate the City on its progress to date with its Internet Master Plan, and are pleased to be its partner in promoting digital inclusion and equity.”

To facilitate the additional work needed to implement the NYC Internet Master Plan, New York City expresses its gratitude for the monetary contributions made to the Mayor's Fund to Advance New York City by Mastercard and the Ford Foundation. Their generous donations have made it possible to expand the New York City Mayor’s Office of the Chief Technology Officer’s team with three additional positions for broadband work: Director of Data, Director of Broadband Technology, and Director of Digital Inclusion & Partnerships.

“Over the last year we’ve seen how critical digital technology is for people across the country to be able to access opportunity and have a pathway to economic mobility, “ said **Michael Froman, Vice Chairman and President of Strategic Growth, Mastercard**. “Mastercard is committed to building a more inclusive, sustainable digital economy, working with partners across the public and private sectors to advance digital inclusion for communities and small businesses. Alongside the Ford Foundation, we are proud to support the City of New York in its initiative to bring much-needed broadband access to all residents.”

"We are pleased to support the hiring of public interest technologists to strengthen the delivery of equitable broadband initiatives in New York City," says **Jenny Toomey, Director of the Public Interest Technology Catalyst Fund at the Ford Foundation**. "Full democratic, economic, and cultural participation is impossible without sufficient access to the internet. This fact has been electrified by the pandemic. We are proud to support the Mayor’s Office of the Chief Technology Officer to build momentum for and deliver broadband equity, and to drive just technology policy and planning during the recovery and into the future.”

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