



Wow: 80 city rec centers are finally getting internet access

Technically Philly | Robert Torres | December 13, 2016



We continue to see the terms of the City of Philadelphia's franchise agreement with Comcast, signed almost exactly 12 months ago, slowly roll out. The latest deliverable? The Center City-based communications giant will be providing local government with a long-overdue internet boost.

According to a press release made available on Monday, Comcast Business and the city have reached a multi-year agreement for an institutional network (or "iNet") for local

government buildings and rec centers. The agreement will span the same timeframe as the franchise agreement (that's 15 years in case you missed our previous coverage).

"We're thrilled to be moving forward with Comcast toward a huge upgrade in the City's network," said Mayor Jim Kenney in the press release. "In this digital age, the network will be the very backbone of our government, and will greatly enhance our ability to provide vital city services, particularly for the departments of Polie, Fire, and Emergency Management."

Charlie Brennan, the City's CIO, told Technical. ly the iNet system will reach 227 separate buildings with city agencies in them, in addition to some 80 rec centers currently without

internet access. (Though many of the city's 150 rec centers were KEYSPOt public computing centers, apparently dozens were internet deserts. We're pretty shocked at this number.) According to the city's tech honcho, the 20-year-old infrastructure was due for an expansion, specifically with institutions like the Philadelphia Police Department using more and more video investigations for the Health Department needing to transfer heavier files like X-Rays and other imaging.

"What we're trying to do is move ahead of where everyone is going: putting more and more information on the network," Brennan said. "This network is going to put us ahead for years and years to come."

The planned expansion will take the city's current set of two 1 Gbps "pipes" to four 10 gbit pipes (that's Gigibits per second).

"Basically raising our internet access by a factor of 20," Brennan said.

Perhaps the biggest win for citizens is that the city will now be able to set up Wifi connections at all city facilities including Love Park. We'll be looking out for this one, as public access to WiFi has been a long-time coming in Philadelphia.

Though financial terms of this project are protected by a non-disclosure agreement, Brennan did mention the city is paying no capital cost for the connection boost, which will require optic fiber installations in some buildings.

"We're very pleased to see that the city's institutional network contract with Comcast includes a massive expansion of free internet services at recreation centers and other municipal buildings," said Hannah Sassaman, Policy Director at Media Mobilizing Project, the activism group that has been keeping tabs on the city's negotiations with Comcast since

day one. "City Council leaders and community members worked very hard, alongside the Administration, to push Comcast to expand this service, a vital one in a City with the third worst broadband penetration of any big city in the United States." ■