



CITY OF BOSTON, MASSACHUSETTS
Office of the Mayor
Thomas M. Menino

PRESS RELEASE

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**Mayor Menino's Wireless Initiative Moves Forward:
openairboston.net to Serve Among Nation's First
Non-Profit Wireless Networks**

Mayor Thomas M. Menino today announced that the Boston Wireless Initiative has filed incorporation papers to create a non-profit entity that will be called *openairboston.net*. The filing marks a major step forward for the initiative, which was announced last summer and is using a unique nonprofit approach to providing municipal WiFi. Using this model, Boston will be the only city in the nation offering a not-for-profit wholesale network, open to business and technology innovators of all kinds while also delivering some of the lowest-priced broadband service in the country to city residents.

"The creation of *openairboston* is a significant milestone in our efforts to bring inexpensive, open wireless service to Boston residents while also creating a unique model for others in the region, the country, and around the world to follow," said Mayor Thomas M. Menino. "Boston will not only bring the power of the Internet to all of our neighborhoods, we will also ensure that the City remains on the forefront of technology and continues to foster economic growth. We're off to a great start."

The formal incorporation of *openairboston.net* comes eight months after Pam Reeve, a former chief executive of software company Lightbridge Inc., and former member of Menino's Wireless Task Force, was asked to take on the role of interim CEO for the initiative and to formulate a launch plan. Menino said that the non-profit is now able to begin designing the organization's framework, execute contracts with the City and outside vendors, step up its fund-raising efforts, and make important progress on current and future pilot projects of the wireless network.

Since Reeve's appointment, Boston has already seen the creation of two downtown wireless hot spots and is currently working on a one-square-mile pilot project in Roxbury's Grove Hall and Dudley Square. Reeve said the build-out of the city-wide network is expected to be complete by the end of 2008.

“With *openairboston*, we really believe that the possibilities are endless,” said Reeve. “We’ve already had the contributions and participation of some of the most well-respected, highly-skilled telecom experts and professionals – in Boston and beyond. We’re looking to move forward with this same momentum and sense of collaboration.”

The non-profit will utilize space on the city’s infrastructure – its light poles, traffic signals, and city buildings – to build the network. The entity is working to raise the projected \$16 to \$20 million through private donations, in keeping with Menino’s pledge that Boston taxpayers will bear no financial burden for the initiative. Reeve said the Museum of Science has agreed to serve as fiscal agent for *openairboston.net* until it achieves 501(c)(3) status, and commended the institution for being a long-time champion of wireless Internet for Boston.

"The Museum of Science has greatly enjoyed collaborating with various members of the Boston community on this important project and is committed to continuing to lend the expertise of its staff and technological resources," said Brian Worobey, Chief Information Officer at the Museum of Science. "A wireless network in our City would provide access to critical educational and job training tools necessary for our young people to compete in a technology driven economy."

This unique approach to municipal wireless, outlined in the Mayor’s Wireless Task Force’s report delivered last July, seeks to dramatically increase competition by operating a wholesale network that provides retail Internet Service Providers (ISPs) with a connection between Internet “backhaul” operators and customers at very low cost. This model, the Task Force found after more than 5 months of research, would best achieve the City of Boston’s principal goals: to foster economic development and stimulate innovation, to ameliorate the “digital divide” within the community, and to improve access to and the quality of city services.

Reeve said prices for the service could be as low as \$10 - \$15 per month for residents.

“Right now, Internet service is available to 90% of Boston’s residents, but only 40% actually subscribe. Even more troubling is the fact that as many as 80 percent of Boston Public Schools students do not have access at home. This is simply unacceptable,” said Mayor Menino. “That’s why we are moving aggressively on this initiative – starting in Boston’s neighborhoods.”

With this model, Reeve says community organizations will likely be able to provide low-cost Internet access to neighborhood constituencies through grants. Surplus revenue that accrues to the non-profit organization will be returned to the community for digital inclusion programs, of which the City’s successful *Technology Goes Home* program is an example.

For more information, visit *openairboston.net*.

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