

Editorial | Wireless Philadelphia

Mayor Wi-Fi

Anyone who's seen Mayor Street zip through messages on his BlackBerry knows the guy is tech-savvy.

Now the mayor is cementing his status as a high-tech leader by closing in on a landmark achievement: creating the nation's largest, citywide wireless Internet network.

The project known as Wireless Philadelphia recently scaled another major hurdle. Street announced at a ceremony last week that the city had finished testing wireless service in a 15-square-mile test zone.

With the Wi-Fi (wireless fidelity) service getting passing grades, Street approved moving ahead on building out the entire city by the end of the year.

Getting Wireless Internet access up and running across the city's 135 square miles will be Street's parting gift to citizens when he departs City Hall after this year.

Greg Goldman, chief executive of the Wireless Philadelphia nonprofit organization, which was set up to oversee the project, says cities around the world are watching the Philadelphia initiative.

Of particular note is Philadelphia's public-private partnership, which provides for Atlanta-based Internet provider Earthlink to build the network. The firm hopes to recoup its \$13.5 million investment by signing up customers for the service.

For the city and civic leaders, the Internet access could be yet another selling point to attract and retain businesses as well as residents. It's also likely to be a boon to the convention and visitor trade, since the signal will be offered free in a number of downtown parks and city squares.

Not only will the project blanket the city in wireless service - available at market-rate fees - it also will offer an Internet signal at reduced

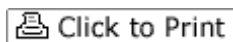
costs for low-income households. Coupled with the discount rates, a "digital inclusion" effort by Wireless Philadelphia will provide low-cost computers and training for low-income households.

There's also an enormous potential for city government to streamline its operations with wireless technology. With Internet-linked devices, crews could provide real-time data on water main and road repairs, building inspections, home visits by social workers and the like. Police could even use tiny cameras and Wi-Fi technology to expand their monitoring of crime hot spots.

The next mayor will be limited only by his imagination in putting Wi-Fi to good civic uses - thanks, of course, to Street's imaginative wireless concept.

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