by Gifford Miller
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This week the City Council is very proud to announce the launching of our new Website www.nyccouncil.info, a tool that we hope will promote both greater transparency and greater citizen participation in city government. Building a stronger city in the 21st century means taking advantage of the technology that can bring more people into the governing process. It also means that we have to work to bridge the “digital divide” and ensure that everyone has access to the advantages that the web provides.

This is the latest City Council effort to utilize new technologies in the service of better government. We started two years ago by putting the current voting record of each council member on-line and, since then, we’ve partnered with NYC.gov to broadcast Stated Council Meetings and show council votes on crucial legislation live through the web. We’ve launched advocacy initiatives that allow New Yorkers to speak out on behalf of New York City to federal and state elected officials on issues like fair funding for our schools and homeland defense. We’ve secured millions in funding to give every New Yorker better access to the Internet at schools, libraries and community center

And New Yorkers are responding enthusiastically â€“ last year we received 12,000 emails in just two weeks calling on the City Council to restore funding to keep city zoos open in Brooklyn and Queens. Every week I receive more than 5,000 emails on subjects varying from laws governing sidewalk cafes to the allocation of New York City’s $46 billion budget. Web organizing and email have empowered small community groups, neighborhood associations, and volunteer organizations to raise their voices and fight for their causes.

As more and more New Yorkers gain access to the web, they will take advantage of the high-tech tools that enable them to play a more active role in civic affairs.

This week the City Council is taking another big step forward in providing New Yorkers with those tools. While www.nyc.gov has become a great resources for information about city agencies and resolving constituent problems, I want to provide New Yorkers with the ability to pro-actively have input into the city's policies and guidelines.

The City Council is launching www.nyccouncil.info to replace our old web site, www.council.nyc.ny.us . In addition to the new easy-to-remember name, our new site allows users to:

1. Speak out with the click of a mouse by emailing every sponsor of a bill or resolution .
2. Receive weekly emails on the location and topics of City Council hearings, meetings and events, and on " hot topics " on the council side of City Hall.
3. Use the council member finder to find out who their council member is and how to contact them.
4. Navigate to the information they want easily and intuitively, with improved accessibility for disabled users.
5. Access constituent resources in Spanish .

And we won't stop there.

In addition, the Council is finding ways to apply technology to make government more efficient and cost-effective, measures which benefit every New Yorker by allowing us to do more with less.

We are investigating how technology can make our schools better, both through providing computers and resources in our schools and ensuring our kids get the technology skills they need to succeed. Also, by investing in programs like "HIP (Helping Involve Parents)Schools" , a program that provides state-of-the-art. 24 hour communication between parents, teachers and students via Internet or telephone, we are bringing the same kinds of accountability and participation to our education system that www.nyccouncil.info brings to municipal government.

We are bringing competitive online bidding to the procurement process, which both allows the

city to purchase services and goods in a more cost-effective and timely manner, but also allows locally-owned small businesses to compete for city contracts
. We are investing in facilities like the Biotech center at State University of New York downstate. By encouraging the growth of emerging technologies, we are seeding a field whose benefits we will reap for years to come.

This week, on the "Speakers Page" at www.nyccouncil.info , I will have information about these technology-related achievements and proposals for our online users. I invite all New Yorkers to use our new website and, of course, to provide me with the feedback, comments and suggestions that our new website is designed to facilitate.

Gifford Miller is the Speaker of the New York City Council.