

Statement of the Historic Districts Council
Before the NYC Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications (DoITT)

February 26, 2004

Re: Proposed and Amended Rules relating to the regulation of Public Pay Telephones

The Historic Districts Council is the advocate for New York City's designated historic districts and neighborhoods meriting preservation. The core belief of the Historic Districts Council is that the preservation and enhancement of New York City's historic resources – our neighborhoods, buildings, parks, and public spaces – are central to the continued success of the city. The Historic Districts Council is pleased to testify before the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications today in support of the proposed amended rules prohibiting advertising on new public pay phones in Manhattan Community Boards 1 – 8.

The Historic Districts Council has long been deeply concerned about the proliferation of public pay telephones and their effect on New York City's historic neighborhoods. In the past five to ten years, New York City's sidewalks have been bombarded with a proliferation of public pay telephones. Usage of these pay phones is down, as cellular phones become more common. However, ironically, the number of public pay phones has multiplied. Pay phone companies argue that they are providing a public service, but really the increasing abundance of the pay phones is a result of the advertising revenue they produce, not a public need.

Today's public pay telephones are a jarring presence in our historic streetscapes, as in essence they have become billboards plastered throughout our neighborhoods. The problem has been most severe in Manhattan neighborhoods like Greenwich Village, Midtown, the Upper East Side, and the Upper West Side, where telephone companies feel that they can profit the largest from advertising. The Historic Districts Council commends DoITT for recognizing that the over-saturation of public pay phones and their corresponding advertising have had a detrimental effect on the quality of life in Manhattan's neighborhoods.

We strongly support the proposed amendments to DoITT's rules that prohibit advertising on new public pay phones in Manhattan's Community Boards 1 – 8. Although these rules do not correct the problems created by the existing over-abundance of telephones and their advertising panels, we firmly believe that this is at least a step in the right direction. These regulations are needed to ensure that Manhattan's neighborhoods are not further denigrated by inappropriate advertising on public pay telephones.

While we fully support these proposed rules, we feel that more needs to be done to protect our neighborhoods from public pay telephone incursions. New Yorkers are besieged daily with commercial signage on not only telephones, but also on building facades, storefronts, newspaper kiosks, garbage cans, buses, subway entrances and sign trucks. The Historic Districts Council urges DoITT to further strengthen its rules to address the problem of the existing proliferation of advertising on telephones. One key step could be outright prohibiting advertising on relocated telephones.

Furthermore, we ask that the city limit the size of the new telephone structures in Manhattan Community Boards 1 – 8. Most public pay phone structures are quite large, merely to allow for the advertising display. These large pay phone structures not only interrupt pedestrian flow but also block the view of storefronts and New York's wonderful architecture. Large, dominating telephone structures will no longer be needed in Manhattan below 110th with these new regulations, and we ask that the city's regulations reflect this by mandating smaller, less obtrusive structures.

This document was created with Win2PDF available at <http://www.daneprairie.com>.
The unregistered version of Win2PDF is for evaluation or non-commercial use only.