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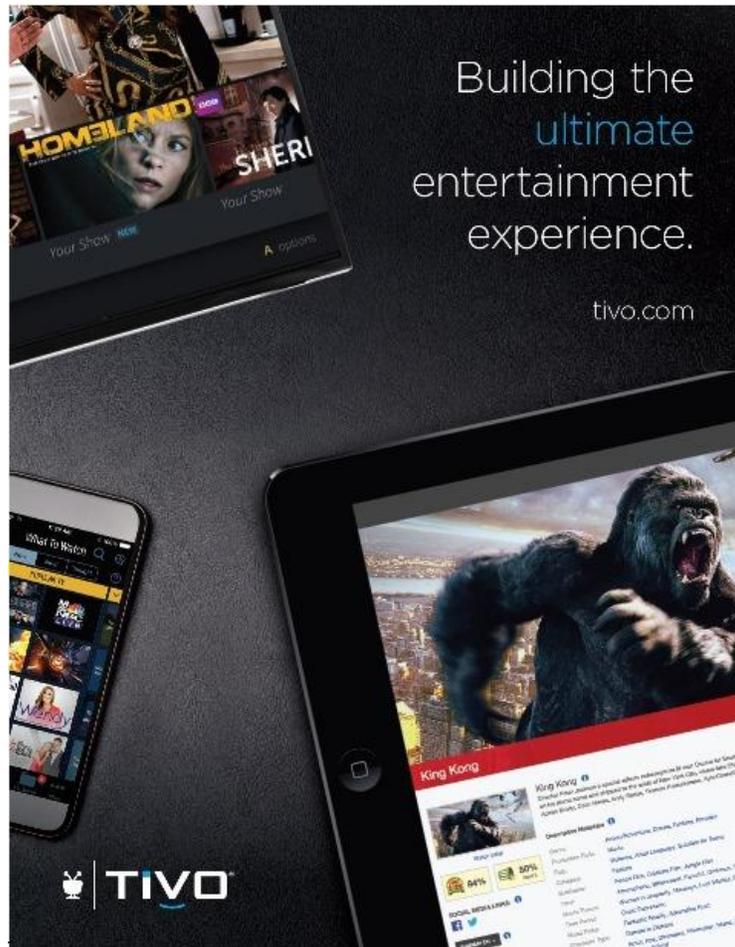
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Seven months after the Erie County Public Library began lending mobile hot spots, demand hasn't diminished for the units that allow users to connect to the internet at home. The library started allowing adult patrons with library cards to check out the devices for free in May, when the first 15 became available. Sixteen more units have been added, and there's always a waiting list. "They're pretty popular," said Rebecca Long, IT manager for the library. "I don't even think the new Harry Potter book had this many holds," she said.



She and others said the demand for the T-Mobile hot spots is indicative of a community where a significant number of people still can't connect their computer, tablet or other Wi-Fi-enabled devices in their homes to the internet. While in some areas of Erie County that's because access simply isn't available, in the city of Erie in particular the lack is due more to economics. "It's more a question of affordability," said Anna Frantz, executive

director of Emerge 2040.

She said that in the city, Wi-Fi is available pretty much anywhere if you want to purchase it, but it can be costly. It just isn't available in some spots in the county, she said. Long said the infrastructure is better in the city than the county. Still, 27 percent of Erie households had no internet subscription, according to 2014 information shared by Frantz. The number for the entire county was 21 percent. Long had figures indicating about 30 percent of households in the city and 25 percent in the county have no internet access. All the numbers are above the national average, which the women put at 20 percent or 21.4 percent. "Erie lags behind for people having access and also broadband access," Long said.

about smart meters

Frantz said that was probably due to lower incomes within the city. In asking about why people didn't have internet access at home, Frantz said, "The overwhelming answer was the cost of the subscription." Because so much more is done online these days - from education to job applications to banking - that lack of access could affect the community's economic stability.

Matt Wiertel, director of sales and marketing with Velocity Network, already hears about the effect on education. He said the Erie-based internet provider does work with schools and hears from superintendents whose students receive a device like a laptop or iPad from school but can't use it for homework because they don't have internet access at home. That could be one reason the library hot spots have generated so much interest, he said.

Library assistant Marcy Hall said the hot spot equipment, about the size of a cellphone, is easy to use and can be borrowed for a week at a time on a first-come, first-served basis. Users can connect up to 10 devices like laptops or iPads. Hall said the library does offer free Wi-Fi at all its sites and, in the case of Blasco Library, people can even use it to connect outside in the parking lot. But the hot spot lending program permits people to take the access home or elsewhere in the U.S. that falls within the T-Mobile coverage area.

Some community and neighborhood centers also offer free internet access to their clients. At the E.F. Smith Quality of Life Learning Center, 2046 E. 19th St., people go inside to use the computers. Center CEO Gary Horton also sees young people and adults sitting or standing outside the building to take advantage of its Wi-Fi even when the center isn't open. "It's a no-brainer, we've got a lot of poor people, a lot of them children, who have parents who lack the ability to provide any kind of access," he said.

Numerous businesses, such as coffee shops or restaurants, also tend to provide free Wi-Fi but its use usually comes with the expectation of a purchase of food or beverage. Wiertel said Velocity Network has a couple free access points that hit parts of Perry Square in downtown Erie. The company also has an agreement to provide the free high-speed wireless internet service now available at Erie Insurance Arena. The Bayfront Convention Center has it as well. Wiertel said some apartment complexes have or are looking to include internet access as part of the rent to compete with other apartments.

Emerge 2040, with help from an AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer, is looking at the internet access issue here, researching what other communities are doing and hoping to implement a project or two in Erie by midsummer, Frantz said. "Our goal is not necessarily to get every single person in their home connected to the internet," she said. Rather, for now, the regional plan aims to make sure that hubs are accessible to people and that they know about "affordable" opportunities that are out there, she said.

In the meantime, the Erie County Public Library will continue to loan out the hot spots. Long said only two have been lost so far and both were replaced. A \$140 fee is charged to a patron's library account if a device is lost or damaged beyond repair. Overdue hot spots have their internet access deactivated within 24 hours. Long said the library would like to add more mobile hot spots for people to borrow but doesn't have the money to do it now unless someone would underwrite the cost. – *Erie Times-News*

During the campaign, Donald Trump railed against powerful corporations and promised to prevent **blockbuster mergers** like the proposed \$85.4 billion deal between AT&T and Time Warner. That was then. Since the election, Mr. Trump

has been decidedly less interested in constraining the power of big companies, especially those in the telecommunications industry.

It now appears that the AT&T acquisition of Time Warner might be approved after all, according to The Financial Times. One antitrust adviser to Mr. Trump, Joshua Wright, argued last month [in *The New York Times*](#) that “a high level of concentration in an industry simply does not mean the industry lacks competition.”

Investors and financial analysts are already betting that the Department of Justice and the Federal Communications Commission under Mr. Trump will be more likely to approve mergers in this industry, including perhaps a deal between Sprint and T-Mobile that was [discussed in 2014](#). Such a merger would almost certainly lead to higher prices for cellphone service by cutting the number of national wireless companies to three, from four.

In addition to being more open to big deals, Mr. Trump appears ready to do away with regulations on this oligopolistic industry. As it is, a lack of competition for some services is driving up prices. The cost of expanded basic cable TV service, for example, increased at twice the rate of inflation from 1995 to 2005, [according to the F.C.C. Another commission report](#) found that 51 percent of Americans live in areas served by only one broadband landline provider (10 percent live in places where there is no such service).

On the chopping block are [net neutrality rules](#) adopted by the F.C.C. in 2015 to prohibit companies like Comcast and Verizon from giving preference to some content over others. For example, Comcast is not allowed to engineer its broadband network to download movies and TV shows from its NBC Universal subsidiary faster than movies from Netflix. These rules were upheld by the United States Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia [in June](#). But the F.C.C. under Mr. Trump is likely to repeal them.

Once Mr. Trump appoints a new F.C.C. chairman, probably early next year, Republicans, who have been inveterate opponents of telecom regulation in recent years, will have a 3-to-2 majority on the commission; Democrats have a majority now. One Republican commission member, Ajit Pai, for instance, [said last week](#) that net neutrality’s “days are numbered.” And a member of Mr. Trump’s transition team, Mark Jamison, suggested in October that [most of the F.C.C.](#) could be eliminated, with the much smaller agency focused on licensing wireless frequencies.

Public interest groups, Democratic lawmakers and sensible Republicans in Congress ought to vigorously oppose Mr. Trump’s deregulatory agenda. This won’t be easy, but they could, for example, try to challenge policy changes by filing lawsuits against the F.C.C., a tactic the telecom industry has used countless times over the years to stymie or delay regulations they opposed. Early next year, Senate Democrats will get to choose a new commissioner for the F.C.C. after the departure of Chairman Tom Wheeler, [who announced his resignation](#) on Thursday, and Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel, who is also leaving.

The Senate would have to confirm the Democratic appointee as it would Mr. Trump’s choices. Democrats ought to pick a strong consumer advocate who will use the position to speak out forcefully for more competition in the industry and common-sense approaches like net neutrality rules. Susan Crawford, of Harvard Law School, and Tim Wu, of Columbia Law School, are two experts who specialize in telecommunication issues and fit that bill. Proper oversight, equitable access to services and fair pricing in telecommunications ought to be bipartisan concerns. — *New York Times* editorial

Former Gov. Ed Rendell thinks Philadelphia Mayor Jim Kenney has done a fine job his first year in office - we recommend Holly Otterbein's [roundup](#) in *Philly Mag* - but he'd like to see him smile more. "I can't understand why he seems to be angry all the time," Rendell said at the Pennsylvania Society last weekend. "He's doing a good job, he's fighting the good fight, he's standing up for the things he believes in. When I did that, I felt like Hubert Humphrey. I felt like a happy warrior."

Kenney has had a pretty successful rookie year, getting a soda tax passed in City Council and several of his bigger initiatives, like pre-K and Rebuild, off the ground. Philadelphia has helped make him look good, too. We hosted a relatively drama-free DNC and landed the NFL draft next year. Rendell suggested that Kenney stop and smell the roses before his mayoral days pass him by. "I would lose my temper, but I enjoyed it. I enjoyed losing my temper," Rendell said. "He should relax and enjoy it because it goes by awful fast."

But Kenney's not exactly a Scrooge either. His public schedule this week included an appearance where he will be dressed up as Buddy the Elf. Tights and all. "Yes, the mayor does enjoy being mayor," Kenney spokeswoman Lauren Hitt told Clout. "No one loves their job 100 percent of the time, and being charged with the well-being of a city of 1.5 million people definitely has its less-than-fun moments, but overall, there isn't a day that goes by that he doesn't feel incredibly privileged and humbled to have this opportunity." So, second term? Yea or nay" – *Philadelphia Daily News*



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