

## **The Open Park Project: Bringing Free Wireless Internet Access to the National Mall**

The Open Park Project (Open Park) is a non-profit, 501(c)(3) tax-exempt organization founded in 2003 to bring free wireless Internet access to the National Mall using the same popular Wi-Fi (Wireless Fidelity) technology found in most home networks and coffee shops.

Open Park launched its first free hotspot on Capitol Hill in April 2004 and installed a second hotspot along Pennsylvania Avenue during Inauguration Week. By making broadband Internet services available to the public from the Capitol to the Washington Monument, Open Park hopes to offer a 21st century community service and expand the educational and informational options for Mall visitors. The group's network also will serve as a public test bed for trials of new wireless equipment and applications (e.g., Wi-Fi equipped museum guides; smart antennas; Wi-Fi security devices). Open Park is solely supported by private contributions and has no plans to seek any public funding.

### **Smithsonian Proposal**

In September 2004, at the invitation of the Smithsonian, Open Park submitted a proposal to mount six small (two foot high) Wi-Fi antennas atop selected Mall museums to provide free Wi-Fi service on the central portion of the Mall for a trial period (2005-2006). The term was intended to be concurrent with the pilot installation of in-building Wi-Fi networks by the Smithsonian for multimedia museum guides (MMGs). Open Park agreed to cover any direct costs incurred by the Smithsonian.

In December 2004, after several meetings, the Smithsonian circulated a draft roof rights agreement to Open Park and in January 2005 invited Open Park's representatives to conduct a detailed site visit to quantify the estimated installation costs to the Smithsonian. However, in February 2005, the Smithsonian abruptly broke off negotiations with Open Park due to the alleged cost burden although Open Park had always agreed to meet the costs (estimated at under \$2000).

The Smithsonian's Under Secretary for Science also wrote separately to 20 Congressional offices stating that an agreement with Open Park was "not in the best interests of the Institution." According to the Under Secretary, an agreement would be contrary to "the Institution's unwavering standard of only accommodating activities or features on Smithsonian buildings that are directly associated with Smithsonian operations or programs."

*The Smithsonian's reasons for rejecting Open Park's proposal are unfounded.*



## **The Open Park Project**

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## **Open Park's Project Will Benefit the Smithsonian and The American Tax Payer**

Given that the Institution receives over \$600 million annually in public funds, the Institution should reconsider its position because Open Park's free public Wi-Fi service will:

**\*\* Comply with the Smithsonian's facilities policy.** Open Park's Wi-Fi network will increase the benefits tax payers greater receive from the millions of dollars the Congress now provides to support the Smithsonian's web publishing activities and on-line event calendars. Ironically, none of these Internet based services are readily available today to Smithsonian visitors on the Mall because the Institution does not provide public Internet terminals. Open Park's Internet access service will close this information gap at no additional cost to the Smithsonian.

The Smithsonian has previously modified its facilities to accommodate public payphone facilities and, in the age of Internet telephony, a Wi-Fi hotspot can provide comparable services. Moreover, Open Park's Wi-Fi installation will not require building modifications at any museum.

**\*\* Improve public safety and home land security.** In the event of any future catastrophe in Washington, when buildings must be evacuated and commercial wireless communications networks may become overloaded, as occurred on 9/11, Open Park's network will provide an independent outdoor emergency communications service for anyone working at or around the Mall, including Smithsonian employees.

**\*\* Increase Smithsonian visitors.** Since 2000, attendance at the Smithsonian has almost halved. Excluding the two new buildings opened by the Smithsonian last year, a museum-by-museum comparison shows that annual visits typically fell by over 30% from 2002 to 2004 alone despite the steady upturn in Washington tourism post 9/11. In this environment, Open Park's free Wi-Fi service will provide a badly needed new drawing card for Mall visitors.

**\*\* Showcase the potential of broadband wireless for all Americans.** The President has set a goal of providing broadband wireless services to all Americans by 2007. Wi-Fi Internet technologies will help America reach that goal and the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) has already commended Open Park for its efforts to "showcase the capabilities of Wi-Fi for the millions of visitors to our Nation's Capital". See the attached NTIA letter.

Open Park believes that if the millions of Americans who visit the Smithsonian could vote directly on this matter, they would agree with Open Park and urge the Smithsonian to give the organization a reasonable opportunity to trial its free public Wi-Fi service on the Mall.



**UNITED STATES DEPARTMENT OF COMMERCE**  
**The Assistant Secretary for Communications**  
**and Information**  
Washington, D.C. 20230

SEP 13 2004

Mr. Greg Staple  
Mr. Kevin Werbach  
The Open Park Project  
740 Seventh Street, S.E.  
Washington, D.C. 20003

Dear Mr. Staple and Mr. Werbach:

It is my pleasure to convey high appreciation for Open Park's initiative in developing a free public network for broadband wireless service on the National Mall. Your efforts showcase the capabilities of Wi-Fi for the millions of visitors to our Nation's Capital.

As you may know, President Bush is committed to the goal of universal, affordable access to broadband technology by the year 2007. Broadband technology for high-speed Internet access will improve the Nation's economic productivity and offer life-enhancing applications, such as distance learning, remote medical diagnostics, and the ability to work from home more effectively.

Wi-Fi and other wireless technologies will play a vital role in meeting the President's goal. To encourage the development of wireless broadband technologies, the Administration has made more radio spectrum available including allocation of an additional 255 megahertz of spectrum for unlicensed devices, such as Wi-Fi. The President has also signed an Executive Memorandum announcing the Administration's commitment to the development and implementation of a comprehensive United States Spectrum Policy for the 21<sup>st</sup> Century. As part of the President's Spectrum Initiative, the National Telecommunications and Information Administration (NTIA) has hosted several public meetings and exhibits in Washington to demonstrate the promise of new wireless technologies and to educate the public about the benefits of wireless technologies, including Wi-Fi.

The Open Park network on the Mall is the kind of project that we hoped would be made possible by the Administration's efforts. It will provide a readily accessible public demonstration of the benefits which unlicensed wireless networks can offer. Open Park has launched an important educational and research project as well as a community service. Please keep my staff apprised of your progress in implementing Open Park's network. I wish you every success.

Sincerely,

Michael D. Gallagher