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City Hopes Free Wi-Fi Access Pumps Businesses

Officials Working To Give Neighborhoods Free Wireless Connection

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BOSTON -- With a wireless Web connection you can log onto the Internet from just about anywhere, but the problem is finding hotspots. That may change now that the city is going wireless.

NewsCenter 5's Janet Wu reported Thursday that in over the next few months, if you start to see people wandering through your neighborhood with their eyes glued to a laptop -- it's a good thing. Wi-Fi is coming to neighborhoods in Boston.

"There's just a myriad of opportunities -- users on the Common doing work, watching your son's game while you finish e-mail for work," said Jim McCarthy of Colubris Networks.

Roslindale is the first neighborhood to get Boston WI-FI. The free service eventually will be available in most commercial centers throughout the city at no cost to taxpayers.

"The private sector is paying for it here in Roslindale," Boston Main Streets' spokeswoman Emily Haber said. "They will sell advertising space, so when you log on you will have a splash page, and on that will be advertising from businesses."

Register with Boston Main Streets once and you'll be able to log on from any neighborhood where the system is set up. You get one hour of Internet surfing before you're cut off and asked to log back in.

Companies building the system claim it is more secure than Newbury Street's Wi-Fi system -- the first free hot zone in the country -- but equivalent to the system around the Boston Public Library.

"That's not to say that you should necessarily come out and start paying all your bills or doing things that might put you in some jeopardy. I think people should be cautious," Haber said.

The ultimate goal is to draw the young, upwardly mobile residents into the neighborhood's shops and cafes.

"The demographics that we see of the people buying and moving into Roslindale are they type of people that are going to need this service," Janice Williams, of Roslindale Main Streets, said.

Officials plan to move the service on to other Boston neighborhoods like West Roxbury and the South End by the end of the month. They hope to have every neighborhood's main street area on the system by the end of the month.

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