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Boston Mayor Thomas Menino recently sat down with Mass High Tech editor Douglas Banks and reporter Catherine Williams to discuss the city's technology infrastructure and the innovation horizon for New England's capital city. From the controversial Biosafety Lab in the South End to the citywide wi-fi project, the four-term mayor weighs in on Boston's biggest technology challenges.



W. Marc Bernsau
Boston Mayor Thomas Menino

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MHT: New England is one of the leading technology regions, and Boston is the flagship city of New England. Does that put an extra burden of responsibility on Boston to foster innovation?

MENINO: As the capital city, we have to be leading the way when it comes to technology. For a while we were not leading the way -- but I think with our new chief information officer, Bill Oates, we're starting to play catch-up. We're leading the wi-fi piece that some people said we would never get. Last winter we used GPS technology in the snowplow trucks and were able to get more efficient delivery of the equipment to neighborhoods. Also we're going to put in a CRM system so we have more response when people call our 24-hour service. Governments are about helping the people. Technology can help people get information.

MHT: The city's top technology job was open for a couple of years. Now that it's filled, what are some of the city's technology needs you're looking to address?

MENINO: I think Bill Oates brings the innovation, the creativity and the know-how to create the partnerships we were missing. He came to the public side and tries to use his private-sector experience. My newest goal is bringing all the computers in the Boston public schools up to date. There is more that companies can do to help us. We had a great community meeting last week at the Lilla G. Frederick Middle School in Dorchester. Every kid in that school has a laptop. It's truly amazing what's going on in that school, with some of those kids who you never thought would be proficient. It shows me it's working when those teenagers get



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excited about technology. That's what it's all about. It's all about the future.

MHT: What is the status of Boston's wi-fi project?

MENINO: We've done the waterfront, Quincy Market and Christopher Columbus Park (in the city's North End). The next one is to make a mile and a quarter from Grove Hall accessible. It's been really successful. You've got some schools there. You've got some community centers, some other businesses there. It's important that you don't just do downtown (but that) you get the neighborhoods also. It helps build priorities.

MHT: The city has new digital parking meters on Newbury Street and solar-powered trash compactors in Downtown Crossing. What's next: Roomba street sweepers going through Boston?

MENINO: I want to accomplish what we have. The technology we have on the parking meters, we need to expand that program. The solar trash receptacles have to go citywide. It will give us a more productive work force because you don't have to pick them up every day. One of the things we sometimes do in government is, we don't complete things. I'd rather continue to stay focused on the wi-fi piece, on the solar piece, the parking meters, and GPS not just in the public works trucks but in all trucks and vehicles in the city.

If we know where they are at all times, there would be more efficiency.

MHT: Speaking of efficiency, let's talk about energy efficiency: What can the city do -- through incentives or other methods -- to gain more momentum as a leader in energy technology?

MENINO: Some cities claim that they are "green building cities," but they only do roofs. We do the entire structure. We're doing it with (Boston Zoning Code) Article 80, which is our development arm. We've met with the real estate community. We've met with the architectural community. We're trying to make sure we're putting forward a program that works, not something generated by a bunch of marketing people at City Hall who are interested in conservation, but also folks who are practitioners and have to use the process.

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