For Immediate Release
October 13, 2021

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*** **P R E S S   R E L E A S E** ***

Pilot Program to Bridge Internet Access Gap for Chinatown SRO's
Supervisor Peskin partners with Department of Technology to bring free internet service to Chinatown families and seniors

Chinatown, San Francisco – Supervisor Aaron Peskin joined the Department of Technology and community advocates in Chinatown today to announce the successful implementation of a pilot program to provide free high-speed internet access to Chinatown's most vulnerable residents living in Single Room Occupancy residential hotels (SRO's).

"The pandemic exacerbated an already challenging digital divide in low-income communities of color, particularly immigrant and ESL communities," said Supervisor **Aaron Peskin**, who represents Chinatown, Upper Tenderloin and North Beach. "From accessing schoolwork and library resources online to signing up for groceries and doctor's appointments, the majority of essential services have moved online. Our seniors and families living in aging and crowded SRO buildings need affordable and reliable infrastructure to connect to these lifelines."

High-speed internet infrastructure is typically installed by telecommunication corporations in neighborhoods where companies can make the biggest profit, and many low-income communities have historically lacked adequate or reliable public utilities infrastructure. After hearing concerns from residents at several community meetings at the start of the pandemic, Supervisor Peskin allocated $200,000 to the Department of Technology to outfit free high-speed internet at SRO buildings assessed to have a high number of seniors and school age children and youth who have become reliant on the internet to participate in distance learning or access social services during the pandemic. Chinatown Community Development Center and the Chinatown SRO Families Advocates then did community outreach to SRO buildings and conducted parent surveys to educate families on internet use.

"The community organized for years, starting in 1998, to develop and realize the Chinatown Alleyway Master Plan, which included undergrounding and upgrading utilities," said **Jennifer Chan**, Senior Resident Services Manager at Chinatown Community Development Center. "But while our SRO housing is some of the most precious affordable housing stock seniors and families rely on, the low rents have meant that upgrades and renovations have been cost-prohibitive to our Chinatown Family Associations. Just like we've organized around our public alleyways, the community is also fighting the digital divide in our SRO housing. This is more than just a quality-of-life issue, this is about addressing historic redlining in marginalized communities of color."

So far, five SRO sites (for a total of 276 units) have been initiated successfully into the pilot program, with two of the five SRO sites still awaiting completed installation of the City's high-speed fiber network into the historic buildings.

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