

New Bill Could Turn Police Precincts Into Digital Sale 'Safe Spaces'

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David Brand



Andrew Windsor, a student at Cardozo Law School, is pushing the City Council to establish “Internet Protection Exchange Locations” at police precincts. // Photo courtesy of Windsor

By Paula Katinas

Budding internet entrepreneurs who sell merchandise on eBay, Craigslist or Facebook should be able to meet their customers at a public place, like a police precinct, to complete the business transaction instead of having a total stranger come to their home.

That's the intriguing idea promoted by two business-minded buddies, Steven Patzer and Andrew Windsor, and embraced by Queens Council Member Donovan Richards and Brooklyn Council Member Mark Treyger.

The two friends, who recently graduated from Baruch College, are trying to convince the City Council to pass a bill to create Internet Protection Exchange Locations in a select number of police precinct station houses around the five boroughs.

Under the bill, the selected precincts would provide a safe haven for internet business owners and their customers.

If the buyer and seller agree to a business deal, like the sale of a laptop computer or a pair of sneakers, they could meet at a precinct station house to exchange the cash and merchandise.

“This is important to the younger community. There are a lot of young entrepreneurs out there and this is how we do business,” said Patzer, who earned a B.A. in public affairs.

The purpose of the bill already has supporters among NYPD precincts in Queens.

In 2016, Jeffrey Schiff, the commanding officer of the 105th Precinct, spoke before a Community Board 13 meeting and encouraged residents to conduct transactions with strangers from the internet in front of the station house in Queens Village.

“We had seven grand larcenies last week,” Schiff said, according to the *Queens Chronicle*. “Five of them were Craigslist.”

“If you’re unsure, meet the person in front of the precinct,” Schiff said. “If you’re on the level and they’re on the level, they should have no problem with meeting you there.”

Treyger introduced the bill in 2017 and re-introduced it earlier this year. Though Patzer and Windsor have been busy lobbying for the bill’s passage, the two started promoting the idea of safe zones even before the legislation was drafted.

The idea came out of personal experience, according to Patzer. “I was out there doing these exchanges myself and I couldn’t believe we don’t have something like that here,” he told this newspaper.

“Dozens exist already across the United States and one exists in New York State, in Geneseo,” said Windsor, who attends Benjamin Cardozo School of Law.



Steven Patzer is pushing the City Council to pass a bill that would establish “Internet Protection Exchange Locations” at police precincts. // Photo courtesy of Patzer

internet protection exchange locations have been set up in Columbus, Ohio, Fairfax, Virginia and Mobile, Alabama, among other cities.

Having a police station serve as the backdrop for a business deal would increase privacy and safety for internet business owners and customers, according to Patzer, who said a friend of his was robbed by someone he met for a sneaker sale. The “customer” grabbed the seller’s iPhone and fled.

Windsor said he heard of a case in which an internet business owner was robbed in Times Square. “It can happen even in a crowded place,” he said.

There are many would-be internet entrepreneurs who are uncomfortable with the idea of meeting at a total stranger’s house or in a dark alley somewhere to do business, the bill’s advocates said.

Public safety concerns stemming from business exchanges generated online are what made Treyger sponsor the bill, according to his communications director, Eric Faynberg.

“Our society is one in which more and more purchases are made or arranged online, but whether one is pursuing an entrepreneurial dream, or simply looking to rid their home of clutter and make a few extra bucks, no New Yorker should ever have to fear for their safety, their possessions, or their life during a simple financial transaction,” Treyger said when he introduced his legislation.

The creation of safety zones for internet business would also have a positive effect on police-community relations, according to Windsor.

“It would bring police and the community closer,” he said.

Treyger’s bill has been sent to the council’s Public Safety Committee.