

**Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications – NYC TV
Testimony before the City Council Committee on Technology in Government
Oversight Hearing on Community Access Television in New York City
Thursday, September 14, 2006**

Good morning Chairperson Brewer and members of the City Council Committee on Technology in Government, and thank you for the opportunity to testify today. My name is Arick Wierson and I am a Deputy Commissioner with the Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications, or DoITT, and the General Manager of NYC TV. Today I will be testifying about NYC TV on behalf of DoITT Commissioner and New York City CIO Paul Cosgrave. Joining me today are two directors from my executive staff, Trevor Scotland and Matthew Tollin.

First, let me begin by saying what a wonderful opportunity it is to share with you some of the tremendously exciting and innovative things NYC TV is doing. On so many levels, NYC TV has really become the benchmark that other cities across the country—and indeed abroad—look to for both inspiration and ideas as it applies to municipal television. From Los Angeles to Seoul, local governments are seeking us out to find how they too can replicate what we have created here in New York. We have come a long way in a very short period of time—it is hard to believe that NYC TV is barely three years old, having launched in June of 2003.

NYC TV was predicated on a very simple idea: that television is meant to be watched. From day one, we had a goal of connecting viewers with their City and their local government. It was a novel approach to municipal television, and with a dedication to programming that is energetic, engaging, and informative, NYC TV succeeded in joining 3-1-1 and *NYC.gov* as cornerstones of a Bloomberg Administration that has made City government more accessible and transparent than ever before.

In 2005, the Bloomberg Administration merged NYC TV with the City's other television station—WNYE—which was managed at that time by the Department of Education. As a result, NYC TV today oversees one broadcast television station (NYC TV Channel 25), reaching approximately 7.3 million households in the greater metropolitan area (including all of New York City proper); five New York City cable television stations; and one full-power FM radio station (WNYE 91.5 FM).

The flagship station, NYC TV 25, airs programming that features New York City lifestyle, culture and history. To date, it has been awarded 14 New York Emmys—while receiving 34 nominations—and 14 National Telly Awards. NYC TV's diverse array of media assets have enabled us to smartly program them, so viewers know where to turn depending upon their area of interest: City Council hearings, Mayoral press conferences, City Planning Commission meetings, and other municipal services information are cablecast on Channel 74; *City Drive Live* (Channel 72 on Cablevision and 93 on Time Warner) provides local drivers with 24x7 live coverage of the City's main roadways via the Department of Transportation's network of traffic cameras; NYC TV Channel 73 features programming of special interest for the City's diverse immigrant communities; Off Track Betting live feeds are broadcast on NYC TV Channel 71; and NYC TV Channel 75 is programmed by the City University of New York.

The merger of WNYE's broadcast television and radio assets with NYC TV allowed Channel 74 to become the dedicated government channel, substantially increasing the number of hours devoted to traditional municipal government programming. In June of this year, Channel 74 revamped its coverage of the Council by now providing 66 hours of City Council events

coverage each week, along with new, contemporary graphics, lower-thirds, and sound-effects to improve the overall viewing experience. So far in 2006 alone, Channel 74 has covered over 350 City Council hearings, forums and press conferences, and we continue to welcome any feedback the Council may have on this new and improved format by which New York City government is brought to its constituents.

I am especially proud of an initiative we undertook in the fall of 2005 called the *Video Voter Guide*. Much as we have in other areas in which NYC TV operates, here too we set a new standard for how cities across America can leverage their media assets to inform and educate viewers about their voting choices prior to local elections. With the *Video Voter Guide*, NYC TV created a nonpartisan educational resource for voters featuring candidates for the offices of Mayor, Public Advocate, Comptroller, Borough President, and City Council member. The *Video Voter Guide* is designed to provide New Yorkers with profiles of candidates to help them make more informed decisions in the voting booth. All candidates for these offices were offered an opportunity to tape brief statements that aired regularly throughout the weeks leading up to both the Primary and General Elections. Airing on NYC TV Channel 74, the Guide reached all of the nearly two million cable households in the City's five boroughs, and used maps to help viewers locate their neighborhoods and identify their council districts. The *Video Voter Guide* was also made available on-demand on *NYC.gov*, with the footage also distributed to third-party broadcasters, which were able to transmit the cablecast free-of-charge—all in an effort to expand coverage. I should also add that in distributing the *Video Voter Guide*, NYC TV also partnered with Google Video to increase the distribution of the candidate statements.

Speaking of innovation, much has been made of NYC TV's innovative approach toward partnering and opening new channels of distribution, and I would like to briefly highlight two of the more important deals we have recently announced, both of which will bring NYC TV's renowned original programming—and, by extension, many of the wonderful things New York City has to offer—to new and varied audiences across the region and country.

First, NYC TV and WNBC have reached an agreement in which NYC TV content will air on WNBC/Channel 4. The programming block, branded "NYC TV on NBC," began on September 4, and runs Monday-Friday, 11am to noon. Starting next week, NYC TV content will also air two hours a day on WNBC's newly-launched digital broadcast channel, WNBC 4.4. As a result of this agreement, a greater number of viewers across the New York region, the Caribbean, and elsewhere in the United States will be able to tune-in to watch episodes of its New York Emmy award-winning programming such as "\$9.99," "Blueprint | NYC," "Cool in Your Code," "Eat Out New York," "New York 360°," and "Secrets of New York." Also as part of the agreement, the City will receive approximately four minutes of commercial time per hour to air advertisements, different portions of which will be used to run public service announcements, promote NYC TV programming, and generate revenue. As you know, NYC TV programming promotes local attractions, businesses and cultural institutions. It is in this way that NYC TV's role as an engine of economic development for the City becomes readily apparent: small businesses, museums and other local attractions featured on NYC TV often see dramatic increases in visitors and patronage after appearing on NYC TV, and the additional exposure on NBC Channel 4 is only building on this exposure.

Also, in another historic arrangement, NYC TV is distributing a set of episodes from our hit series "Secrets of New York" to PBS stations around the country, making this popular show NYC TV's first nationally-syndicated program. The agreement will bring NYC TV's award-winning programming to a national audience, and in doing so will promote New York City as a tourism destination. As a result of this deal, viewers in eight of the country's ten largest

television markets (Los Angeles, Chicago, Philadelphia, San Francisco, Dallas-Fort Worth, Washington, D.C., Houston, and, of course, New York) will get to enjoy NYC TV's original programming. In total, stations serving more than 94% of U.S. TV households will now be able to enjoy this fast-paced, historically-rich documentary program.

Finally, as successful as we have been in developing and enhancing our original programming, I could not conclude without mentioning the key role NYC TV plays beyond educating and informing viewers about New York: NYC TV is a vital part in the City's emergency public communication systems. From key locations throughout the City, NYC TV is able to not only broadcast live on its own stations, but also share video and audio with television and radio stations around the City—and country—to help disseminate critical information. In instances such as the illegal transit strike in December 2005, various terror threat-related press conferences, and the recent anthrax scare this past February, our emergency communications system has proven invaluable in quickly providing vital information to New Yorkers.

So what is next for NYC TV? Well, a lot, but among the most immediate areas we are focusing on is our transition to digital television as mandated by the Federal Communications Commission. Some of you may have noticed that we began multicasting *City Drive Live* on NYC TV Channel 25.2 in June. Most recently, I am pleased to share with you that NYC TV has received a grant award from the Corporation for Public Broadcasting, which will provide NYC TV with the funding necessary to support the operation of, and upgrades to, its full-power digital transmitter, transmission line, antenna and related equipment at its transmission facility, which serves the entire New York metropolitan area. We continue to aggressively pursue grant monies from many sources to aid both in this conversion and for other initiatives central to NYC TV's mission.

In closing, NYC TV has been successful in proving that municipal television can generate broad-based appeal. We have broken new ground in programming and viewership with original content that resonates with New Yorkers, as well as television viewers across the country and beyond. NYC TV is a postcard for the City: by successfully highlighting many of the City's world-class attributes, such as its parks, libraries, public facilities, varied neighborhoods, parades and other cultural happenings, NYC TV has emerged as one of the region's fastest growing television networks, and Channel 25's primetime audience currently averages well over 100,000 viewers during its nightly primetime broadcast. In the end, this amounts to more people appreciating and learning about their City, as well as better understanding the role local government plays in managing it. We at NYC TV remain committed to retaining its status as a media organization worthy of the world's greatest city—and as ever, we welcome your comments and ideas about how we can make NYC TV even better still.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify today. We will now be happy to address any questions you may have.