

# Current

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## In Gotham, City Hall holds on to coveted TV and FM spectrum

**A**nother city handed off its educational frequencies recently, but not to a nonprofit public broadcaster, as the Detroit school system did (story at left).

Although independent public stations WNET and WNYC had been itching for years to have the additional program “shelf space” of WNYE-TV and FM, respectively, from the New York City Department of Education, the city government earlier this year moved oversight of the stations to its Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications. DoITT already ran the city’s five cable channels.

“The city is always looking to make things more efficient,” said Jonathan Werbell, a spokesman for Mayor Michael Bloomberg. “The Education Department has been involved in a historic shift in delivering education reform in the city. It wasn’t a core mission to operate a TV and radio station. Still, it’s a good asset to have for many different reasons, such as promoting the city.”

### WNYE

The broadcast and cable channels together are now called NYC TV, with Arick Wiersen as general manager. Wiersen was hired shortly after Bloomberg took office in 2002 and was instrumental in revamping the city’s cable programming, which won eight New York Emmy Awards in April, said Werbell.

Werbell said moving WNYE from one city department to another will save money, but he wouldn’t put a price tag on the gain. In lieu of purchasing the pricey arts programming it aired at night, WNYE is airing original content the city produces for cable. These include shows such as \$9.99 (fun in Gotham on less than 10 bucks a day) and *Fashion in Focus* (showcasing local designers). The station continues to air its lineup of foreign news shows and other programming for ethnic communities.

Although the 1.8 million homes reached by the city cable channels is not a shabby potential audience, WNYE’s broadcast signals get into more than 7 million homes in New York, New Jersey and Connecticut, according to the mayor’s office.

WNET had talked with the city for years

to explore ways to consolidate functions with the school board’s TV station. Beginning in the late 1990s, there was talk of a joint master control operation between WNET, WNYE, and Long Island-based WLIW, and the three stations got \$2 million from CPB to explore options; WLIW agreed to merge with WNET in 2001. WNET and WNYE almost had a deal in 2000 with then-Mayor Rudy Giuliani and the schools chancellor, but the school board nixed it, according to Carmen DiRenzo, WNET v.p. and managing director, corporate affairs.

DiRenzo said the current restructuring of WNYE indicates the city “is seeking to achieve the most effective way of using their broadcast and cable channels. To the extent that WNET can be helpful in helping WNYE be even more efficient and meaningful to the city, we’re here.” WNET is already working with DoITT on a homeland security project and other collaborations, she noted.

“WNYC remains very interested in acquiring another station that would enable us to offer full-time music and cultural programming to the New York community,” said WNYC President Laura Walker. “Should the city ever decide to sell WNYE, of course we would be delighted to explore that opportunity.”

—Geneva Collins