

INDEPENDENT
VILLAGE DEMOCRATS



V. I. D. LOCAL GOVERNMENT HANDBOOK

A Brief Compendium of Local Government, Democratic Party and Judicial
Officials, Institutions, and Their Functions and Duties.

Prepared for the

V. I. D. Voter Education Forum

March 5, 1985 at 7:30 P.M.

Forum Speakers:

Hon. Bruce Wright, Justice of the New York Supreme Court
Hon. Ruth Messinger, Member of the New York City Council
Rita Lee, District Manager of Community Board 2
Catherine Abate, Democratic District Leader
Anthony Hoffmann, Democratic District Leader

Presented by the V.I.D. Campaign Committee

Bruce Feffer, Chair
Joe Catrambone, Deputy Chair

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in arranging the Forum and in preparing this Handbook:

Catherine Abate, District Leader
Rick Braun, President
Joe Catrambone, Deputy Chair, Campaign Committee
Carol Feinman, Election Law Chair
Richard Hartzman, Co-chair, Environmental Committee
Gloria Whitman, Former Chair, Campaign Committee

NEW YORK CITY GOVERNMENT

Mayor (current salary: \$110,000)

- * chief executive officer of the City
- * chairs Board of Estimate
- * signs City Council bills to make them law
(Veto can be overridden by 2/3 vote of council)
- * appoints heads of most City agencies
- * submits semi-annual management reports to City Council
and Board of Estimate on goals of each City agency
- * 4 year term
- * 2 votes on Board of Estimate

President of the City Council (current salary: \$90,000)

- * presides over City Council meetings
- * votes only to break a tie
- * succeeds to Office of Mayor if vacant
- * New York City ombudsperson--coordinates a city-wide
citizens' information and service complaint program
- * 4 year term
- * 2 votes on Board of Estimate

Comptroller (current salary: \$90,000)

- * chief financial officer of the city
- * advises Mayor, Board of Estimate and City Council of the
City's financial condition
- * arranges for sale of New York City bonds
- * conducts performance audits of City agencies
- * administers and manages sinking funds and most trust funds
- * member of Board of Trustees of the Teachers Retirement
System, the New York City Employees Retirement System,
Fire Department Pension Fund, and Police Pension Fund
- * member (along with NYC Commissioner of Finance) of the
Banking Commission, which rules on eligibility of
banks applying to receive deposits from the City
- * pays bills--keeps accounts of the City
- * 4 year term
- * 2 votes on Board of Estimate

Borough President (current salary: \$80,000)

- * member of Board of Estimate
- * appoints members to Community Boards
- * chairs the Borough Board
- * appoints one member to the seven member New York City Board
of Education
- * 4 year term
- * 1 vote on Board of Estimate

District Attorney (current salary: \$82,000)

- * investigates and prosecutes criminal conduct
- * 4 year term
- * elected county-wide

City Council (current members' salary: \$47,500)

- * City Council consists of the President and 35 members:
 - Manhattan - 7
 - Bronx - 6
 - Brooklyn - 11
 - Queens - 9
 - Staten Island - 2
- * vested with legislative power of the City (shares power with Board of Estimate over approval of City Budget)
- * sole power to adopt local laws
(can override Mayor's veto by 2/3 vote within 30 days)
- * recommends one-half of all Community Board appointments to respective Borough Presidents
- * appoints City Clerk for 6 year term
- * 4 year term

Board of Estimate

- * Board of Estimate consists of the Mayor, City Council President, Comptroller (two votes each) and the five Borough Presidents (one vote each)
- * shares with City Council power to adopt the Budgets
- * 2/3 vote of the Board can override Mayor's veto of budget if City Council concurs with a majority vote
- * Mayor takes no part in consideration, modification or vote on the Budget he proposes
- * has final authority over planning and zoning
- * has charge of contracts, franchises, city property and employees retirement system
- * a pending federal court decision will determine whether the one person/one vote rule applies to the Board of Estimate

Borough Board

- * Borough President serves as chair
- * members are City Council members and Community Board Chairpersons
- * involved in questions of zoning and other matters relating to more than one Community Board
- * mediates disputes and conflicts between two or more Community Districts in the Borough
- * meets every month

Community Board

- * 59 Community Boards in City
- * up to 50 unsalaried members on each Board
- * members appointed by Borough President (1/2 in consultation with City Council members)
- * has full-time salaried District Manager
- * monitors delivery of services by city agencies in their districts
- * makes recommendations on budget priorities for the City
- * involved in uniform land use review procedures -
 - land use proposals first voted on by the Community Board, then passed on to City Planning Commission, and finally to Board of Estimate

DEMOCRATIC PARTY COUNTY AND STATE ORGANIZATION

Democratic Party District Leaders (unsalaried)

- * comprise Democratic Party County Executive Committee, which, as a body:
 - (a) endorses candidates for public offices
 - (b) takes positions on city, state and national issues
 - (c) recommends party rules to county committee convention
- * liaison between Democratic Party and elected officials
- * liaison between elected officials, city and state government, and community
- * 2 year term
- * elected in Democratic primary by registered Democratic voters of each State Assembly District part

Democratic County Leader (unsalaried)

- * principal political, executive and administrative officer of the Democratic Party in the county
- * official Democratic Party spokesperson for the county
- * calls and presides over meetings of County Executive Committee
- * elected by County Executive Committee (comprised of District Leaders)

Democratic County Committee

- * base of the Democratic Party organization
- * decides party rules
- * fills party vacancies
- * elects Democratic Party nominees for public office when mid-term vacancies occur
- * 2 year term
- * minimum of 2--maximum of 4 per Election District

Democratic State Committee

- * consists of State Committeemen and State Committeewomen elected every two years from each of the 150 State Assembly Districts in New York
- * endorses candidates for state-wide office
- * formulates procedures for election of delegates to the Democratic National Convention
- * takes positions on important issues
- * State Committee members are often active community leaders who work with elected officials on local problems

NEW YORK JUDICIARY

Civil Court

The New York City Civil Court handles all civil (non-criminal) matters involving claims up to \$25,000. Judges are nominated by the voters of each party in the primary election and are elected by all voters in the general election. Judges may be elected either from an entire county or from a section of a county called a municipal court district. They serve for ten years and may

also sit in Criminal, Family or Supreme Courts by appointment as acting judges of those courts.

Housing Court

Commonly known as "Landlord and Tenant Court", Housing Court is the part of Civil Court which handles proceedings regarding evictions and to obtain repairs and services. The judges are appointed by the Administrative Judge of the Civil Court, after recommendations made by an advisory council which consists of one member appointed by the Mayor; one by the New York State Commissioner of Housing and Community Renewal; two representatives of the real estate industry; two from tenants' organizations; two from civic groups and bar associations; and 4 public members.

Small Claims Court

The part of the Civil Court where small claims up to \$1500 are heard. Only damages can be obtained here. Procedures are simplified, and usually an attorney is not necessary. Arbitrators, who are volunteer, unpaid attorneys, assist the court by hearing and deciding most of the cases. The filing fee to start a law suit in Small Claims Court is minimal.

Criminal Court

The New York City Criminal Court handles felony complaints, misdemeanors (crimes which call for sentences of 1 year or less imprisonment) and violations. Judges are appointed by the Mayor from a group of candidates who have been found qualified by a screening panel. Judges serve ten year terms.

Family Court

The New York City Family Court handles matters such as paternity, adoption, alimony, child support and custody proceedings, as well as some juvenile delinquency matters. Judges are appointed by the Mayor in the same manner as are judges of the Criminal Court.

Surrogate's Court

The Surrogate's Court handles all matters concerning wills and other questions concerning decedents' estates. New York County has two Surrogates--judges--who are nominated by voters of each party in the primary election and are elected by all voters in the general election for fourteen year terms.

Supreme Court

The Supreme Court is a court of general statewide jurisdiction, handling all types of civil and criminal matters. There is a branch in each county. In Manhattan, justices are nominated by delegates at party conventions, the delegates having been elected by voters of each party in the primary election. The justices are elected by all voters of the county in the general election and serve for fourteen years.

Appellate Term and Appellate Division

Appeals of decisions made by the above courts are usually heard by the Appellate Term and/or Appellate Division whose justices are elected judges of the Supreme Court whom the Governor of the State has designated to sit on the Appellate Term or Appellate Division.

Court of Appeals

The Court of Appeals is the highest court of the state and has jurisdiction of all appeals from the above courts. Judges are appointed by the Governor of the State from a group of candidates who have been found qualified by an independent screening panel, with the advice and consent of the New York State Senate.