

Buffalo Common Council

Akilesh Ramakrishna, Alana Barrington Dye, Schyler Norton and Edward Hawthorne

What is the City of Buffalo Common Council?

The City of Buffalo Common Council is the legislative branch of city government. There are nine council members, each elected by their own district. The Common Council has existed in some form since the incorporation of Buffalo in 1832.

What powers does the Common Council have?

The Common Council has all the legislative powers of the city and the power to confirm the mayor's major administrative appointments.¹ It is also responsible for adopting the city's annual operating and capital budgets, as well as the city's four-year capital program.²

The Common Council has the power to:

- Enact local laws and ordinances;³
- Adopt resolutions, rules, and regulations;⁴
- Authorize the borrowing of funds by the city;⁵
- Impose taxes and special assessments;⁶
- Acquire by purchase, gift, or eminent domain any interest in real and/or personal property for any city purpose or as by law;⁷
- Dispose of any real or personal property of the city;⁸
- Appoint local officers such as a city clerk and other staff to the Common Council as deemed necessary for the proper functioning of the Council;⁹
- Fix the salary and compensation of every officer and employee of the city except as may be otherwise provided by law;¹⁰
- Investigate and inquire into all matters of concern to the city and its inhabitants and require and enforce by subpoena the attendance of witnesses or the production of documents at such investigations.¹¹

What are the key limits to the Common Council's power?

The mayor is responsible for all executive and administrative functions and controls the day-to-day affairs of the City. Under the

This fact sheet was drafted and updated by several PPG interns, including Akilesh Ramakrishna, Alana Barrington Dye, and Schyler Norton. The original fact sheet was created in 2009 by Edward Hawthorne, a University at Buffalo School of Law student.

It outlines the powers and responsibilities of the Buffalo Common Council and includes contact details and brief background information for the nine sitting council members.

The fact sheet also lists the current committees and subcommittees of the Common Council, and where and when meetings are held.

Read additional fact sheets on government entities in Western New York in the Buffalo Commons library, at ppgbuffalo.org.



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City Charter the mayor may veto actions taken by the Council. The Council may override the mayor’s veto with a vote of six of the nine members.¹²

How are council members elected?

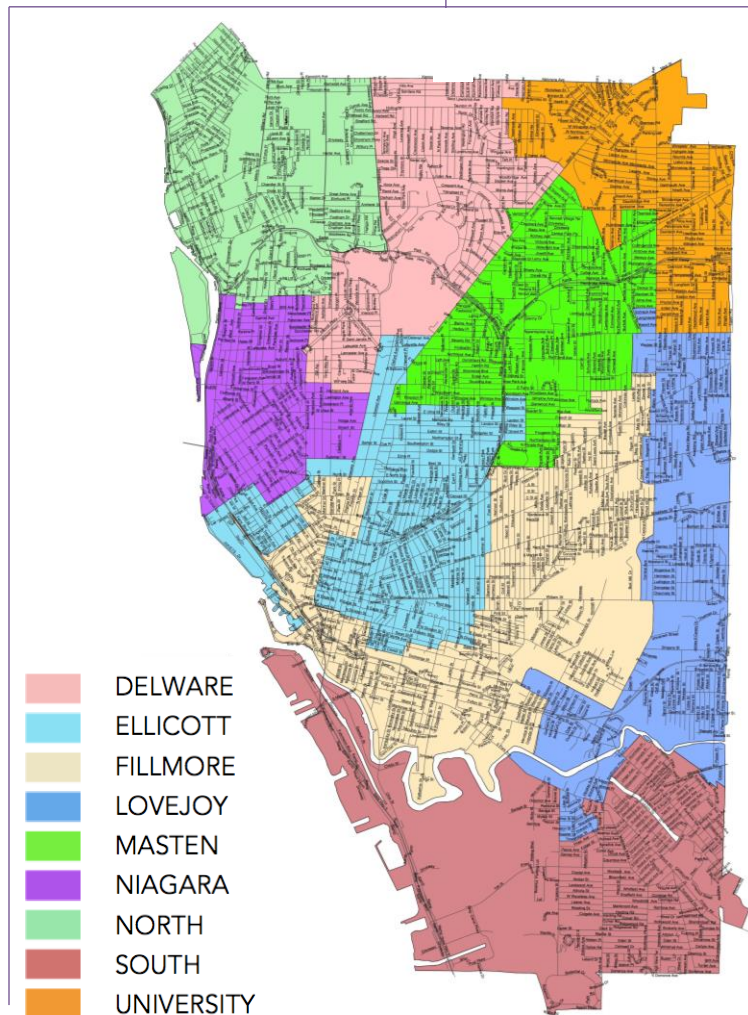
A Council Member is elected when they receive a majority of the vote from the district in which they are seeking to serve. Council members may serve in certain leadership positions in the Common Council: President, President Pro Tempore, and Majority and Minority Leaders. These positions are selected by the council members, and each leadership position has a two-year term.¹³

How long is a council member’s term of office?

Common Council Members serve four-year terms of office. All current council members are serving a term of office beginning January 1, 2020 and ending December 31, 2023.¹⁴

What are Buffalo’s Common Council districts?

The City of Buffalo is made up of nine Common Council districts: Delaware, Ellicott, Fillmore, Lovejoy, Masten, Niagara, North, South, and University (pictured at right).¹⁵ Fact sheets on each of the nine districts are available at ppgbuffalo.org.



How do I contact my council member?¹⁶

DELAWARE DISTRICT

Joel P. Feroletto Phone: 716-851-5155
 1405 City Hall Fax: 716-851-4553
 Email: jferoletto@city-buffalo.com

ELLCOTT DISTRICT

Darius G. Pridgen, Council President Phone: 716-851-4980
 1315 City Hall Fax: 716-851-6576
 Email: dpridgen@city-buffalo.com

FILLMORE DISTRICT

Mitch P. Nowakowski Phone: 716-851-4138
 1408 City Hall Fax: 716-851-4869
 Email: mnowakowski@city-buffalo.com

LOVEJOY DISTRICT

Bryan J. Bollman Phone: 716-851-5151
 1316A City Hall Fax: 716-851-5141
 Email: bbollman@city-buffalo.com

MASTEN DISTRICT

Ulysees O. Wingo, Sr. Phone: 716-851-5145
 1414 City Hall Fax: 716-851-5443
 Email: uwingo@city-buffalo.com

NIAGARA DISTRICT

David A. Rivera, Majority Leader Phone: 716-851-5125
 1504 City Hall Fax: 716-851-4970
 Email: darivera@city-buffalo.com

NORTH DISTRICT

Joseph Golombek, Jr. Phone: 716-851-5648
 1502 City Hall Fax: 716-851-5116
 Email: jgolombek@city-buffalo.com

SOUTH DISTRICT

Christopher Scanlon, President Pro Tempore Phone: 716-851-5169
 1405 City Hall Fax: 716-851-4294
 Email: cscanlon@city-buffalo.com

UNIVERSITY DISTRICT

Rasheed N.C. Wyatt Phone: 716-851-5165
 1508 City Hall Fax: 716-851-4580
 Email: rwyatt@city-buffalo.com

There are currently no women on the Buffalo Common Council.

GET TO KNOW YOUR COUNCIL MEMBER²³

Delaware District

COUNCIL MEMBER FEROLETO is a graduate of Canisius College and the University at Buffalo Law School. He is a member of the NYS Academy of Trial Lawyers. Feroletto served as a legislative aide to two former council members as well as deputy chief of staff to a state senator. He chairs the Legislation Committee.

Ellicott District

COUNCIL PRESIDENT PRIDGEN is a veteran of the U.S. Air Force. He is a graduate of Buffalo State College and received a master's degree in Organizational Leadership from Medaille College. Pridgen is also senior pastor at True Bethel Baptist Church. He chairs the Rules Committee.

Fillmore District

COUNCIL MEMBER NOWAKOWSKI graduated SUNY Buffalo State with degrees in Political Science and Urban Planning. Nowakowski formerly served as an Aide to Councilman Rivera and a Legislative Assistant to the full Council. He chairs the Claims Committee.

Lovejoy District

COUNCIL MEMBER BOLLMAN has worked in housing and is a licensed real estate broker. Bollman served as the former Lovejoy councilman's Chief of Staff for eleven years. Bollman chairs the Education Committee.

Masten District

COUNCIL MEMBER WINGO is a graduate of Houghton College and received a master's degree in public administration from Buffalo State. He is a former Program Coordinator at Buffalo Promise Neighborhood and director of the Boys and Girls Clubs of Buffalo. Wingo is also a pastor at Antioch Baptist Church. He chairs the Civil Service Committee.

Niagara District

COUNCIL MAJORITY LEADER RIVERA served as a Buffalo Police Officer from 1982 to 2008. His duties in the BPD included patrol officer and confidential aide to Mayor James Griffin. He was a detective sergeant in the Sex Offense/Domestic Violence Unit and the General Investigative Unit. Rivera chairs the Budget and Police Oversight subcommittees.

North District

COUNCIL MEMBER GOLOMBEK is a graduate of SUNY Buffalo State and received a master's degree in European History from Marquette University. He teaches history at Buffalo State College. Golombek chairs the Community Development Committee, and the Preservation Subcommittee.

South District

COUNCIL PRESIDENT PRO TEMPORE SCANLON is a graduate of Bishop Timon St. Jude High School and ECC. He has managerial experience at UPS and the Western New York Pub Group. Scanlon chairs the Transportation and Waterfront Development subcommittees.

University District

COUNCIL MEMBER WYATT is a graduate of the Kensington Business Institute and Medaille College. He is a former chief of staff for the Common Council and has experience in finance and banking. Wyatt chairs the Finance Committee and the Minority Women's Business Enterprise Task Force.

Does my council member have a duty to address my concerns?

One of the main responsibilities of a council member is constituent service. The city charter mandates that a council member consider and address in a timely and thorough manner any concerns regarding the affairs of the city that are communicated to him or her by residents of or visitors to Buffalo.¹⁷

What are the Common Council Committees and Subcommittees, and who are their respective members?¹⁸

COMMITTEES

CIVIL SERVICE COMMITTEE handles the creation and abolishment of city government positions well as issues regarding the hiring and firing of officers and employees.

Chair: Ulysees Wingo

Members: Bryan Bollman, David Rivera, Rasheed Wyatt

CLAIMS COMMITTEE addresses all un-liquidated claims against the city and the release of liabilities.

Chair: Mitch Nowakowski

Members: Joel Feroletto, Christopher Scanlon, Rasheed Wyatt

COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE handles all matters relating to work or improvements to be met, in whole or in part, by revenue from another government unit, including all matters relating to urban renewal programs within the city.

Chair: Joseph Golombek

Members: David Rivera, Christopher Scanlon, Joel Feroletto, Rasheed Wyatt

FINANCE COMMITTEE handles all issues related to the budget, city revenue and spending, and the issuance of bonds.

Chair: Rasheed Wyatt

Members: Bryan Bollman, Mitch Nowakowski, David Rivera, Ulysees Wingo

RULES COMMITTEE addresses all matters relating to Council procedure and the office of the City Clerk.

Chair: Darius Pridgen

Members: David Rivera, Christopher Scanlon



PAST COUNCIL MEMBER SPOTLIGHT

Cora P. Maloney

Council Member Maloney was the first woman and first African-American woman to serve on the Common Council. She was elected in 1957 and served two terms for the Masten District until her death in 1961.

Maloney became involved with the Democratic Party in Buffalo after moving to the city in 1945. Her experience fundraising and ringing doorbells for community organizations led her to consider running for office.

In 1959, Maloney refused to attend the U.S.

Conference of Mayors in New Orleans. Due to segregation, she would not have been allowed to stay at the same hotel as the other delegates. Mayor Frank A. Sedita stood by her and also refused to attend the conference.

Maloney expressed her political ideology as such: "I'm a feminist. Women are the watchdogs of civilization. It's always a feminine voice which cries for better government and better social laws."²⁴

LEGISLATION COMMITTEE addresses local laws, ordinances, and general legislation except those that are referred to the Committee on Civil Service.

Chair: Joel Feroletto

Members: Joseph Golombek, Mitch Nowakowski, David Rivera, Christopher Scanlon

EDUCATION COMMITTEE handles all educational issues.

Chair: Bryan Bollman

Members: Mitch Nowakowski, Rasheed Wyatt

SUBCOMMITTEES

MINORITY WOMEN'S BUSINESS ENTERPRISE TASK FORCE SUBCOMMITTEE handles all matters relating to minority business enterprise, women's business enterprise, workforce development, and planning activities.

Chair: Rasheed Wyatt

Members: Joseph Golombek, David Rivera, Ulysees Wingo

BUDGET SUBCOMMITTEE manages the City budget process.

Chair: David Rivera

Members: Joseph Golombek, Christopher Scanlon, Rasheed Wyatt

POLICE OVERSIGHT SUBCOMMITTEE meets biannually with the leadership of the Buffalo Police Department. In March 2018, the Common Council established an eleven-member citizen advisory board to work with the Police Oversight Committee.¹⁹

Chair: David Rivera

Members: Joel Feroletto, Christopher Scanlon, Rasheed Wyatt

TRANSPORTATION SUBCOMMITTEE handles all matters concerning transportation and the effects of transportation infrastructure.

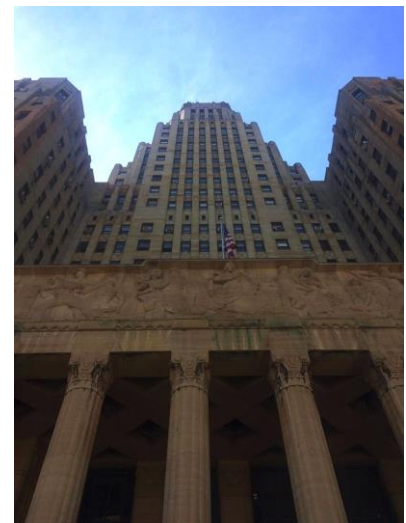
Chair: Christopher Scanlon

Members: Joel Feroletto, Bryan Bollman, David Rivera

WATERFRONT SUBCOMMITTEE handles all matters on waterfront development and related issues.

Chair: Christopher Scanlon

Members: Mitch Nowakowski, Joseph Golombek, Ulysees Wingo,



BOARDS

BUFFALO URBAN RENEWAL AGENCY (BURA) is a public benefit corporation that was formed in 1966 by the New York State Legislature. Its corporate purpose includes the general planning and operation of various urban renewal programs designed to prevent or eliminate blight and deterioration in the city of Buffalo.

Council members on the BURA board: Joseph Golombek, Darius Pridgen, Christopher Scanlon

Can I attend Common Council meetings?

Yes, all Common Council committee meetings are open to the public as required by the city charter.²⁰

Where and when do Common Council meetings take place?

The meetings take place in the Common Council Chambers on the thirteenth floor of City Hall, unless otherwise noted. Amidst the coronavirus pandemic, Common Council meetings are conducted virtually through video conferences.

A schedule of the meetings can be found at:

www.buffalony.iqm2.com/citizens/calendar.aspx. However, all scheduled meetings are subject to change and cancellation by the respective Chairmen of the committees.²¹

How do I learn more about the Common Council?

Visit the Common Council website at:

<https://www.buffalony.gov/362/Common-Council>.

The Common Council has centralized Legislative Staff to provide technical, clerical, and administrative support to the Council and its members; to provide assistance at public meetings and hearings; to prepare resolutions and rules for enactment; and to provide assistance with the review of items and issues before the Council.

The Council's Chief of Staff is Malcolm Ertha (mertha@city-buffalo.com), Deputy Chief of Staff is James Montour (jmontour@city-buffalo.com), and Public Information Officer is Clayton Hoyt (choyt@city-buffalo.com). Legislative Staff are located at 1413 City Hall and can be reached at 716-851-5105.

All Common Council meetings are open to the public.

Meetings take place in Council Chambers on the thirteenth floor of City Hall.

Sources

¹ "History of the Common Council," City of Buffalo, accessed May 2009, www.ci.buffalo.ny.us/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/HistoryOfCommonCouncil.

² City of Buffalo Charter, § 3-7 (e).

³ City of Buffalo Charter, § 3-7 (a), (b).

⁴ City of Buffalo Charter, § 3-7 (c).

⁵ City of Buffalo Charter, § 3-7 (f).

⁶ City of Buffalo Charter, § 3-7 (g).

⁷ City of Buffalo Charter, § 3-7 (h).

⁸ City of Buffalo Charter, § 3-7 (j).

⁹ City of Buffalo Charter, § 3-7 (k), (l).

¹⁰ City of Buffalo Charter, § 3-7 (m).

¹¹ City of Buffalo Charter, § 3-7 (o).

¹² "History of the Common Council," City of Buffalo, accessed May 2009, www.ci.buffalo.ny.us/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/HistoryOfCommonCouncil.

¹³ "Common Council," City of Buffalo, accessed May 2009, www.ci.buffalo.ny.us/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil.

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ "Common Council," City of Buffalo, accessed July 27, 2020, <https://www.buffalony.gov/387/Common-Council-Members>

¹⁷ City of Buffalo Charter, § 3-12.

¹⁸ All information about committee and board membership was taken from the biography page of each councilmember as of July 2020. "Common Council," City of Buffalo, 2020, accessed July 20, 2020, <https://www.buffalony.gov/387/Common-Council-Members>.

¹⁹ Williams, Deidre. "New community advisory board to augment city's Police Oversight Committee," *The Buffalo News*, March 8, 2018, accessed July 11, 2018, <https://buffalonews.com/2018/03/08/new-community-advisory-board-to-augment-citys-police-oversight-committee>.

²⁰ City of Buffalo Charter, § 3-8(c).

²¹ "Meeting Calendar," City of Buffalo, accessed July 11, 2018, www.buffalony.iqm2.com/citizens/calendar.aspx.

²³ All information about the background of common council members was taken from the biography page of each councilmember as of July 2020. "Common Council," City of Buffalo, 2020, accessed July 20, 2020, <https://www.buffalony.gov/387/Common-Council-Members>.

²⁴ "Cora P. Maloney: Buffalo's First African American Female Common Council Member," Buffalo Rising, 2015, accessed July 11, 2018, <https://www.buffalorising.com/2015/02/cora-p-maloney-buffalos-first-african-american-female-common-council-member/>; "Cora Pleasant Maloney," Uncrowned Community Builders, 2018, accessed July 11, 2018, <http://uncrownedcommunitybuilders.com/person/cora-1>.



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