
SUMMARY OF FINAL PROPOSALS

August 1989

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Harriet R. Michel
Vice Chair

Nathan Leventhal
Secretary

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Amalia V. Betanzos

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W. Bernard Richland

Most Rev. Joseph M. Sullivan

David G. Trager

Eric Lane

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THE COUNCIL

The Council

- To encourage fuller representation of all New Yorkers, the Council would, in a 1991 election, be increased in size from 35 to 51 members who would be elected from smaller districts. (A Council of 35 members would be elected in 1989 under the current charter, but would serve for two years instead of the customary four-year term. The expanded Council, elected in 1991, would serve for two years; the Council elected in 1993 would serve a four-year term.)
- The new Council districts would be about 30 per cent smaller in population than the Council's current districts, bringing Council members into closer contact with their constituents. Smaller districts, if drawn properly, would also enhance the opportunity for racial and language minorities to elect representatives of their choice.
- The new Districting Commission which will redraw Council district lines after the 1990 census and after each succeeding ten-year census would be required to be politically and geographically diverse and to include fair and proportional representation of the city's racial and language minorities. Currently, the mayor is empowered to appoint all nine members of the commission. Under the new charter, the mayor would appoint seven of the 15 members, with five appointed by the majority party of the Council and three appointed by the minority party. The commission would designate one member as its chair.
- The Districting Commission will use the April, 1991 results of the 1990 census in drawing the new Council lines for the 1991 elections. The Council district lines might be redrawn again in 1993 to reflect any subsequent refinements in the 1990 census figures.

The charter would require the Districting Commission to draw district lines that ensure fair and effective representation of language and racial minorities in the city, and which keep intact neighborhoods with common interests and histories. Unless it is necessary to accomplish these objectives or to keep districts compact, district lines could not be drawn with the objective of diluting geographic concentrations of voters belonging to a particular party.

- To ensure broad and fair competition in elections for the new Council, funding for the city's system of partial, voluntary public financing of election campaigns—which city voters overwhelmingly approved last year—would be continued as long as the local law stands.

Increased Powers

- Sole authority to modify and adopt the city's \$27 billion annual budget—the document that sets New York's spending priorities—would pass to the Council.
- The Council would review and approve, modify or disapprove all decisions of the City Planning Commission on zoning changes, most dispositions of city-owned residential property, urban renewal plans and plans for the development of the city.
- Would review other City Planning approvals of land use matters subject to ULURP, if the affected borough president and community board object, or if a majority of the Council's members vote to undertake such a review.
- The City Council would have the power to confirm the appointment of the city's commissioner of investigation, and the mayor would be required to give the Council written reasons if he or she wishes to dismiss the commissioner of investigation.

Independent, Democratic and Accountable Rules

- The full Council would elect the chairs of Council standing committees.
- Each standing committee of the Council would be required to conduct comprehensive hearings at least once a year on the operation of the agencies under its jurisdiction.
- A Council member would be required to be present at a Council or committee meeting to cast a vote.
- All committee votes would be recorded and available for public inspection.
- The principal sponsor of a proposed local law could require a committee vote on that measure.
- A majority of the members of the Council could vote to discharge a proposed local law from a Council committee.
- The Council would be required to establish, by resolution, any system of stipends to Council leaders and committee chairs over and above their city salaries.
- Any commission created to evaluate the need for increases in salaries for Council members could also analyze the costs and benefits of restricting Council members earned income from other sources.
- Each proposed local law brought to the floor of the Council for a vote would be accompanied by a multi-year "fiscal impact statement" estimating the law's effects on city revenues and expenditures.

- The Council would draft and submit the budget for its own operations to the mayor. The mayor would be required to include it unchanged in the executive budget, but would have the ability to line-item veto any appropriation. The Council would be required to report quarterly and publicly on its budget.
- The Council's vice-chair, who is also the majority leader of the Council, would be called the Council's "speaker".