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## City of Buffalo Common Council

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## City of Buffalo Common Council

### Abstract

The Mayor is responsible for all executive and administrative functions and controls the day-to-day affairs of the City. Under the 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. Each Council Member is elected by receiving a majority of the vote from the district in which they are seeking to serve. The leadership positions of the Common Council are selected by and from the Common Council Members to serve in a Leadership position for a two year period. These positions include President, President Pro-Tempore, and Majority and Minority Leaders.

### Keywords

Buffalo, Government, Local Government Bodies, Fact Sheet, PPG, PDF

**City of Buffalo Common Council  
Edward Hawthorne  
University at Buffalo Law Student**

**What is the City of Buffalo Common Council website?**

The City of Buffalo Common Council's website is  
<http://www.ci.buffalo.ny.us/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil>.

**What is the City of Buffalo Common Council?**

The City of Buffalo Common Council is the legislative branch of the city government. On January 1, 1928 the City of Buffalo adopted a new charter. This charter created the City of Buffalo Common Council.<sup>1</sup>

**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.<sup>2</sup> One of the Common Council's main responsibilities is to adopt the annual operating budget of the city, the annual capital budget of the city, and the four-year capital program of the city.<sup>3</sup>

The Common Council also has the power to:

- To enact local laws and ordinances.<sup>4</sup>
- To adopt resolutions, rules, and regulations.<sup>5</sup>
- To authorize the borrowing of funds by the city.<sup>6</sup>
- To impose taxes and special assessments.<sup>7</sup>
- To acquire by purchase, gift, or eminent domain any interest in real and/or personal property for any city purpose or as by law.<sup>8</sup>
- To dispose of any real or personal property of the city.<sup>9</sup>
- To appoint local officers such as a city clerk, a deputy city clerk, a deputy city clerk of birth records, and other staff to the Common Council as deemed necessary for the proper functioning of the Common Council.<sup>10</sup>
- To fix the salary and compensation of every officer and employee of the city except as may be otherwise provided by law.<sup>11</sup>



- To investigate and inquire into all matters of concern to the city and its inhabitants and to require and enforce by subpoena the attendance of witnesses or the production of documents at such investigations.<sup>12</sup>

### **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 City Charter the Mayor may veto actions taken by the Council.<sup>13</sup> The Council may override the Mayor’s veto with a vote of six of the nine members.<sup>14</sup>

### **How are Council Members elected?**

Each Council Member is elected by receiving a majority of the vote from the district in which they are seeking to serve. The leadership positions of the Common Council are selected by and from the Common Council Members to serve in a Leadership position for a two year period. These positions include President, President Pro-Tempore, and Majority and Minority Leaders.<sup>15</sup>

### **How long is a Council Member’s term of office?**

A Common Council Members serve a four-year term of office. All current Common Council Members are currently serving a term of office beginning January 1, 2008 and ending December 31, 2011.<sup>16</sup>

### **What are the city of Buffalo’s Council districts?**



The City of Buffalo is made up of nine Common Council Districts. The nine districts are Ellicott District, Lovejoy District, Fillmore District, North District, South District, Delaware District, Niagara District, University District, and Masten District.<sup>18</sup>

## **How do I contact my Council Member?**

### **Ellicott District**

Brian C. Davis  
1408 City Hall  
Phone: 716-851-4980  
Fax: 716-851-6576  
brdavis@city-buffalo.com

### **Lovejoy District**

Richard A. Fontana (Majority  
Leader)  
1414 City Hall  
Phone: 716-851-5151  
Fax: (716)851-5141  
rfontana@city-buffalo.com

### **Fillmore District**

David A. Franczyk (President  
of the Common Council)  
1315 City Hall  
Phone: 716-851-4138  
Fax: (716)851-4869  
dfranczyk@city-buffalo.com

### **North District**

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

### **South District**

Michael P. Kearns (President  
Pro-Tempore)  
1401 City Hall  
Phone: 716-851-5169  
Fax: 716-851-4294  
mkearns@city-buffalo.com

### **Delaware District**

Michael J. LoCurto  
1405 City Hall  
Phone: 716-851-5155  
Fax: 716-851-4553  
mlocurto@city-buffalo.com

### **Niagara District**

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

### **University District**

Bonnie E. Russell  
1508 City Hall,  
Phone: 716-851-5165  
Fax: 716-851-4580  
brussell@city-buffalo.com

### **Masten District**

Demone A. Smith  
1316-A City Hall  
Phone: 716-851-5145  
Fax: 716-851-5443  
Email: dsmith@city-  
buffalo.com

## **Does my Council Member have a duty to address my concerns?**

One of the main responsibilities of a Common Council Member is constituent service. In fact, the City of Buffalo Charter mandates a Common Council Member shall have the duty to consider and address in a timely and thorough manner any concerns regarding the affairs of the city of Buffalo that are communicated to him or her by residents of or visitors to the city of Buffalo.”<sup>19</sup>

## **What are the Common Council Committees and who are the members of those committees?**

### **Standing Committees**

The Civil Service Committee handles all matters relating to the creation and abolishment of officers and employees. The chairwoman of the civil service committee is Bonnie E. Russell. The member of this committee are Brian C. Davis, Michael P. Kearns, and David A. Rivera.<sup>20</sup>

The Claims Committee handles all un-liquidated claims against the city and the release of liabilities. The chairman of the claims committee is David A. Rivera. The members of the committee are Richard A. Fontana, Michael P. Kearns, and Bonnie E. Russell.<sup>21</sup>

The 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. The chairman of the community development committee is Michael J. LoCurto. The members of the committee are Richard A. Fontana, Joseph Golombek Jr., David A. Rivera, and Demone A. Smith.<sup>22</sup>



The Finance Committee handles all matters concerning the budget and the issuance of bonds. The chairman of the finance committee is Michael P. Kearns. The members of the committee are Brian C. Davis, Michael J. LoCurto, David A. Rivera, and Bonnie E. Russell.<sup>23</sup>

The Legislation Committee handles all matters relating to local laws, ordinances and general legislation, except those matters which are referable to the Committee on Civil Service. The chairman of the legislation committee is Joseph Golombek Jr. The members of the committee are Brian C. Davis, Richard A. Fontana, Michael J. LoCurto, and David A. Rivera.<sup>24</sup>

The Minority Business Enterprise Committee, or MBE, is a sub-committee which handles all matters relating to minority business enterprise, women’s business enterprise, workforce development

utilization, and planning activities and issues. The chair of the minority business enterprise committee is Demone A. Smith. The members of the committee are Richard A. Fontana, Brian C. Davis, Joseph Golombek Jr., and David A. Rivera.<sup>25</sup>

The Rules Committee handles all matters relating to Council procedure and the office of the City Clerk. The chair of the rules committee is David A. Franczyk. The members of the committee are Richard A. Fontana, and Michael P. Kearns.<sup>26</sup>

The Waterfront Committee is a sub-committee which handles all matters relating to waterfront development and related issues. The chairman of the waterfront committee is Michael P. Kearns. The members of the committee are Brian C. Davis, Joseph Golombek Jr., and David A. Rivera.<sup>27</sup>



### **Subcommittees**

The Budget Committee is a sub-committee, which handles all matters concerning the City budget. The chairman of the committee is Richard A. Fontana. The members of the budget committee are Michael J. LoCurto, Michael P. Kearns, Demone A. Smith.<sup>29</sup>

The Education Committee is a sub-committee which handles all matters relating to educational issues. The chairman of the education committee is Demone A. Smith. The only other member of the committee is Richard A. Fontana.<sup>30</sup>

### **Boards**

Buffalo Urban Renewal Agency, or BURA, is a public benefit corporation that was formed, by an act of the New York State Legislature, in 1966. 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.<sup>31</sup> The Council Members who serve on the BURA board are David A. Franczyk, Michael P. Kearns, and Michael J. LoCurto.<sup>32</sup>

Buffalo Economic Renaissance Corporation, or BERC, supports business development and growth by assisting the private sector to create and retain jobs that increase the wealth of Buffalo residents and strengthen the Buffalo economy.<sup>33</sup> Brian C. Davis is the only Council Member to serve on the BERC board.<sup>34</sup>



The Joint Schools Construction Board, or JSCB, is an

inter-municipal board created by the City of Buffalo (acting by amendment to the City Charter) and the City School District (acting by resolution of the Board of Education) to assist in the planning and development of a comprehensive program to redevelop Buffalo's educational facilities ("the Program").<sup>35</sup> Richard A. Fontana represents the Council on the JSCB.<sup>36</sup>

## **What are some initiatives the Common Council is currently planning?**

### **Financial Indicatives**<sup>37</sup>

- Develop a Strategy to Increase Recycling
- Standardize Community Center Lease Agreements
- Dedicate the Casino Local Revenue Stream to Buffalo
- Explore Hiring a Sustainability Director / Energy Compliance Officer

### **Economic Development Indicatives**<sup>38</sup>

- Remove the Skyway / Route 5 Development Barrier
- Encourage Waterfront Projects to Move Beyond the Planning Phase
- Continue Brownfield Redevelopment Efforts
- Market Economic Development Programs Using a One-Stop Approach

### **Planning Indicatives**<sup>39</sup>

- Update the City of Buffalo Zoning Code to Encourage Smart Growth
- Codify a Role for Community Participation in Planning and Development
- Brand Buffalo's Neighborhoods
- Make Buffalo More Pedestrian and Bicycle Friendly
- Grow the Number of Community Gardens in Buffalo



### **Safe and Affordable Housing Indicatives**<sup>40</sup>

- Standardize Housing Survey Policies
- Support Weatherization and Energy Efficiency Initiatives
- Initiate a Roof Replacement Matching Grant Program
- Expand Lead Paint Screening and Abatement Efforts
- Revisit the Rental Registry Program
- Conduct Neighborhood-Based Home Ownership Events
- Eliminate the Old First Ward's Flood Plain Designation

### **Quality of Life Indicatives**<sup>41</sup>

- Create Preservation and Demolition Policies



- Change the Code Enforcement / Demolition Cycle
- Combat Property Crimes
- Enact a Problem Property Response Time Guarantee
- Expand the Buffalo Police Department's K-9 Unit
- Secure Buffalo's Place as a Premier Arts Destination
- Return Ice-Skating to Hoyt Lake

**Community Outreach Indicatives**<sup>42</sup>

- Establish an Office of New Buffalonians
- Provide Information and Services in Multiple Languages
- Expand Police Community Outreach

**Where can I find more information about the Common Council's initiatives?**

More information about these initiatives can be obtained by visiting:  
<http://www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/CommonCouncilActionPlans>

**Can I attend the City of Buffalo Common Council meetings?**

Yes, all Common Council committee meetings are open to the public as required by the city charter.<sup>43</sup>

**Where and When do the Common Council Meetings take place?**

- The meetings take place in the Common Council Chambers, 13th floor City Hall, Buffalo, New York, unless otherwise noted. A schedule of the meetings can be found at:  
[www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/Committee\\_Meetings](http://www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/Committee_Meetings).
- However, all scheduled meetings are subject to change and cancellation by the respective Chairmen of Council Committees.<sup>44</sup>



<sup>45</sup>

**How do I learn more about the City of Buffalo Common Council?**

- You can visit the Common Council website at <http://www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil>.
- You can view archived copies of Common Council videos by visiting [www.city-buffalo.com](http://www.city-buffalo.com)

buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/Cars\_on\_Main/CommonCouncilVideos.

- Copies of Common Council Agendas can be obtained by visiting  
www.city-  
buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/Council\_Agendas.

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- <sup>1</sup> [www.ci.buffalo.ny.us/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/HistoryOfCommonCouncil](http://www.ci.buffalo.ny.us/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/HistoryOfCommonCouncil)
  - <sup>2</sup> [www.ci.buffalo.ny.us/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/HistoryOfCommonCouncil](http://www.ci.buffalo.ny.us/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/HistoryOfCommonCouncil)
  - <sup>3</sup> City of Buffalo Charter, § 3-7 (e)
  - <sup>4</sup> City of Buffalo Charter, § 3-7 (a),(b)
  - <sup>5</sup> City of Buffalo Charter, § 3-7 (c)
  - <sup>6</sup> City of Buffalo Charter, § 3-7 (f)
  - <sup>7</sup> City of Buffalo Charter, § 3-7 (g)
  - <sup>8</sup> City of Buffalo Charter, § 3-7 (h)
  - <sup>9</sup> City of Buffalo Charter, § 3-7 (j)
  - <sup>10</sup> City of Buffalo Charter, § 3-7 (k), (l)
  - <sup>11</sup> City of Buffalo Charter, § 3-7 (m)
  - <sup>12</sup> City of Buffalo Charter, § 3-7 (o)
  - <sup>13</sup> [www.ci.buffalo.ny.us/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/HistoryOfCommonCouncil](http://www.ci.buffalo.ny.us/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/HistoryOfCommonCouncil)
  - <sup>14</sup> [http://mickeykearns.com/images/metro\\_CapBudget.pdf](http://mickeykearns.com/images/metro_CapBudget.pdf)
  - <sup>15</sup> [www.ci.buffalo.ny.us/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil](http://www.ci.buffalo.ny.us/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil)
  - <sup>16</sup> [www.ci.buffalo.ny.us/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil](http://www.ci.buffalo.ny.us/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil)
  - <sup>17</sup> [www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil](http://www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil)
  - <sup>18</sup> [www.ci.buffalo.ny.us/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil](http://www.ci.buffalo.ny.us/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil)
  - <sup>19</sup> City of Buffalo Charter, § 3-12
  - <sup>20</sup> [www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/CommitteeMemberships](http://www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/CommitteeMemberships)
  - <sup>21</sup> [www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/CommitteeMemberships](http://www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/CommitteeMemberships)
  - <sup>22</sup> [www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/CommitteeMemberships](http://www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/CommitteeMemberships)
  - <sup>23</sup> [www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/CommitteeMemberships](http://www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/CommitteeMemberships)
  - <sup>24</sup> [www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/CommitteeMemberships](http://www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/CommitteeMemberships)
  - <sup>25</sup> [www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/CommitteeMemberships](http://www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/CommitteeMemberships)
  - <sup>26</sup> [www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/CommitteeMemberships](http://www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/CommitteeMemberships)
  - <sup>27</sup> [www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/CommitteeMemberships](http://www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/CommitteeMemberships)
  - <sup>28</sup> [urbandesignproject.ap.buffalo.edu/projects/wci/index.htm](http://urbandesignproject.ap.buffalo.edu/projects/wci/index.htm)
  - <sup>29</sup> [www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/CommitteeMemberships](http://www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/CommitteeMemberships)
  - <sup>30</sup> [www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/CommitteeMemberships](http://www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/CommitteeMemberships)
  - <sup>31</sup> [www.ci.buffalo.ny.us/Home/City\\_Departments/BURA](http://www.ci.buffalo.ny.us/Home/City_Departments/BURA)
  - <sup>32</sup> [www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/CommitteeMemberships](http://www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/CommitteeMemberships)
  - <sup>33</sup> [www.berc.org/](http://www.berc.org/)
  - <sup>34</sup> [www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/CommitteeMemberships](http://www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/CommitteeMemberships)
  - <sup>35</sup> [www.ci.buffalo.ny.us/files/1\\_2\\_1/Mayor/four\\_year\\_plan\\_2007/4y%20Plan-JSCB.pdf](http://www.ci.buffalo.ny.us/files/1_2_1/Mayor/four_year_plan_2007/4y%20Plan-JSCB.pdf)
  - <sup>36</sup> [www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/CommitteeMemberships](http://www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/CommitteeMemberships)
  - <sup>37</sup> *The Common Council – City of Buffalo, New York 2008-2009 Annual Action Plan*, pg. 3-5
  - <sup>38</sup> *The Common Council – City of Buffalo, New York 2008-2009 Annual Action Plan*, pg. 5-7

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<sup>39</sup> *The Common Council – City of Buffalo, New York 2008-2009 Annual Action Plan*, pg. 8-10

<sup>40</sup> *The Common Council – City of Buffalo, New York 2008-2009 Annual Action Plan*, pg. 10-13

<sup>41</sup> *The Common Council – City of Buffalo, New York 2008-2009 Annual Action Plan*, pg. 14-17

<sup>42</sup> *The Common Council – City of Buffalo, New York 2008-2009 Annual Action Plan*, pg. 18-19

<sup>43</sup> City of Buffalo Charter, § 3-8(c)

<sup>44</sup> [www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/Committee\\_Meetings](http://www.city-buffalo.com/Home/Leadership/CommonCouncil/Committee_Meetings)

<sup>45</sup> *The Common Council – City of Buffalo, New York 2008-2009 Annual Action Plan*