

Location Focus: Columbia University Area
(Morningside Heights/West Harlem, Manhattan Community District 9)

Local Civics 101: NYC Local Government & Civic Engagement

*What does local government do?
What can I do about it?*



NYC Civics Modules

01

LOCAL GOV 101

Understand local government positions and how to influence decisions made by local government.

02

HOUSING

Understand why housing costs are rising and how tenants and residents can shape local housing policy.

03

POLICING

What authority does NYC have over policing and when do they change their approach?

04

EDUCATION

Learn how NYC schools are governed and how parents and residents can influence education policy.

05

MEDIA LITERACY

Find trustworthy local information, evaluate online claims, and contribute to local civic reporting.

06

CAMPAIGNS & GOTV

Learn how issue campaigns, primaries, and elections work and how to effectively participate.



Pre-Program Survey QR Code.
Please Complete the Survey If You

Does local government matter?

If you have considered questions like...

- Can I afford to stay in NYC?
- Do I have rights to demand heat and repairs in my building?
- Can my landlord evict me?
- Can I get support to pay for groceries and healthcare?
- Can the police stop and search me without reason?
- Can I demand police patrols to keep my street safe?
- Can I afford childcare so I can start a new business?
- Can I get support for my mental and physical health between jobs?
- Is my neighborhood clean? Can I demand services to improve its sanitation?
- Is my child receiving a quality education?
- Is NYC prepared for climate disasters like floods and heat waves?



Why local government matters

- Local government directly controls the services you use every day (housing quality, public safety, schools, infrastructure, protections from rent increases, transit efficiency).
- Local officials are often more accessible than national or state officials because you can actually reach them (but state reps in NYC are also close by).
- Given low turnout in local elections, your voice, vote, and volunteering time can have real impact.
- There are many ways to participate in government. You can join civic organizations that influence local government & make a real impact

Who Has Power in NYC? [Not Exhaustive]

Mayor (Elected)

Borough President (Elected)

**New York State Governor and State
Reps (Elected)**

District Attorney (Elected)

City Council Member (Elected)

Police Commissioner (Appointed)

Comptroller (Elected)

Schools Chancellor (Appointed)

Public Advocate (Elected)

**Department of Housing Preservation and
Development Commissioner (Appointed)**

Being an Informed NYC Voter Matters

2025 Primary Election for Mayor

The Democratic primary usually determines who becomes mayor. Primary turnout is typically only 20–25% of registered Democrats but reached about 40% in 2025, when Mamdani was elected.

The candidates represented different governing visions and were supported by different coalitions of voters—including many business leaders and higher-income voters on one side and younger, middle and working-class voters on the other.

2021 Comptroller Primary Election

A narrow contest between Brad Lander and Corey Johnson. Lander won by 24,000 votes – a margin of .5% of all registered voters in NYC.

This determined how aggressively corruption was investigated and how to invest NYC's \$250 Billion pension funds.

2018 State Senate Primary Election

Primaries often attract only 10,000–15,000 voters. In 2018, Andrew Gounardes won by just 2,476 votes.

This shifted Senate control, leading to major changes in tenant protections, voting laws, criminal justice, and climate policy.

When Have NYC Voters Made a Difference Beyond the Ballot Box?

Civic Society Advocating to Protect Library Funding

In 2022, community members – including the libraries themselves – organized rallies, contacted elected officials, testified at hearings, and campaigned against proposed budget cuts.

City Council preserved library funding

Tenant Activism Impacting State Tenant Policies

Tenant groups built a statewide coalition through years of lobbying and staging protests.

The result was the **2019 Housing Stability and Tenant Protection Act**, which strengthened rent regulation.

Anti-Corporate Action

In 2019, Amazon pulled out of its HQ2 plan in Long Island City.

This followed intense opposition to corporate subsidies from activists, union leaders, and local politicians like Alexandria Ocasio Cortez.

Government Positions and What They Do

Mayor, New York State Governor,
Comptroller , City Council Member, Public
advocate, Borough President, District
Attorney

Government Agencies and What They Do

NYPD, Department of Education, Department
of Housing Preservation and Development,
Department of Social Services

How to Stay Informed, Get Involved, and Influence NYC Government

Key Questions

- Who does what in NYC government?
- Why does local government matter for the issues I care about?
- How can I find information online and in-person about events related to the local government issues that I care about?

NYC Civic Mythbusters

Thumbs up = True 

Thumbs down = False 

1. The Mayor controls the subway and its fare increases.
2. NYC controls its schools
3. The mayor can raise taxes on the rich if he wants to.
4. Negligent landlords cannot have their buildings taken away from them.
5. The Mayor can cut funding for the police on his own.
6. Ranked choice voting lets people vote more than one time on election day.
7. NYC services do not rely on federal dollars.
8. Local news is dead.

NEWSSTAND

How can I stay informed about NYC government?

PART 1



Stay Informed: Local News Outlets Covering NYC (Citywide)

The New York Times

(<https://www.nytimes.com/section/nyregion>)

NYC coverage and investigative reporting on city politics and government decisions

The City

(thecity.nyc)

Nonprofit news reporting on NYC government, housing, schools, and municipal issues

Gothamist

(gothamist.com)

Reports on NYC culture and government news with broad city coverage

Hell Gate

(hellgatenyc.com)

Independent reporting on NYC news and city policy

Columbia Spectator

(<https://www.columbiaspectator.com/>)

Student newspaper covering Morningside Heights and West Harlem issues

NY1 & WNYC Radio

(<https://wnyc.org/browse/shows/wnyc-news>)

24-hour local news channel and NYC's public radio station (93.9 FM)

Stay Informed: Local News Outlets Covering Brooklyn

News 12 Brooklyn

https://youtube.com/playlist?list=PLLI5tv_yVQDNcOeXaEc8haZSdT_c2wCpF&si=wvx1WFci2UKtZULj

Brooklyn Reader

<https://www.bkreader.com/>

Covers Brooklyn local politics and culture

Brooklyn Paper

<https://www.brooklynpaper.com/>

Covers neighborhood politics, community boards, development projects, crime, schools, and local events.

The City

(thecity.nyc)

Nonprofit news reporting on NYC government, housing, schools, and municipal issues – including Brooklyn.

Brownstoner

(<https://www.brownstoner.com/>)

Reporting on Brooklyn housing and real estate

Brooklyn Eagle

<https://brooklyneagle.com/>

Covers local local government, business, real estate, and neighborhood issues.

Following Your Reps and Local Officials on Social Media

Mayor

IG & Twitter: @NYCMayor
YouTube: @NYCMayorsOffice

City Council

IG & Twitter: @nycouncil

City Council Member (Morningside Heights)

IG & Twitter: @cmshaunabreu

Governor

IG & Twitter: @govkathyhochul
(for NYC issues)

State Assembly

IG & Twitter: @nysa_majority
(for NYC issues)

Senator & Assembly Rep (Morningside Heights)

@micahlasher
@senatorccclare

Department-Specific Office Holders (Policing, Housing, Education)

IG & Twitter: @nycschools, @NYCHousing, @nycdsscommr, @nypdpc

What Can You Do with 311?

Report Issues

Request service to fix problems like dirty sidewalks, noise, etc



Discover Services

Get help navigating city services like SNAP, trash collection, etc

[Click here to report problems](#)

Check Status

View the latest status of your service requests

[Click here to browse services](#)

NYC311 is for non-emergency City services

Stay Informed: Local Radio Stations Covering NYC and Morningside Heights

1010 Wins (92.3 FM): Covering news, weather, and hosts podcasts for NYC and the Tri-State area

WNYC (93.9 FM): Public radio station covering news with a focus local to NYC

710 WOR (710 AM): AM radio station covering NY and national news

Stay Informed: Local TV News Stations Covering NYC and Morningside Heights

NBC 4 New York (Channel 4): Covering news for NY with 24/7 stations and live coverage of breaking news

CBS News New York (Channel 2): Coverage of Tri-State area news 24/7

ABC7 Eyewitness News (Channel 7): Coverage of NYC and Tri-State area news with street interviews of viewers and passers-by

Spectrum News (Channel 1): Covers local news with a focus on NYC

PIX11 News (Channel 11): Covers NYC news on events, weather, traffic and sports stories

WNET (Channel 13): PBS station with local news programming like MetroFocus.

Government Positions

Who does what in NYC government?



PART 2

KEY NYC POSITIONS

Mayor

Borough President

New York State Governor

District Attorney

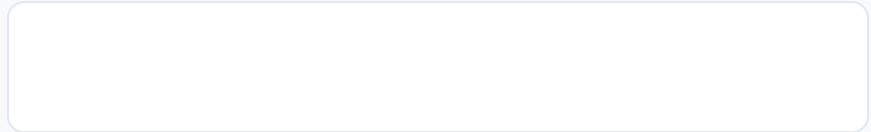
City Council Member

Police Commissioner

Comptroller

Schools Chancellor

Public Advocate





IG & X (Twitter): @NYCMayor
YouTube: @NYCMayorsOffice
Website: www.nyc.gov/mayor

Mayor

Current: Zohran Mamdani

- Chief executive of NYC (oversees all city agencies)
- Proposes the city budget (~\$100+ billion)
- Appoints commissioners of major agencies (NYPD, Sanitation, Buildings, etc.)
- Sets citywide policy priorities
- Represents the interests of the city and all New Yorkers

The Difference Voting Makes: 2025 NYC mayoral candidates



Zohran Mamdani

Democratic socialist platform centered on affordability; rent freeze for stabilized tenants



Andrew Cuomo

Centrist platform: crime, antisemitism, public safety



Curtis Sliwa

Tough-on-crime, right-wing critic of both opponents



Example of Mayoral Power: Affordable Housing

Bloomberg:

- Rezoned Williamsburg/Greenpoint, Downtown Brooklyn, and other areas to advance new developments.

Mamdani:

- Proposed adding new units and preserving existing units using city own land.
- Appointed board members that sets annual increases for rent-stabilized apartments & freeze rent increases

RENT GUIDELINES BOARD

PROPOSED RENT INCREASE

1-YEAR LEASE: 0 TO 2%
2-YEAR LEASE: 0 TO 4%



Example of Mayoral Power: Protecting Immigrants

NYC is a sanctuary city, which means that city agencies do not share personal information with federal immigration authorities (ICE) and the NYPD does not cooperate with ICE.

Mayor Mamdani also created the Interagency Response Committee, which ensures that agencies remain compliant with local sanctuary city laws.



Example of Citizens Reversing a Mayor's Decision by Pressuring City Council and the Mayor



Mayor Eric Adams proposed major cuts to the budgets of the New York Public Library, Brooklyn Public Library, and Queens Public Library. This would reduce hours, classes, and the services offered.

In response, library workers and the community organized rallies, protests, signed petitions, and testified at the City Council budget hearings.

In the end, the City Council made restoring library funding a major budget priority. Negotiations with the Mayor's Office led to the restoration of most of the proposed cuts.

How can I Engage with the Mayor's Office?



- Vote for mayor in city elections (every 4 years)
- Attend town halls and events related to the Mayor's agenda.
- Join civic groups related to city policies and administration (e.g., Communities United for Police Reform).
- Share your experience directly with city officials through public hearings and listening sessions.



IG & X (Twitter): @NYCCouncil
Website: council.nyc.gov

What Does City Council Do?

- Approves the city's annual budget (over \$100 billion), deciding how much funding goes to schools, policing, parks, sanitation, housing, and social services
- Passes local laws that affect housing, public safety, business regulation, and quality of life across NYC.
- Hold oversight hearings that investigate city agencies
- Allocate millions of dollars to neighborhood projects and organizations
- Review major land-use decisions, including rezonings and large development projects through the ULURP process

Unilateral Powers of the Mayor Vs. City Council Powers

What the Mayor Can Do Alone

Appoint commissioners who run city agencies (NYPD, HPD, DOE, DSS, Sanitation)

Set agency priorities and enforcement strategies

Direct day-to-day operations of city government

Propose a city budget and policy agenda

Respond to emergencies and coordinate city services

Issue executive orders within existing legal authority

When the Mayor Needs City Council

Pass new local laws

Approve the city's annual budget

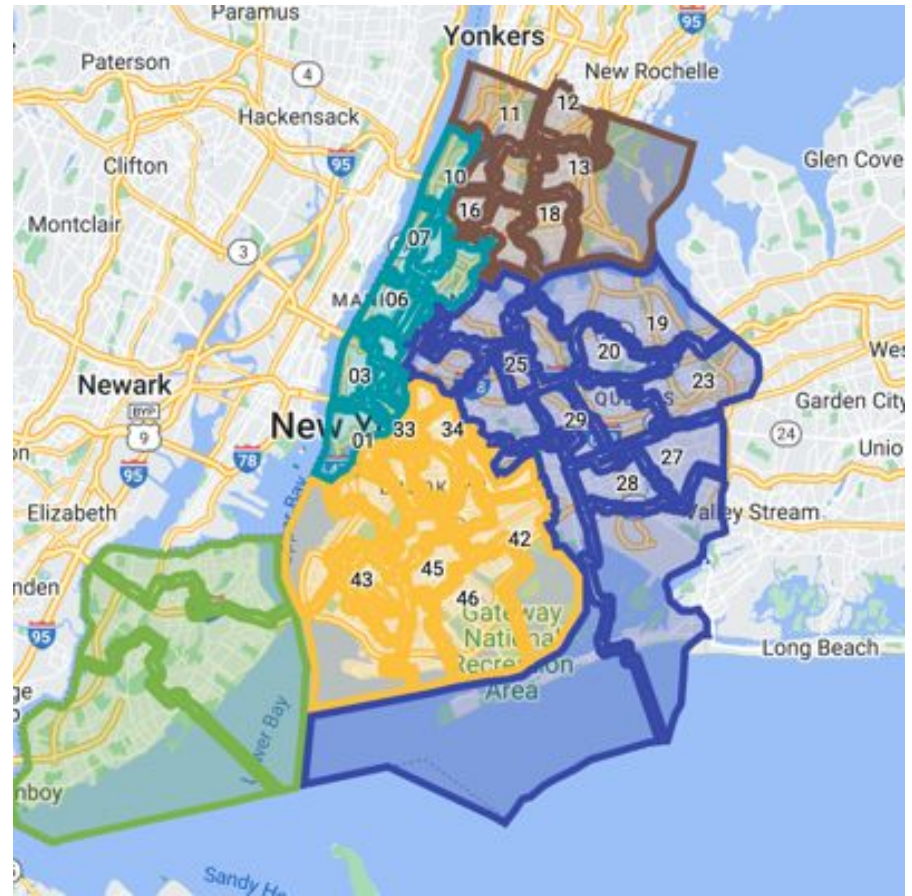
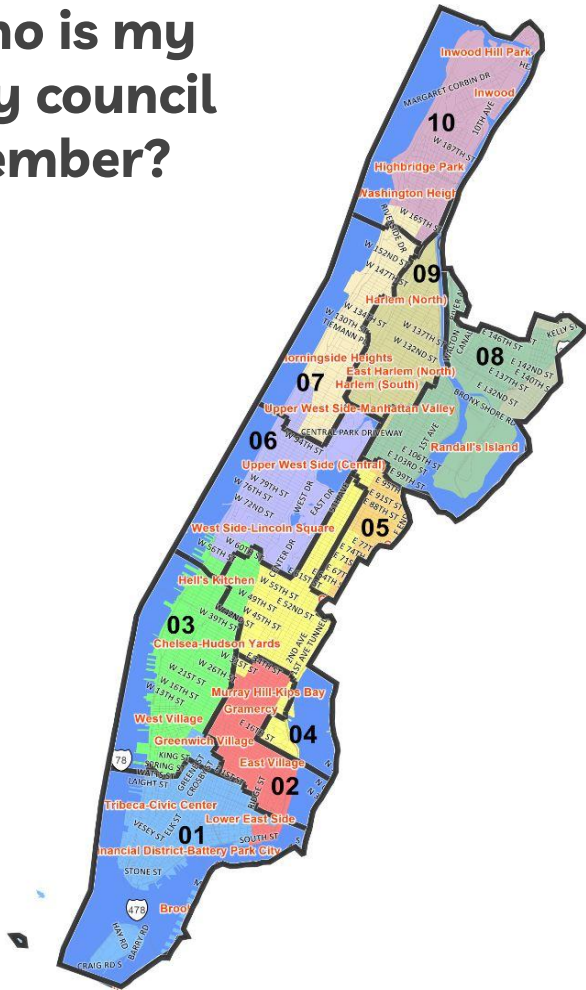
Create or expand major city programs that require funding

Increase, decrease, or reallocate spending across agencies

Approve major land-use and rezoning decisions

Override a mayoral veto (with a two-thirds vote)

Who is my city council member?





IG & X (Twitter): @cmshaunabreu

City Council Member

Current: Shaun Abreu (District 7)

Representing Morningside Heights and West Harlem



Represents district interests at City Hall by advocating for local priorities and introducing legislation.



Helps residents solve problems with city agencies like housing, sanitation, benefits, and street safety.



Secures millions in funding for parks, schools, libraries, nonprofits, and community programs.



Holds town halls and meetings to hear directly from residents.



IG & X (Twitter): @shahanafrombk

City Council Member

Current: Shahana Hanif (District 39)

Representing Kensington, Borough Park, Windsor Terrace, Park Slope, Gowanus, Carroll Gardens, Cobble Hill, Boerum Hill, and the Columbia Waterfront



Represents district interests at City Hall by advocating for local priorities and introducing legislation.



Helps residents solve problems with city agencies like housing, sanitation, benefits, and street safety.



Secures millions in funding for parks, schools, libraries, nonprofits, and community programs.



Holds town halls and meetings to hear directly from residents.

Example: Your City Council Member Serving Constituents



- In 2021, Council Member and current Majority Leader Shaun Abreu sponsored legislation mandating minimum 10% tips on third-party delivery apps and timely worker payment. The City Council also established minimum wages and working conditions for these workers.
- Council Members assist constituents with issues like housing and social welfare, such as addressing landlord violations and demanding repairs.

Example: Your City Council Member Serving Constituents (BK)



In 2024, Council Member Shahana Hanif enacted Local Law 45, providing survivors of domestic violence with free lock changes, personal safety alarms, and door and window repairs.

Council Members assist constituents with issues like housing and social welfare, such as addressing landlord violations and demanding repairs.



Example of NYC Voters Influencing City Council Decisions

In April 2021, Los Deliveristas Unidos (group of food delivery workers) rallied for increased wages, bathroom access, and protected bike lanes. For third-party app delivery services, workers also wanted to be recognized as employees, which would allow them to join unions.

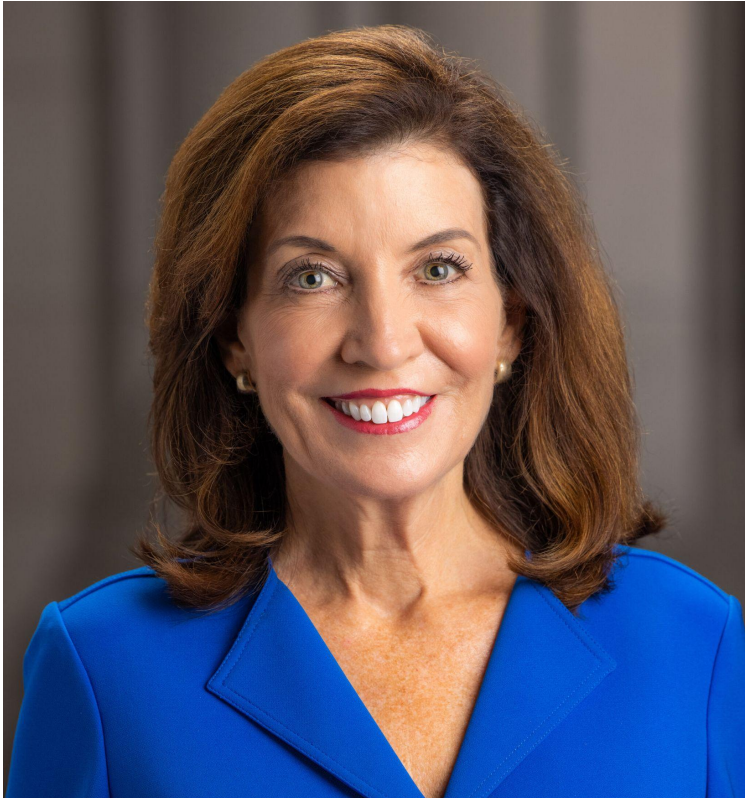
Impact: Paved the way for a series of City Council laws protecting delivery workers.



How can I Engage with my City Council?

- Vote in local elections for city councilor (every 4 years)
- Attend office hours of your local rep.
 - Shaun Abreu's Office: 500 West 141st Street, New York, NY 10031
 - 212-928-6814
 - Open from 9:00am - 5:00pm
- Attend city council meetings and register complaints.
 - Hearings are also live-streamed on the website
<https://council.nyc.gov/livestream/>





IG & X (Twitter): @govkathyhochul
Website: www.governor.ny.gov/

State Government

Governor: Kathy Hochul

- NY State Controls state budget (provides 30-40% of NYC's revenue)
- Approves tax increases (e.g., rejected income tax increase on high earners)
- Appoints the MTA Chair and nominates the majority of the MTA Board members.
- Can override NYC laws and policies through state legislation
- Declares states of emergency (COVID, weather) that supersedes Mayor

City vs. State Power

City (Mayor + City Council)

Governor + State Legislature

- Provides everyday services (trash, parks, libraries, schools)
- Operates city agencies (NYPD, FDNY, sanitation, parks)
- Determines zoning laws (what can be built where)
- Approves the city budget and local taxes.

- Homelessness
- Schools
- Childcare
- Climate
- Development

- Authorizes new NYC taxes and sets limits on local taxation.
- Controls transit fares (MTA)
- Sets housing laws (rent rules, tenant protections)
- Legalizes or regulates drugs
- Sets minimum wage
- Funds public universities (CUNY & SUNY)
- Makes state criminal and election laws

State-City Cooperation

When the Mayor Gets the Governor to Cooperate

- Mayor Mamdani's proposal of placing a tax on second homes was supported by Governor Hochul. In May of 2026, New York State lawmakers passed this pied-a-terre (secondary residence) tax for homes valued at \$5 million or more.
- The universal child care initiative for 2-year olds has been supported by both Mayor Mamdani and Governor Hochul to provide free childcare for all two-year-olds.
- Mayor Mamdani and Governor Hochul support congestion pricing, which charges vehicles \$9 to enter Manhattan below 60th St.

When the Governor Blocks the Mayor's Agenda

- One of Mayor Mamdani's campaign promises was the creation of free and fast buses, but Governor Hochul has not supported this plan so far, stating, "Not at this time."
- Rejected Mamdani's plan to increase local income taxes on the wealthy.
- Under Mayor Bloomberg, the state blocked congestion pricing in NYC.

How can I Engage with NY State Government?



State Assembly Member Micah Lasher

- **VOTE!**
 - Governor, State Senator, State Assembly Member
- Email or attend office hours
 - State Assembly Rep Micah Lasher:
lasherm@nyassembly.gov - 245 West 104th Street,
New York, NY 10025
 - State Senator Cordell Cleare: cleare@nysenate.gov
- 163 West 125th Street, Adam Clayton Powell, Jr.
State Office Building., Suite 912, New York, NY
10027
 - Pressure lawmakers to support a bill by sharing
your personal story and perspective
- Pressure state reps to prioritize NYC issues and
concerns

Who has the authority to do something about this? Mayor, City Council, the State, All of the above, something else?

Scenario 1: NYC public schools need more funding. The mayor proposes raising taxes on high-income New Yorkers to pay for it. Who needs to approve this?

Scenario 2: Your apartment has a leak in the ceiling and holes in the walls that need to be filled. Your landlord refused to pay for the repairs for over a year. You are ready to file a complaint.

Scenario 3: There is too much traffic and pollution in midtown Manhattan and the mayor calls for a new toll to disincentivize driving to work instead of taking the train.

Scenario 4: ICE agents arrest a neighbor outside their apartment building. Residents want to respond. Who can they turn to?

15 minute Break: Meet Your Neighbors





IG & X (Twitter): @MarkLevineNYC

Website: comptroller.nyc.gov

Comptroller

Current: Mark Levine

- NYC's chief financial officer and corruption "watchdog"
- Audits city agencies to expose waste, fraud, and mismanagement
- Audits city contracts (~ \$40 million)
- Manages public pension funds (~\$250 billion)
- Issues reports on city financial health

Three top candidates from the 2025 NYC comptroller election



Mark Levine

Democrat – affordable housing via pension funds, defending city finances from federal cuts, restoring trust in government.



Justin Brannan

Democrat – universal free childcare, divestment from Tesla, more spending to protect low-income New Yorkers



Peter Kefalas

Republican – fiscal conservatism and restraint on city spending

Consulate at Heart of Adams Case Got Special Treatment, Review Finds

The Turkish Consulate was the only building of its size allowed to open without a required fire safety certification, an investigation by the city comptroller found.

Listen · 5:07 min

Share full article



Example of Comptroller Power: Exposing Corruption

In 2024, then-Comptroller Brad Lander's office conducted audits of Mayor Eric Adams' administration and found serious financial irregularities.

He found that there were hundreds of office buildings that were never certified as safe. The Mayor had pressured the Fire Department to approve a Turkish consulate building, despite safety violations, in exchange for illegal campaign contributions and luxury travel from Turkish officials worth \$100,000.



Public Advocate

Current: Juumane Williams

- Citywide *ombudsman* (impartial referee) = helps residents navigate city bureaucracy (e.g., landlord abuse)
- Issues reports highlighting problems and recommendations
- No direct power, but has platform to raise awareness
- First in line of succession if Mayor can't serve

IG: [@nycpublicadvocate](https://www.instagram.com/nycpublicadvocate)

X(Twitter): [@JumaaneWilliams](https://twitter.com/JumaaneWilliams)

Website: <https://advocate.nyc.gov/>

Example of Public Advocate Power

Worst NYC Landlords of 2025

Based on open violations from November 2024 to October 2025

1

Margaret Brunn

24 buildings with
4872 open HPD violations



2

Donald Hastings

36 buildings with
3889 open HPD violations



3

Barry Singer

15 buildings with
2885 open HPD violations



Public Advocate publishes the annual “**Worst Landlord Watchlist**” a data-driven report used to publicly shame negligent building owners and equip tenant unions with the evidence needed to demand repairs and sue for safer living conditions.

After being named the 2022-2023 Worst Landlord, Daniel Ohebshalom was sent to jail twice for failing to make the proper repairs, serving time on Rikers Island.

Three of the most negligent landlords on this list were charged over \$33 million in penalties this year.

How can I Engage with my Public Advocate?

- File a complaint with the Public Advocate if a city agency isn't responding.
- Join campaigns highlighted by the Public Advocate's office (e.g., Worst Landlords).
- Organize neighbors or tenant groups around issues the office is spotlighting
 - Tenants and Neighbors: grassroots organization that provides organizing support and technical assistance to tenants who want to organize campaigns to keep their building affordable
 - Met Council on Housing: tenants' rights membership organization that offers tenants' rights telephone hotline and a free walk-in clinic





Borough President

Manhattan: Brad Hoylman-Sigal

The Borough President serves primarily as an advocate, with duties including:

- Appointing Community Board members and one City Planning Commission member
- Holding hearings with local stakeholders
- Recommending policy to City Council
- Advocating for borough funding and controlling funding for local projects
- Reviewing land use applications with advisory power

IG & X (Twitter): @bradhoylman

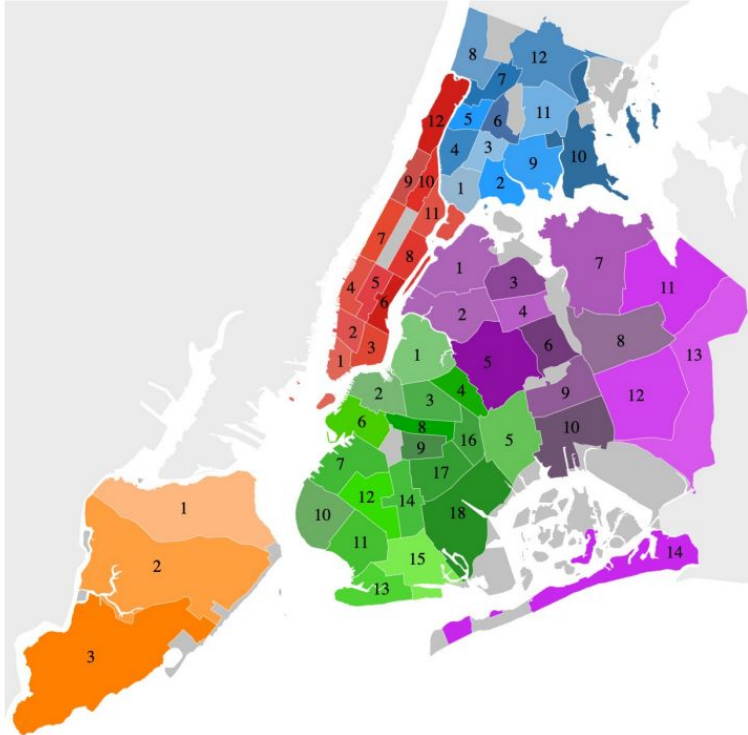
Website: manhattanbp.nyc.gov

New York City Community Districts

by Fitnr

The following is a map of the community districts in the five boroughs of New York City. Each community district board advises on how land in their district is developed, provides input on the city budgeting process, and manages the delivery of services to their community.

Primary Source:



Borough Presidents of NYC:

Manhattan- Brad Hoylman-Sigal (D)

The Bronx- Vanessa L Gibson (D)

Brooklyn- Antonio Reynoso (D)

Queens- Donovan Richards (D)

Staten Island- Vito Fossella (R)

Example of Borough President Power



Borough presidents can affect the land-use and zoning review process and control a portion of the city budget.

In 2023, Brooklyn Borough President Antonio Reynoso launched “The Comprehensive Plan for Brooklyn” to address the housing and public health crises. This was the first borough-specific large-scale planning effort ever in NYC and a model for planning citywide.

This means that when developers try to pass rezonings that lack affordable housing or don’t match the plan’s equity goals, Reynoso uses his official land-use power to recommend denial



Manhattan Community Board 9

Includes Morningside Heights and West Harlem

IG: @manhattancommunityboard9

Website: <https://www.cb9m.org/>

Community Boards

59 local boards across NYC

Members are volunteer residents appointed by the Borough President and City Council.

Primary Forum for Concerns

The first place residents raise issues about housing, traffic, sanitation, parks, and nightlife.

Development Review

Review housing proposals and make recommendations on zoning and construction.

Neighborhood Feedback

Provide critical feedback on schools, public safety, and local services.

How can I Engage with Community Boards?

- Apply to become a Community Board member!
- Attend Borough Board meetings (representatives from all Manhattan Community Boards)
 - Monthly board meetings (you can also join via Zoom)
 - Remaining 2026 Dates: July 16th; August 20th; September 17th; October 15th; November 19th; December 17th
- Attend monthly Community Board meetings (Manhattan Community board 9)
- Speak during public comment
- Join a committee (housing, transportation, parks, etc.)
 - Apply through Borough President's office

Examples of Citizens Making Change Through Community Boards



Community boards can influence bike lanes and street redesigns. Residents can testify to community boards to push for increased street safety, more bike lanes, or changing street designs.



In 2024, residents and restaurant owners testified before Community Boards about outdoor dining setups. They influenced decisions about roadway dining locations, when structures should be removed, and the city's new dining program.



Manhattan District Attorney

Current: Alvin Bragg

- Elected to 4-year terms (Independent from NYPD)
- Prosecutes criminal cases in Manhattan
- Sets prosecution priorities.
- Decides which cases to charge
- Investigates public corruption
- Established the Post-Conviction Justice Unit to overturn wrongful convictions.

X(Twitter) and IG: @manhattanDA

Website: <https://manhattanda.org/>

Example of Manhattan District Attorney Power



Policy & Prosecution Priorities

Alvin Bragg's policy on subway fare evasion is to no longer prosecute it as a standalone criminal charge. He also no longer prosecutes misdemeanor marijuana possession and sales.



Major Convictions & Authority

In 2022, Manhattan DA Alvin Bragg secured the conviction of former Trump Organization CFO Allen Weisselberg on tax fraud charges, demonstrating the DA's authority to investigate and prosecute financial crimes committed in Manhattan.

How can I Engage with the District Attorney?

- Vote in elections for DA
- Organize community to push DA on prosecution priorities
- Attend a Community Advisory Council meeting to share information and observations (particularly about crimes that are underreported to the police because of language barriers or immigration concerns)
- Submit complaints or information about fraud, misconduct, or bias in NYC or NYC government to the DA's office.



5 minute Break: Talk to Your Neighbors



Who Runs NYC Government Departments?

PART 3





**Department of
Education**



**Department of
Housing Preservation
& Development**



**Department of
Social Services**

Human Resources
Administration

Department of
Homeless Services



IG & X (Twitter): @NYCHousing
Website: [nyc.gov/site/hpd/index.page](https://www.nyc.gov/site/hpd/index.page)

Housing Commissioner

Current: Dina Levy

- Appointed by mayor
- Enforces housing quality standards (heat, hot water, repairs)
- Inspects apartments for code violations
- Takes legal action against bad landlords and can take over buildings in extreme cases.
- Develops and preserves affordable housing

Note: NYC public housing and section 8 is run by a separate agency (NYCHA) overseen by a mayor-appointed board.

Example of Housing Commissioner Power



Mayor Zohran Mamdani directed HPD and other city agencies to hold "Rental Ripoff" hearings in all five boroughs during the administration's first 100 days.

HPD used this testimony to identify common patterns of abuse and develop new enforcement priorities and policy recommendations. The administration committed to publishing a report based on what residents shared.

How can I Engage with the Housing Preservation and Development Department?

- Attend HPD [housing workshops](#) (free, teaches about tenant rights and how to file complaints)
- Call 311 with a complaint to trigger an HPD inspection on your building/landlord.
- Organise building-wide with multiple tenants
- Request Emergency Repair Program for ignored repair requests.
 - 1) Report the emergency with 311
 - 2) HPD will inspect the violation and give the landlord a timeframe
 - 3) If the landlord does not fix it, ERP allows the HPD to fix it and bill it to the landlord
 - hpderp@hpd.nyc.gov

Example of Tenants Organizing to Change Housing Policy

Queens



In 2025, HPD placed 35-64 84th Street in Jackson Heights, Queens into the Alternative Enforcement Program (AEP) after years of serious unresolved violations. This program subjects buildings to strict monitoring, issues necessary repairs, and can involve fines for the property owner.

Many tenants complained and the HPD inspected this property. It had over 900 open hazardous and immediately hazardous violations, such as mold, pests, self-closing doors, and other unsafe conditions.

HPD initiated litigation against the landlord and spent \$87,000 on emergency repairs. They warned that the owner could face more than \$110,000 in penalties if conditions were not corrected.

Example of Tenants Organizing to Change Housing Policy

Brooklyn - Flatbush Gardens



In 2026, residents of said their apartments had serious problems, including mold, leaks, pests, and broken ceilings.

Tenants joined together and formed a tenant union with over 2,000 members (United Tenants of Flatbush Gardens)

They organized meetings, rallies, and worked with legal aid groups to raise awareness about housing conditions.

They challenged eviction cases that they believed were unfair or based on incorrect charges.

Their efforts helped win a pause on more than 300 eviction cases while the issues were reviewed.

Example of Tenants Organizing to Change Housing Policy

Manhattan



In 2015, members of the Chinatown Tenants Union organized with tenant groups across New York City.

Tenants spoke at public hearings and argued that rent should not increase when housing conditions and wages had not improved.

They pushed the Rent Guidelines Board to protect low-income and working-class renters.

Impact: Their advocacy helped win the first rent freeze in 46 years for rent-stabilized apartments, benefiting about 2.5 million New Yorkers living in rent-stabilized housing. Tenant groups also successfully won a second rent freeze in 2016.



DSS Commissioner

Current: Erin Dalton

- Appointed by mayor
- Oversees two agencies: HRA (Human Resources Administration) and DHS (Dept of Homeless Services)
- Administer public benefits: SNAP (food stamps), Medicaid, Cash/rental assistance
- Runs the homeless shelter system (50,000+ people in shelters nightly)
- Connects New Yorkers to social services
- Manages NYC Care (health insurance for uninsured)
- Investigate benefit fraud, but also helps eligible people access benefits

IG & Twitter: @nycdsscommr

Example of Organizing to Make Change: Right to Shelter



In 2023, hundreds of protesters called for the protection of the Right to Shelter laws in NYC.

This mandate guarantees emergency housing to anyone who asks, but Mayor Eric Adams and Governor Kathy Hochul proposed suspending this policy.

Protesters demanded that the city provide shelter to any New Yorker in need. These laws are still in place today.

How can I Engage with the Department of Social Services?

- Apply for benefits (SNAP benefits, disability access, healthcare, temporary emergency shelter) through [ACCESS HRA](#) (Human Resources Administration)
- If HRA not responding, call your Council Member or Public Advocate
- File complaint with Public Advocate if DSS not providing service
- Get help from free advocates:
 - Legal Aid Society - nonprofit that gives free legal representation to low-income New Yorkers on issues including disability/health, homelessness, domestic violence, etc
 - Urban Justice Center - nonprofit legal services serving New York's poverty stricken and minority populations that protects New Yorkers' access to public services



IG & X (Twitter): @nypdpc
Website: [nyc.gov/site/nypd/index.page](https://www.nyc.gov/site/nypd/index.page)

Police Commissioner

Current: Jessica S. Tisch

- Appointed by mayor (Commissioner Tisch was appointed by Eric Adams)
- Police Commissioner runs the entire NYPD (36,000+ officers & 78 Precincts)
- Sets policing policies and priorities (e.g., stop and frisk vs community policing).
- Manages NYPD's ~\$6 billion budget
- Appoints the Chief of Police and precinct commanding officers.
- Disciplines officers (or doesn't)

Example of Citizens Making Change to Policing



Following the 2020 Black Lives Matter Protests, the practice of **kettling** became heavily criticized. Kettling is when police officers form a tight border around a group of protesters, trapping them in with no escape to then pepper spray or arrest them.

People organized and protested against this tactic, calling to reform policing rules surrounding protests. In a 2023 legal settlement, kettling was banned and policy reforms were made to reduce police presence at protests and require de-escalation methods.

Example of Police Commissioner Power



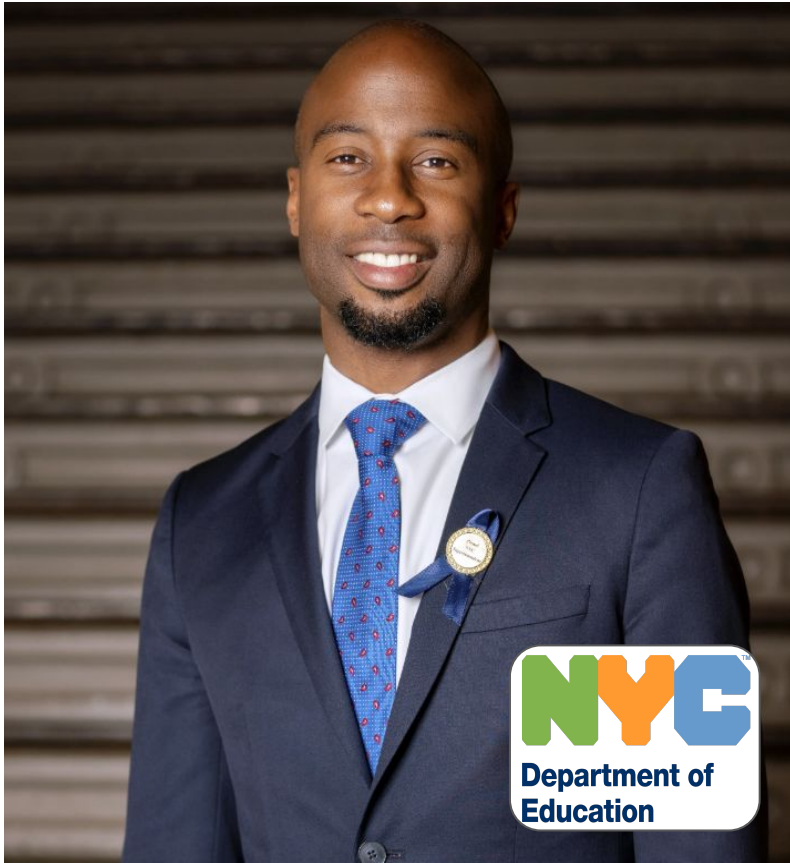
Commissioner Tisch wanted to increase collaboration between NYPD units by giving cops more flexibility to operate outside of their normal precinct boundaries.

This method of specific policing sends in 650 additional officers to target neighborhoods.

How can I Engage with the NYPD?

- Attend precinct community council meetings to raise neighborhood safety concerns directly with precinct leadership
 - Bring neighbors so that your issue is too big to ignore!
- Meet with the precinct commanding officer to flag a specific, ongoing issue in your block or building.
- File a complaint with the Civilian Complaint Review Board (CCRB) if you experience or witness police misconduct.
- Learn more through the Citizens Police Academy: a 6-week program where community members get a behind-the-scenes look at NYPD policies and operations to understand how decisions get made.





Schools Chancellor

Current: Kamar Samuels

- Appointed by the Mayor (Commissioner Samuels was appointed by Mamdani)
- Runs entire NYC public school system (1,800+ schools, 1 million students)
- Hires and fires principals
- Sets education policy and curriculum
- Decides school admissions policies, calendar, health protocols
- Answers only to the Mayor (no elected school board in NYC)

IG & X (Twitter): @nycschools

Website: schools.nyc.gov

Examples: Schools Chancellor Impact

2025: Cell Phone Prohibition



Chancellor **Melissa Aviles-Ramos** prohibited student cell phone use during school hours.

This unilateral policy affected over one million students without requiring a City Council vote.

2023: Citywide Literacy Reform



Chancellor **David Banks** mandated a citywide elementary reading curriculum based on the "science of reading."

Resulted in new training for thousands of teachers and updated materials for hundreds of thousands of students.

Example of Citizens Making Change in Local Education

This past year, Schools Chancellor Kamar Samuels announced a proposal to open an AI-themed high school, which would have closed and relocated several middle schools to make room.

Parents, students, and educators protested and testified to the Panel for Education Policy with a petition of over 2,200 signatures.

On April 29, parents, students, and educators testified to the Panel for Education Policy for seven hours against the role of AI and big tech in schools.

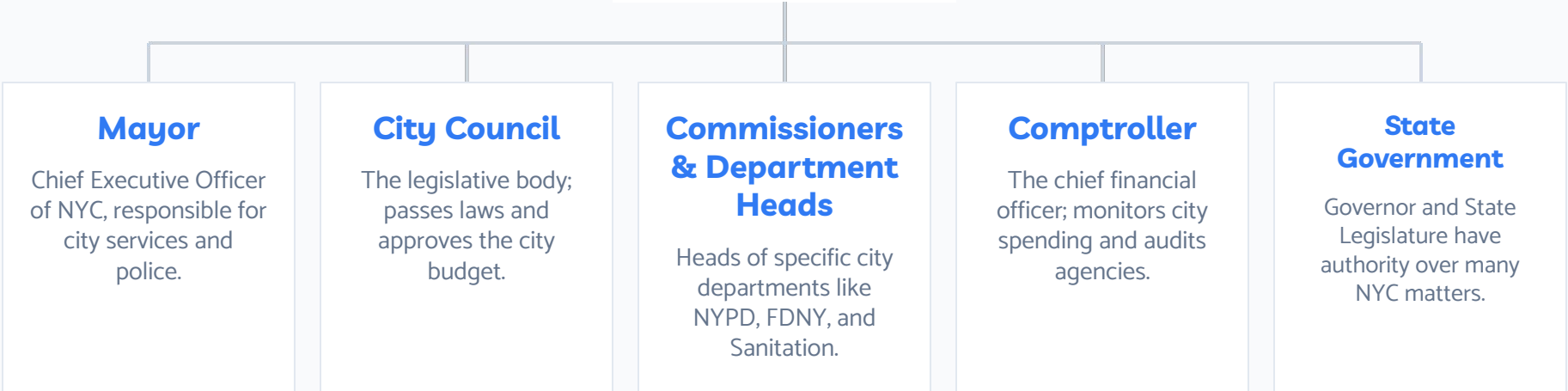
Impact: this proposal was voted down.



How can I Engage with the Education Department?

- Attend PEP (Panel for Educational Policy) meetings and testify during public comment.
 - PEP votes on major policies like school closures and budget allocations. Testifying puts pressure on members before a vote and creates a public record of community opposition or support.
- Organize Through Your PTA or School Leadership Team to influence school spending and programming.
- Contact your City Council Member to pressure the DOE if a serious problem isn't being addressed at the school level.
- Join advocacy groups that can amplify your cause:
 - Advocates for Children of New York – helps families fight for students being denied services or rights.
 - EdTrust-New York – connects local school issues to statewide policy fights on funding and opportunity gaps.

Review: Who Makes Decisions for NYC?



Group Discussion: What Can You Do In These Scenarios?

Scenario 1: Heat in your building has not been working for 6 weeks during the winter. Your landlord has ignored your calls for a month. What would you do first? Who else could help?

Scenario 2: Your landlord threatens to report an immigrant tenant to ICE unless they move out in two weeks. Who would you contact? What can you do?

Scenario 3: There has been open-air drug dealing and repeated assaults on your block for six months. You and your neighbors feel unsafe. What can residents do? What can NYC do?



What's Next



NYC Civics Modules

July
8

LOCAL GOV 101

Understand local government positions and how to influence decisions made by local government.

July
23

HOUSING

Understand why housing costs are rising and how tenants and residents can shape local housing policy.

Aug
5

POLICING

What authority does NYC have over policing and when do they change their approach?

Aug
19

CAMPAIGNS & GOTV

Learn how issue campaigns, primaries, and elections work and how to effectively mobilize voters and participate in campaigns.

Sept
19

MEDIA LITERACY

Find trustworthy local information, evaluate online claims and be able to detect misinformation, and learn how to contribute to local civic reporting.

TBA

SOCIAL SERVICES

Learn who has power over social services and how to navigate access and advocate for NYC benefits and services.

Action Items Before We Meet Again !

- Follow your reps and agency chiefs on social media (See SM handles below!)
- Subscribe to a local news source or follow it on social media (see above!)
- Join the Local Civics whatsapp group (we'll add you if you request it on the sign-up sheet)
- Attend one civic event with another participant before the next session.
- Get coffee with your neighbors and discuss local issues.
- Tell your friends about what you learned today. Bring them with you for the housing session on July 22 at 7pm!

All Contact Info

- **Mayor**: IG & X (Twitter): @NYCMayor - YouTube: @NYCMayorsOffice - Website: nyc.gov/mayor
- **City council**: IG & X (Twitter): @NYCCouncil - Website: council.nyc.gov
 - Shaun Abreu (City Council Member) - IG & X (Twitter): @cmshaunabreu
- **Governor**: IG & X (Twitter): @govkathyhochul - Website: governor.ny.gov/
- **Comptroller**: IG & X (Twitter): @MarkLevineNYC - Website: comptroller.nyc.gov
- **Public Advocate**: IG: @nycpublicadvocate - X (Twitter): @JumaaneWilliams - Website: advocate.nyc.gov/
- **Manhattan Borough President**: IG & X (Twitter): @bradhoylman - Website: manhattanbp.nyc.gov
- **Community Board 9**: IG: @manhattancommunityboard9 - Website: cb9m.org/
- **Manhattan District Attorney**: IG & X(Twitter): @manhattanDA - Website: manhattanda.org/
- **Police Commissioner**: IG & X (Twitter): @nypdpcc - Website: nyc.gov/site/nypd/index.page
- **Schools Chancellor**: IG & X (Twitter): @nycschools - Website: schools.nyc.gov
- **Housing Commissioner**: IG & X (Twitter): @NYCHousing - Website: nyc.gov/site/hpd/index.page
- **Social Services Commissioner**:

Q&A



Post Session 1 Feedback Survey (4 questions)
QR Code.