

Question #3: Community Boards

The City's community boards are advisory bodies with a formal role designated by the City Charter in various matters, including land use. This Charter amendment would: (a) impose term limits of a maximum of four consecutive full two-year terms for community board members with certain exceptions for the initial transition to the new term limits system; (b) require Borough Presidents to seek out persons of diverse backgrounds in making appointments to community boards and set forth application and reporting mandates related to such appointments; and (c) require the proposed Civic Engagement Commission to provide resources, assistance, and training related to land use and other matters to community boards.

Term Limits. Community board members are appointed by the Borough Presidents, with input by City Council Members and community groups. For each community district, the Borough President appoints up to 50 community board members for staggered two-year terms. The Charter does not currently impose term limits for community board members. This proposal would limit appointment of community board members to four consecutive two-year terms, starting with terms for which appointments or reappointments are made on or after April 1, 2019. However, members appointed or reappointed for a term commencing on April 1, 2020, could be reappointed for up to five consecutive two-year terms, in order to prevent a heavy turnover of community board membership in 2027 and 2028. Appointments made for terms commencing after April 1, 2020, would be subject to four consecutive two-year term limits. These term limits would be prospective only; terms served before April 1, 2019, or April 1, 2020, would not count toward the term limits that start on those dates. Additionally, members who have served for the maximum number of consecutive terms would not be barred from re-appointment after one full term out of office.

Appointment Process. The Charter provides for the nomination and appointment of community board members. Under the Charter, the Borough President must assure adequate representation from the different geographic sections and neighborhoods within the community district, and consider whether the aggregate of appointments fairly represents all segments of the community. Members must reside in the City and maintain a residence, business, professional, or other significant interest in the community district. Not more than 25% of the appointed members may be City employees, and none may be employees of the Borough President or nominating City Council Member. Members must be at least 16 years old, and no more than two members of each community board shall be less than 18 years of age.

This proposal would require Borough Presidents to seek out persons of diverse backgrounds, including with regard to race, ethnicity, gender, age, disability status, sexual orientation, and language, as well as other factors which the Borough President may consider important in promoting diversity and inclusion of underrepresented groups and communities on community boards, to apply for appointment to community boards.

This proposal would also require Borough Presidents to make available on their websites applications for community board membership, and require the applications to request certain information regarding the applicant: name; address; residence, business, professional or other significant interest in the community district; past service on a community board; age; work and education history, special skills, and professional licenses; relevant professional, civic, or community involvement experience; an option to provide additional demographic information that the applicant chooses to disclose; and any additional information that the Borough President determines is relevant or necessary to the application process. The application would also be required to include a statement describing the applicant's interest in the position, disclosures of City employment and potential conflicts of interest, and a certification that the applicant meets all requirements for the position and will abide by all applicable conflicts of interest laws.

Additionally, this proposal would require Borough Presidents, starting on July 1, 2019 and annually thereafter, to submit to the Mayor and Speaker of the City Council, and make available on Borough President websites, a report disclosing information about community board membership and the recruitment and selection process. The report would include: the number of vacant community board member positions, the number of applicants for open community board member positions, the number of applicants interviewed, and the names of members and their dates of appointment or reappointment, length of service, nominating City Council Member or other nominating party, and community board leadership positions, if any. The report would also include demographic information about community board members that was voluntarily disclosed, in aggregated and anonymous form; the Borough President's plan for recruiting candidates and filling vacancies, including outreach efforts and methods used to promote a diverse and inclusive pool of candidates; a general description of the evaluation criteria used by the Borough President to select members; and any tools used by the Borough President to promote objectivity in the selection process.

Assistance and Training. This proposal would require the proposed Civic Engagement Commission, subject to appropriation and in consultation

and coordination with the Department of City Planning, other relevant City agencies, and the Borough Presidents to the extent practicable, to provide assistance and training to community boards beyond the forms of assistance now provided by City agencies. The Civic Engagement Commission would be required to identify qualified firms, professional staff members, or consultants to provide urban planning and other technical assistance related to land use matters, and to administer a program for providing such services to community boards upon request. It would be required, to the extent practicable, to ensure that these forms of assistance are provided impartially to all community boards, in a manner consistent with their needs and objectives, and to provide a means for community boards to give feedback regarding the assistance provided to them. The Civic Engagement Commission would also be required, in consultation with the Mayor's Office of Immigrant Affairs, to identify and provide services requested by community boards to address the needs of limited English proficient individuals, such as staff training and language assistance tools. This element of the proposal would only become effective if this ballot question and the ballot question establishing the Civic Engagement Commission are both approved.

This proposal would also require community boards to maintain websites that provide adequate public notice of upcoming meetings, minutes from past meetings for the previous twelve months, and contact information. The Department of Information Technology and Telecommunications (DOITT) would be required to provide technical assistance and support to community boards in maintaining websites and assistance to the Borough Presidents in making community board applications available online.

Effective Date. These amendments would take effect on January 1, 2019, except that the amendments requiring a proposed Civic Engagement Commission to provide resources to community boards would take effect on April 1, 2019.