

Philadelphia City Council Set to Undergo Once-in-a-Generation Transformation

While a period of massive transition has already been well underway at Philadelphia City Council — with three unclaimed at-large seats for the taking, not to mention the more than 30 candidates who are challenging incumbents for 13 other seats — it was made abundantly clear with Council President Darrell L. Clarke's (District 5) announcement last week that he would not be seeking reelection that the changes to City Council will not be limited to the mere addition of new faces.

Now, the race to succeed Council President Clarke in the prestigious and politically powerful position he has held since 2012 also begins, ensuring a shakeup in Democratic party leadership no matter how the chips fall. Council Majority Leader Curtis Jones, Jr. (District 4), Majority Whip Mark Squilla (District 1), Deputy Majority Whip Cindy Bass (District 8), and Councilmember Kenyatta Johnson (District) are all strongly considering running for the position, which will be decided by a majority vote upon the beginning of the 2024 term next January.

While petition season is still ongoing and will determine which candidates make the final May primary ballot — and ballot positions, which are randomly selected by drawing names from the infamous Horn & Hardart coffee can, can tip the scales for at-large candidates — several candidates for both district and at-large seats have already begun making names for themselves.

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District 5: **Curtis Wilkerson** has yet to formally announce his candidacy for his former boss's seat. However, he stepped down from his position as Council President Clarke's chief of staff a few weeks ago to solicit ballot petitions. He also secured the council president's endorsement to be his successor, which is sure to come in handy.

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District 7: While it is notoriously difficult to overcome the power of incumbency in district council elections, **Andrés Celin** was very close to current District 7 Councilmember **Quetcy Lozada** in terms of cash-on-hand as of the most recent campaign finance reports.

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District 8: Challenger **Seth Anderson-Oberman** trails behind incumbent District 8 Councilmember **Cindy Bass** by a fair margin. However, if the growing Philadelphia progressive political machine proves successful, endorsements he has received from Reclaim and the Working Families Party, among others, may end up working in his favor.

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District 10: Democratic union leader **Gary Masino** is looking to flip the one remaining Republican-held district council seat. Again, this may be an uphill battle, but he does have significantly more cash on hand than incumbent Councilmember **Brian O'Neill**.

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At-Large: Importantly, each political party is only allowed to run a maximum of five at-large candidates in the general election according to the Philadelphia Home Rule Charter. Working Families Party incumbent Councilmember **Kendra Brooks** is all but guaranteed to make her party's final ballot, and it is likely that Democratic incumbent



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Councilmembers **Katherine Gilmore Richardson**, **Jim Harrity**, and **Isaiah Thomas** will make theirs as well — though nothing is set in stone. The following non-incumbent at-large candidates (in alphabetical order by last name) are perhaps the most viable:

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Molecular biologist and local NOW president **Nina Ahmad** has not only held her own in terms of fundraising but may also end up receiving an endorsement from the Democratic City Committee, who left a three-way tie-up to Philadelphia's ward leaders last month to decide their final at-large endorsement.

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Local activist **Erika Almirón** was another recipient of the Democratic City Committee's conditional endorsement and also has endorsements from Amistad Movement Power, Philly Neighborhood Networks, and Reclaim, among others. Her most recent fundraising numbers will likely need to be higher in the future for her to be a true contender.

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While former city sanitation worker **Terrill Haigler**, better known as "**Ya Fav Trashman**," may not be performing as well as some of his competitors in the fundraising department, his social media following may serve him well in terms of name recognition — especially if his popular moniker is allowed to appear on the official ballot.

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Executive Director of Old City District **Job Itzkowitz** has relationships with both current councilmembers — he used to work for Councilmember Bass — as well as small business owners throughout the city, as he helped many of them apply for PPP loans during the height of the pandemic.

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Rue Landau has raised more cash-on-hand than any other non-incumbent at-large council candidate — even surpassing some current officeholders. Perhaps more importantly, she is the only non-incumbent at-large candidate who secured an unconditional endorsement from the Democratic City Committee. If elected, she would be the first openly gay member in City Council history.

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Amanda McIlmurray is one of the co-founders of Reclaim and was one of the first candidates to get into the race for City Council — initially as a challenger to Councilmember **Mark Squilla** (District 1), though she has since decided to run for an at-large position instead.

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Nicolas O'Rourke will almost certainly appear on the final ballot, as he is one of only two Working Families Party candidates for City Council at-large. The other is current Councilmember Kendra Brooks, who shocked everyone with her historic win in 2019. O'Rourke appeared on the same ballot and ended up falling short, though he still fared better than all non-incumbent Republican candidates that year. If both Brooks and O'Rourke succeed, the at-large portion of the City Council would be without a Republican for the first time in history.

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Eryn Santamoore was also a recipient of the Democratic City Committee's conditional endorsement and has previous experience running for an at-large seat, as well as experience having worked for former Councilmember and current mayoral candidate Allan Domb and former Mayor Nutter.

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Philanthropist **Max Tuttleman** not only has a competitive amount of cash on hand but also career experience in the nonprofit sector that voters may perceive as translatable to a role in public service.

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Donavan West's experience founding the Black Business Accelerator also may be appealing to voters, though his most recent fundraising numbers leave something to be desired.
