

Like

Tweet



Councilperson Celeste Friend



South Utica - Third Ward

cfriend@cityofutica.com

315-725-5987

Follow on Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram

How Utica Works: Politics, Party Committees, Petitions, and Primaries

We have a busy and important political year ahead of us. This year is the first time that we have had an open Mayoral race, without an incumbent, in 12 years. This makes it a good time to explain a few essential features of our political system here in Utica.

(I will use the City of Utica and the Democratic Party as my reference, simply because that is what I am familiar with. But almost everything I say here is also true of how the Republican Party works, as well as how it works in other municipalities. If you wish to learn more, reach out to Mike Gentile, the current Chair of the Utica Republican Committee. You can email him at michaelgentile315@gmail.com.)

Parties and Party Committees

Our political system is dominated by the two major political parties: Democratic and Republican. Currently in New York State, there are two additional parties on the ballot, the Working Families Party and the Conservative Party. Everyone who registers to vote can Register with any one of these four parties, or with no party at all. By registering with a party, you get to vote in Primaries, but also to participate in the activities of the party, through its committees. All the

registered Democrats in a County, in other words, are the Democratic party for that County.

Those Democrats are represented by members of their party who serve on their Committee. At the County level, the Democratic party consists of a Committee for each municipality. The Oneida County Democratic Committee includes members from municipalities within the County. Utica is the largest municipality in Oneida County. These municipal Committees have their own bylaws, and can elect their own executive officers, to include Treasurer, Secretary, Chair, and Vice Chair. Each Ward has its own Chair, who also serves on the City and County Executive Committees. One important role of the Executive Committee is to recommend to the entire Committee whether to endorse a particular candidate for elected office. They can also vote to not endorse anyone.

Utica is divided into 6 Wards of approximately the same population. These Wards are further divided into Election Districts. As your Representative, I live in Ward 3, Election District 7. The Utica Democratic Committee follows this City-wide electoral organization.

In Utica, every Election District is given two seats on the City Committee, and everyone on the City Committee is, by extension, on the County Committee. For Utica, this means that there are over one hundred Committee seats, though the Committee hasn't been full in a very long time. Committee members are the backbone of the political parties: they help to collect petition signatures for themselves and candidates for elected offices. They promote the party and ideally help to create awareness of their party, recruit candidates, help with fundraising campaigns for them by canvassing and helping to Get Out The Vote during Early Voting and on election day, and so on. Depending on the rules that each Committee adopts, they may also endorse candidates who are running for elected office within the Committee's municipality.

The first paragraph of the Rules of the Democratic party of the City of Utica reads: "We, the duly elected members of the City of Utica Democratic Committee, in order to inspire and encourage the greatest number of Democrats to participate in the affairs of the Democratic Party, to insure the continuing success of the Democratic Party, and to provide the best possible responsible government for the people do hereby adopt the following rules for the organization and governance of the Democratic Party of the City of Utica."

The Utica Democratic Committee is filled in one of two ways: by appointment or by petition.

Petitions and Appointments to get on the Democratic Committee

We petition our way onto the Utica Committee by getting a certain number of our fellow party members to sign a form saying that they want us to represent them on the Committee. You can serve without living in the City. Members can be seated in any Election Districts within their Assembly District. I live in Assembly District 119. Therefore, I can serve on the Committee, not only in Utica, but representing any Election District encompassed by that Assembly District.

In New York State, we petition our way onto our Committee in even-numbered years, aka Congressional election years. We do this petitioning on the same schedule as we collect petition signatures to get candidates for elected offices onto ballots, so roughly speaking the month of March. If more than two people collect enough petition signatures (this is unusual, but it can and does happen), then it goes to the voters of that same ED, on the primary election date.

In between petitioning onto the Committee, people can be appointed to the Committee as long as there is a vacant Committee position and they are eligible voters, registered in the relevant Party, and in the appropriate Assembly District. Members of the Committee can make a request that an individual be appointed to the Committee. That request must be approved by the Utica Committee Chair, the county committee Chair, and the county committee. The following year they must petition in order to continue to serve on the Committee.

Petitions for Candidates to Appear on a Ballot

Petitioning to gain access to the ballot in order to run for office works much the same way as petitioning onto the Committee. To get onto the ballot, a person must collect signatures from a certain number (generally 5%) of members of one's own political party within the same district in which the potential candidate is running. So, when you run for a specific Ward in the City, you collect signatures from members of your party in that Ward. If you run for any city-wide position, you collect signatures from the entire city. And the number of signatures you need to collect depends on how many registered voters there are in that district. And this is important: any member of a political party has a right to collect petition signatures in order to get onto the ballot and run for office. They do not have to be endorsed by the Democratic Party to run in the Democratic Primary in June. If endorsed, a candidate is given the advantage that their petitions are distributed to Committee members, who are expected to help them collect petition signatures.

There are plenty of fine-tuned rules about these petition signatures and the forms on which they are collected. Signers must be registered with the relevant party in the relevant district. Signatures must be collected in chronological

order, and one can never use “ditto” marks for addresses. (So, two or more signers from the same household must each write out their address.) The person collecting the petition signatures must either be from the same party, be a notary, or be what is called a “Commissioner of Deeds”, and must sign the bottom of the form, attesting to having personally collected the signatures. No person can collect their own petition signature. Signature collectors must be registered to vote in New York State.

Although Democratic Committees often meet to endorse candidates, there is no need for a candidate to be endorsed by the Party to appear on a ballot. It is the gathering of sufficient numbers of signatures on petitions that places a candidate on a ballot. If two or more people collect enough signatures, then there will be a Primary.

So now let’s see how primaries work.

Primaries

When two or more candidates from the same party successfully collect enough legitimate signatures on petitions, they then run against each other in a primary election. This means that members of Committees can also be primaried, but only if more than two people collect enough signatures. (Because Committee members can serve on a committee to represent an Election District other than where they live, this only really happens when there are people motivated to take over a committee.) Primary elections in New York now happen at the end of June, which means that petition signatures are collected in March. Once petition signatures are collected, they have to be submitted to the local Board of Elections, and there is a carefully worked out calendar for dates to submit signatures, days when they can be inspected and challenged, and dates by which the Board of Elections certifies whether a candidate has successfully gained access to the ballot. After the Primary election, the winner of each major party then goes on to be the nominee of their party for that elected office, and the general election, always on the first Tuesday following the first Monday in November, decides who will hold that seat.



Photo: an illustration of a hand holding a pen signing a petition on a clipboard

Newsletter Archive Now Online

If you have found my Newsletters interesting and informative, I have good news. They are now all archived on my website.

[Newsletter Archive - See them all here!](#)



©2023 City of Utica | 37 Emerson Ave Utica NY 13501

[Web Version](#)

[Preferences](#)

[Forward](#)

[Unsubscribe](#)

Powered by [Mad Mimi®](#)

A GoDaddy® company