



The County Legislature | Putting the Charter into Practice



CHAIRMAN ROB ROLISON, 2010-PRESENT

Courtesy of Michael N. Kelsey Esq.

Rob Rolison has been a member of the Dutchess County Legislature since 2003, representing portions of the city and town of Poughkeepsie. In 2010, Rob was elected by his colleagues to serve as chairman of the legislature. Known for his collaborative leadership style and governing through consensus, Rolison is seen here delivering his acceptance speech after being re-elected as chairman in January 2012.



CHAIRMAN WOODY KLOSE, 1996-1999

Courtesy of the Poughkeepsie Journal

Seen here during his 1987 election campaign for county executive, Woody Klose served as chairman of the county legislature from 1996-1999. During his years in office, he shepherded the legislature through numerous challenging projects, including the construction of Dutchess Stadium, the expansion of the jail, renovation of the old courthouse, and the closing of the county infirmary.



CHAIRMAN ROGER HIGGINS, 2008-2009

Courtesy of OnLocation Studios

Roger Higgins joined the legislature in 1987 where he served as Minority Leader in 1995 and 2000-2007. In 2008, the legislature shifted from a Republican to a Democratic majority for the first time since 1978 and Higgins was elected to serve as its chairman.



CHAIRMAN BRADFORD KENDALL, 2000-2006

Courtesy of OnLocation Studios

Bradford Kendall served in the county legislature for thirteen years, seven as chairman, making him one of the longest-sitting legislators in county history. Kendall guided the legislature through a significant re-districting challenge during the opening years of his chairmanship, which saw the number of legislators further reduced to 25.



AN OVERFLOW CROWD

Courtesy of the Poughkeepsie Journal

Record numbers attended the May 19, 1970 meeting of the board of representatives, which featured a crucial vote on an expansion project for Dutchess Community College. Public works projects like these have dominated the legislature's business since the charter. In the foreground are (l-r) Reps. Louis J. Donaldson and William Hauptman. Behind them (l-r) are Reps. James Goodall and Karl Charter. Seated in the back under a white hat is the board's first female member, Rep. Jean Murphy.



CHAIRMAN JUDI SMITH, 1993

Courtesy of Eli Sloves Photographers Inc.

Judi Smith represented East Fishkill, LaGrange, and Wappinger from 1987-1995. She chaired several committees and served as Majority Leader in 1991 and 1992. In 1993, Smith became the first female chairman of the legislature.

The legislative branch of county government has changed significantly over the past decades in response to practical realities. Reapportionment has been a signal issue, due to federal regulations requiring district lines to be re-drawn after each census. After one such episode in 1975, the board of representatives changed its name to the Dutchess County Legislature and dropped from 37 to 35 members. Legislative meetings have shifted in scheduling as a response to membership changes, switching from mid-morning to suit farm schedules to the evening to cooperate with office work. The addition of a full-time clerk and staff has provided essential support for legislative business. The legislature's membership has become more diverse, reflecting its role in developing policy for an ever-changing population. Though the charter has been modified by nearly fifty years of amendments, the spirit of effective representation embodied in its provisions remains alive and well with the county legislature today.