



A History of the Development of City Government in New York State

Each of New York State's 62 cities is a unique governmental entity with its own special charter. Two -New York and Albany -have charters of colonial origin, and the other 60 were chartered separately by the State Legislature. Although home rule was a hard-won prize for the cities of New York State, they now have substantial home rule powers, including authority to change their charters and to adopt new charters by local action. Now New York State contains all of the major forms of city government: council-manager, strong mayor-council, weak mayor-council, and commission.

New York City was originally established as a consolidated "regional" government. It is now the core of a vast metropolitan region which sprawls over large areas of Connecticut and New Jersey as well as New York. In response to swift-moving social and economic changes the government of New York City has undergone important changes in both structure and allocations of authority.

When the Dutch West India Company granted what roughly amounted to a charter to New Amsterdam in 1653, it established the first city organization in the future state. New Amsterdam operated as an arm of a "higher government." The provincial governor -Peter Stuyvesant at the time- appointed local officials. These magistrates were then granted the power to choose their successors; however, Stuyvesant reserved the right to promulgate ordinances. The charters granted to New York City and Albany by the English Governor Dongan in 1686 gave these cities more privileges and authority which they could exercise independently of the colonial government. The first State Constitution, adopted in 1777, recognized the existing charters of New York and Albany and authorized the Legislature " . . . to arrange for the organization of cities and incorporated villages and to limit their power of taxation, assessment, borrowing and involvement in debt." Since that time separate special legislative acts have been necessary to establish each new city, although later developments permit cities to amend their charters by local action.



By 1834, six new cities had been chartered along the state's principal trading route, the Hudson-Mohawk arterial between New York City and Buffalo. These new cities were Brooklyn, Buffalo, Hudson, Rochester, Schenectady, and Troy. Thirty-two more cities were created between 1834 and 1899, as thousands of immigrants were attracted to the state. The most recently chartered city in New York is the City of Rye, which came into being in 1942.

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