

= Philadelphia municipal election , 1951 =

Philadelphia 's municipal election of November 6 , 1951 was the first held under the city 's new charter , which had been approved by the voters the previous April . The positions contested included those of mayor , district attorney , all seventeen city council seats , among other offices . There was also a referendum on whether to consolidate the city and county governments . Citywide , the Democrats took majorities of over 100 @,@ 000 votes , breaking a 67 @-@ year Republican hold on city government . Joseph S. Clark , Jr. and Richardson Dilworth , two of the main movers for the charter reform , were elected mayor and district attorney , respectively . The Democrats also took fourteen of seventeen city council seats , and city @-@ county consolidation passed by a wide margin . The election marked the beginning of Democratic dominance of Philadelphia city politics , which continues today .

= = Mayor = =

The incumbent Republican mayor , Bernard Samuel , did not run for re @-@ election , leaving an open seat to be contested by the Republican nominee , Daniel A. Poling , and the Democrat , Joseph S. Clark , Jr . Clark was a lawyer and United States Army officer who had served in World War II . Raised in a Republican family , he switched his party affiliation to the Democrats in 1928 . After several unsuccessful attempts at public office in Philadelphia , he served as a Deputy Attorney General of Pennsylvania . Clark was known as a reformer , having been elected city controller two years earlier in 1949 on a platform of cleaning up corruption in the city . In those two years , Clark probed various inefficiencies , graft , and theft in the Samuel administration and reported his findings to the voters . Many of those accused of crimes were convicted , and nine committed suicide . Clark continued his push for reform by urging adoption of a new city charter , which was approved by referendum in April 1951 . He campaigned for mayor with the promise of a " clean sweep of City Hall " .

The Republican nominee , Poling was a Baptist preacher , which GOP leaders hoped would help deflect the corruption charges leveled against the machine . Poling had worked for various charitable organizations and managed the Christian Herald . His son , Clark V. Poling , was one of the Four Chaplains lost aboard the SS Dorchester in World War II , and Poling served as pastor at the chapel erected in their memory .

The election was a landslide for Clark , as he won by more than 120 @,@ 000 votes . With 58 % of the vote , the Democrats had gained nearly 215 @,@ 000 votes from the last election , in which they had been defeated . As the vote tally became apparent , he told reporters that it was a " great victory for the thinking people of Philadelphia and it ends a long hard fight . "

= = District Attorney = =

As in the mayor 's race , the contest for district attorney pitted a Democratic reformer , Richardson Dilworth , against a representative of the Republican machine , Michael A. Foley . Dilworth , like Clark , was a former Republican who had been advocating reform for several years . He had run for mayor unsuccessfully in 1947 , with Clark as his campaign manager . In 1949 , he was elected City Treasurer . Democratic party leaders had intended Dilworth to be their candidate for mayor again in 1951 , but when Clark announced his candidacy , Dilworth agreed to run for district attorney instead . Foley , a local attorney , had no success against the Democratic wave . Dilworth won by almost as large a margin as his running mate , taking just shy of 58 % of the vote . He told reporters that the victory had a " sobering effect , " and that " the bigger the victory , the bigger the responsibility . "

= = City Council = =

Under the new charter , Philadelphians elected a seventeen @-@ member city council in 1951 , with ten members representing districts of the city , and the remaining seven being elected at @-@

large . For the at @-@ large seats , each political party could nominate five candidates , and voters could only vote for five , with the result being that the majority party could only take five of the seven seats , leaving two for the minority party . The Democrats ' citywide triumph continued into the city council races , as they took nine of ten districts and five of seven at @-@ large seats .

Constance Dallas , the first woman to win election to City Council , was elected in a close vote in the 8th district (covering Chestnut Hill , Germantown , and Roxborough) over incumbent councilman Robert S. Hamilton . In the 1st district , which took in South Philadelphia , attorney Thomas I. Guerin defeated Dominic J. Colubiale . In the 2nd , the Republicans ' lone district victory came as electrician William M. Phillips bested Louis Vignola , a labor union official . In the 3rd district , made up of the southern half of West Philadelphia , incumbent Harry Norwitch defeated another incumbent from the old city council , George Maxman , who had held office since 1936 . In the 4th , which covered the northern half of West Philadelphia , state representative Samuel Rose defeated incumbent James G. Clark .

In the city 's 5th district in North Philadelphia , another incumbent , Eugene J. Sullivan , was defeated by Raymond Pace Alexander , a local attorney and civil rights leader . In the 6th district , covering Kensington and Frankford , plumbers ' union official Michael J. Towey won over William J. Glowacz . In the 7th , James Hugh Joseph Tate defeated Joseph A. Ferko , a local Mummers string band leader . Insurance broker Charles M. Finley defeated incumbent councilman William A. Kelley in the 9th district , which covered Oak Lane , Olney , and Logan . In Northeast Philadelphia 's 10th district , incumbent Clarence K. Crossan , who had held office since 1925 , went down to defeat against real estate broker John F. Byrne , Sr.

In the at large races , the all five Democrats were elected , including city party chairman James A. Finnegan , former registration commissioner Victor E. Moore , Charter Commission secretary Lewis M. Stevens , attorney (and future district attorney of Philadelphia) Victor H. Blanc , and magistrate Paul D 'Ortona . The Republican slate ran more than 100 @,@ 000 votes behind the Democrats , with incumbent councilman Louis Schwartz and state senator John W. Lord , Jr. narrowly edging out assistant district attorney John B. Backhus , labor leader Colbert C. McClain , and clergyman Irwin W. Underhill for the two minority party slots on the council .

= = Other offices , referendum , and aftermath = =

The Democrats ' success continued down the ballot . They elected a county sheriff , William M. Lennox ; clerk of courts , Joseph A. Scanlon ; and recorder of deeds , Marshall L. Shepard . In the race for county commissioners , each party nominates two candidates and the top three are elected : here , too , the Democrats triumphed , electing both Maurice C. Osser and Thomas P. McHenry . The Republican spot on the county commission went to Walter I. Davidson . The Democrats also took eight of the fourteen magisterial district judge positions (a local court , the duties of which are now performed by the Philadelphia Municipal Court) .

A statewide referendum on the ballot that day continued the work begun by the new city charter in asking voters to consolidate the city and county governments in Philadelphia . In 1854 , all of the municipalities in Philadelphia County had been consolidated into one city , but many county offices still existed , duplicating the efforts of city officials . Merging the city and county governments had been defeated in a 1937 referendum , but in 1951 the question was overwhelmingly approved .

The 1951 election was the final blow to Philadelphia 's once @-@ dominant Republican machine . Since that time , the Democratic party has dominated the city 's politics , with no other party electing a mayor or a majority of the city council in the intervening years .