

Sesame Street: Town Council

Committee Background Guide

General Crisis Committee

New York University Model United Nations Conference

New York University - April 2024

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Welcome Letter

Esteemed Delegates,

Welcome to NYUMUNC XV, and to your exciting stint as both a politician and a muppet! We hope you're all very excited to be here, and we are so excited to see what each of you will bring to the table!

Note from your chair:

My name is Jade (she/her) and I'm your Chair this year. I am from Florida, and a sophomore pursuing a double major in International Relations and Spanish at the College of Arts and Science. This past year I was a CA for EmpireMUNC X and I am a member of NYU's Model UN travel team. Outside of MUN, you can find me figure skating, doing puzzles, trying to bake in my small dorm kitchen, or reading. My favorite book from last year was *The Anthropocene Reviewed* by John Green (highly recommend!!). As a former PBS kid, I am obviously thrilled to be the chair of this committee and look forward to meeting you all!

Note from your CD:

My name is Dorothy (she/her), and I am in my final year studying Computer Science at NYU. I've been involved with MUN since my freshman year of high school, and this will be my sixth and last MUN conference with NYU—it's very bittersweet, to say the least! In my free time, I like to find and eat good food around the city, read memoirs, and crochet/knit.

As you know, the subject of this committee, as quirky as it is, requires a great deal of imagination. Don't be afraid to push the envelope with your arcs, and certainly don't feel constrained to the contents of this guide. We are thrilled to be able to experience this with you all in April. In the meantime, feel free to reach out with any questions, and best of luck preparing for your impending muppethood.

Until we meet,

Jade Oquendo-Eisenhour, Chair

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Statement of Diversity and Inclusion

Whilst NYUMUNC is committed to maintaining an experience that is as educational and historically accurate as possible, we recognize that any debate around historical and/or semi-fantastical events will incorporate sensitive issues. Delegates are expected to discuss these issues maturely and appropriately. NYUMUNC is committed to promoting a culture of diversity and inclusion in line with NYU's values; in the spirit of this commitment, NYUMUNC will not tolerate any bigoted symbols, statements, or attitudes.

Delegate crisis notes may not attempt to make use of any inappropriate substances, nor include any direct or indirect references to hate-related speech and actions.



Committee Mechanics

Please note: *In the spirit of immersion, the acceptable attire for committee attendance will be either **Western Business Attire** or **Character Costume**. Please exercise your best judgment. Character costumes must be representative of the character to a reasonable degree, and must adhere to general dress code guidelines. NYUMUNC reserves the right to deem costumes inappropriate. Please reach out to the committee heads with any questions/concerns regarding appropriate attire.*

The Sesame Street Town Council will function by the general procedures of any representation-based lawmaking body. There will be debate and writing of draft resolutions. For the purposes of terminology, “resolution” will be used interchangeably with “ordinance” and “proposed law.” To enact change, the Council will need to agree upon steps to take (yes, this means directives). We will distinguish between legislation and directives. All legislation will be initiated via directives, but not all passed directives will equate to the passage of legislation.

As far as the daily affairs of the neighborhood, most community-related and personal issues are fair game to be touched upon by the Council. In fact, most local issues are, in fact, the primary responsibility of the Council to address. This covers fiscal and social matters. The Council oversees the budget, and Sesame Street operates with its own budget constraints, separate from the City of New York. Anything related to the well-being of the residents (within reason), also falls under the Council’s jurisdiction. Community cleanliness, neighborhood property valuations, and maintaining general peace between the muppets, are, for example, all issues of concern.

The Council may not, however, interfere with the goings-on of any larger government. Legislation passed does not extend its impact beyond the Sesame Street neighborhood bounds. The Council does not hold official ties to any other governmental body.

Introduction

The Sesame Street Town Council is responsible for maintaining the well-being of one of the arguably happiest neighborhoods in New York City. Council Muppets regularly grapple with the delicate balance of governance and camaraderie, meshing so many diverse muppet backgrounds together. As the heartbeat of Sesame Street, the Council regularly faces unprecedented challenges, from policy disputes to community harmony.

The committee timeline will begin in April 2024, at the first Council gathering of the month. Election day is months away. There will be plenty of freedom for each muppet to drive their own story, and explore their own pasts and aspirations. The councilmuppets' personal agendas, Council interactions, and unforeseen crises, will all explore the importance of diplomacy, compromise, and resilience in upholding the cherished values of this vibrant, unique, and universally beloved community.

Delegates, Please Note: Feel free to take creative liberties with your muppet's history, involvements, relationships, dreams, etc., as there is a lot of history about each individual muppet beyond the scope of this guide. In doing so, however, please ensure that all decisions and traits adhere to the NYUMUNC Statement of Diversity and Inclusion.

Historical & Contemporary Context

Early Days

Since the establishment of a thriving community on and around Sesame Street in 1969, the colorful and (mostly) friendly inhabitants have struggled, at length, with the task of self-governance. Though situated within the borough of Manhattan within New York City, the residents living on and around Sesame Street operated nearly autonomously, and had their own unique set of wants and needs that necessitated a separate collection of representatives, as well as tailored policies. At first, this desire led to some friction with the local elected officials, but after persistent grassroots efforts and cheery lobbying, the official and independent Sesame Street Town Council was established by 1979. It is important to note that despite the existence of the Council, there is no separate nor additional representation for Sesame Street residents in the state and national governments.



123 Sesame Street Sign

The Council at Present

The primary goal of the Town Council is to ensure that the needs and concerns of the residents are voiced and addressed. Maintaining harmony and happiness throughout the community, while prioritizing unity in diversity, is the key task of the elected officials. In general, the most important role of the council is hosting and responding to the weekly town halls, where all residents are welcome to attend the open forum and voice any issues they would like to see addressed.

As far as organizational hierarchy, though certain members will assume specialized roles from time to time, there are no explicit roles for the elected officials, beyond general representative. Once upon a time, this wasn't the case. From its establishment to roughly 2000, the councilmuppets were elected to specific offices, and served only in those roles. However, they soon discovered that, contrary to what the surrounding communities may believe, this was actually not the most efficient way to govern. Rather, it made more sense for each muppet to simply apply their own unique skills naturally. After all, they were elected for a reason. So, in the current state, each muppet on the Council holds equal power, but are free to adapt their own responsibilities as the group sees fit. Recently, though, a developing rift between the youth and the old-timers have challenged this belief. Some of the younger councilmuppets have been involved in a growing push to reinstate an official hierarchy.

Decision-making is accomplished through the passage and enactment of ordinances and resolutions, which are proposed and drafted by the Council. This can often be an arduous process, but no change ever comes easy. Though there are exceptions, most voting procedures (including resolution passage) require a simple majority vote. Special circumstances, like the ousting of a member, may require a $\frac{3}{4}$ majority vote.

Elections

In terms of eligibility to run for office, the neighborhood agreed long ago that the only fair requirement was muppetness. In other words, every muppet that resides on or around Sesame Street is eligible to run for election to the Town Council. Keeping with the spirit of fairness and simplicity, the councilmuppets are decided via rankings. Muppets who receive no votes from others are not eligible to be ranked. A muppet may not vote for themselves. The top twenty (or less, as necessary) muppets, ranked by votes, are then sworn into the Council for the cycle.

Every election cycle, many muppets run, but the Council regulations do not allow for more than twenty members. Therefore, with every election cycle, the campaigns get tougher and tougher. Historically, there have always been enough ranked candidates to appoint to the Council at the end of every election year. Recently, the turnaround has been rather high with each new election. This has made serving on the Council a dual mandate: councilmuppets must not only work to ensure that the neighborhood is operating at its best, but must also ensure that public opinion about their own work is in tip-top shape, especially as the election approaches.

Luckily, the Council election cycle follows the US presidential election cycle, which has generally been fantastic for both voter and candidate morale. No messy dates to keep track of year after year—residents just need to remember that in November 2024, as they vote for their next national president, they will also be electing the next generation of councilmuppets.

Potential Fault Lines

As typical with any melting pot of backgrounds, ideologies, and traits, the Council has witnessed its fair share of internal divisions. One of the more pressing divisions has been between the muppets with powers, headed by Abby Cadabby, and the muppets without any access to magic, headed by Oscar the Grouch. Oscar was adamant that the use of magic would put the

non-magical councilmuppets at a disadvantage when it came to garnering public support. Abby, on the other hand, insisted that the magic was an innate part of each magical muppet, and therefore could not be limited. This conflict was never fully resolved, though the Council has heard extensive debate on the matter. Some older councilmuppets fear that this division may eventually lead to larger issues, so far those fears have proved unnecessary.



Oscar, protesting one of Abby's shenanigans.

On the topic of the older councilmuppets—the other relatively prominent pre-existing divide is between the older generation and the newer generation of muppets. Some councilmuppets have called Sesame Street home for decades (Big Bird, Oscar, Bert, Ernie, Count, etc.) whereas others have only moved in fairly recently (Baby Bear, Abby, Gonger, etc.). Generally, the unofficial divide is roughly set around the year 2000. Those who have been around the block a time or two naturally feel that they have more experience under their belts, while the newer councilmuppets often wonder if the old-timers' tactics might be a bit outdated.

Previous Issues

Following some effects of the Great Recession in 2008 (to which no one was immune), along with a general national downward trend of public trust in lawmaking bodies, the Council received considerable backlash and dwindled support in the years following. The vast majority of councilmuppets of the 2008-2012 cycle were not re-elected, in a shocking defiance of historical trends. Some were able to take back their spots in subsequent years, while others continue to struggle to regain their status. For the past decade, the turnover for each new iteration of the Council has been considerably high. This continues to make passionate councilmuppets nervous for their re-election prospects. Effective campaigns and high public opinion are more important now than ever.

Another key aspect to note is the most infamous scandal in Sesame Street Council history. The great Voter Fraud Scandal of 2000 (colloquially referred to as “Voter Frog”) spurred mass criticism of the structure of the Council, and its arguably lenient electoral set-up. Amidst the eventful national election of 2000, Kermit the Frog decided to enter into the running for Council elections considerably late into the game. Two days before election day, Kermit began his campaign. It was an honest effort, but given the number of experienced councilmuppets who had been campaigning for months on end, it should come as no surprise that Kermit, with such short notice, was not able to garner a competitive number of supporters. For reasons that he has yet to admit to this day, Kermit the Frog was incredibly determined to achieve his councilmuppet fate, and resorted to any means necessary. When election day rolled around, he received the most votes of any candidate, by a landslide. Celebrations were held for his grand success, and he was sworn into the Council shortly after. For a while, the happy, green, seemingly unprecedentedly widely-supported frog was the talk of the town, and effectively the face of the Council. The ruse was bound to expire, however, as it was eventually uncovered that he had made up hundreds of identities in order to cast votes for himself, repeatedly. In the summer of 2001, he was removed

from service, and stripped of his rights to affiliate with the Council in any sense, ever again. He has since kept a distance from the community, for the most part.



Kermit and Elmo, pre-scandal.

The scandal, and the events following, caused great harm to the Council's reputation and credibility. Not only were citizens furious that so many fake voter identities had slipped through the cracks, they also began to distrust the remaining members of the Council, who had publicly built up a camaraderie with Kermit. Protests took place, calling for amendments to the Council structure and election format. Yet, two decades later, resolute steps still have not been taken in this direction.

Current Issues

Power Dynamics

Within the vibrant neighborhood, a subtle yet palpable power struggle has begun simmering beneath the surface, revealing the complexities of intergenerational dynamics. The older, seasoned residents, who have long called Sesame Street home, have expressed a level of discontent with the alleged disruption to their routines as a wave of newcomers, full of energy and fresh perspectives, arrived in recent years.

As the original inhabitants grapple with the influx of change, subtle tensions brew over the established norms and traditions. The seasoned residents, possessing a deep understanding of the street's history and a sense of ownership, fear that the sweetness of the air may be at risk. They guard the cherished routines and banners of brightness and joy that have defined Sesame Street for decades. On the other hand, the newer muppets, eager to contribute and bring their own unique flair to the community, have been faced with limited avenues of expression. While nearly everyone loves meeting their new neighbors, a surging population has unsurprisingly put strain on the existing infrastructure and systems. Sooner or later, these issues must be addressed...

In the midst of this power dynamic, Sesame Street becomes a microcosm of society at large, highlighting the intricate dance between tradition and progress, and the enduring challenge of finding unity in diversity.

In the Federal Eye

Despite the colorful whimsy of the town, it's important to remember that federal regulations still apply. Self-governance did not directly translate to self-regulation, and several aspects of life in the neighborhood have made their way onto a federal watch list. To name a (non-exhaustive) few:

- Bert and Ernie may have unintentionally flouted zoning laws as they transformed

their residence via extravagant and imaginative large-scale renovations.

- Abby Cadabby's fairy-in-training status, paired with her use of magic, has made her a subject of interest. Her spells have identified potential to disrupt traffic flow with conjured-up fantastical creatures—an issue that may fall under the jurisdiction of the Department of Transportation. Her magical mishaps that have taken flight have also sparked debates about airspace regulations.
- Big Bird's oversized nest, amidst the city skyline, has consistently raised eyebrows in building code discussions.
- Cookie Monster's endless appetite, along with Abby's magical culinary experiments, may be in violation of FDA responsible ingredient-use regulations, particularly regarding magical ingredients.
- Oscar the Grouch's unconventional waste disposal methods do not align with environmental regulations.

Ultimately, it is important for the Council to ensure that the neighborhood is in compliance with federal and state laws. However, the Council should also work to preserve the residents' rights to self-expression, and their individual ways of life. This, of course, is a delicate balancing act. Going too far in one direction may result in unfortunate legal repercussions for the residents, whereas going too far in the other direction may lead to rapidly declining local public opinion at this crucial time.

The Future of the Council

With recent pushes for increased hierarchy and a set structure for the Council roles and responsibilities, it may be time for a large-scale reorganization. Of course, many of the seasoned councilmuppets believe that the pre-existing perfectly flat organizational structure has functioned perfectly fine (in the grand scheme of things) for all these years, and there is no good reason to invest so much time and energy into a restructuring. The newer generation, for the most part, has

been advocating for this change, citing the needs of the growing population that cannot be properly addressed by such a free-form governmental structure.

Election Year

As the town council braces for a pivotal re-election year, each councilmuppet must pour their passion and expertise into their own re-election campaigns. With each town hall, and each policy decision, they must tread carefully, in order to maintain public favor while still achieving legislative progress. At this crucial time, the councilmuppets are locked in a delicate dance between fulfilling their civic duties, and uplifting and inspiring the community. With each decision, they weave a narrative that not only upholds the values of Sesame Street, but also ensures the enduring trust and support of their diverse constituents. Each current councilmuppet must remember that there are dozens of other muppets, not currently on the Council, actively vying for their same seats in the upcoming cycle. In this election year, the councilmuppets must work to keep public opinion high, while also fostering the air of warmth and unity that define the essence of Sesame Street.

Questions to Consider

1. Is the current set-up and organization of the Council the most effective? If not, then given the past, present, and future conditions, would it be worthwhile to attempt to revise the underlying structure?
2. Which issues should take the highest priority? Resident concerns? Federal restrictions? Personal gain?
3. How can the credibility of the Council be maintained, especially amidst this competitive election cycle?

Character List

All councilmuppets are residents of Sesame Street. Please feel free to look into each of their histories separately.

- **Elmo:** Bubbly and kind red monster with an infectious youthful energy.
- **Cookie Monster:** Cookie-loving blue monster who loves to bake and share.
- **Oscar the Grouch:** Green monster who lives in a trash can and delights in all things trashy.
- **Snuffleupagus:** Gentle giant with a heart of gold and a deep love for nature.
- **Abby Cadabby:** Enthusiastic fairy-in-training with a passion for magic and learning.
- **Big Bird:** Gentle and curious bird with a childlike innocence.
- **Bert:** Friendly academic with a dry sense of humor and a love for pigeons.
- **Ernie:** Joyful friend to all and lover of his rubber duckie.
- **Count von Count:** Math-loving vampire who values friendship above all and enjoys sharing his passion for numbers.
- **Grover:** Part-time waiter, part-time superhero, full-time energetic friend.
- **Guy Smiley:** Perpetually cheerful and enthusiastic showman.
- **Gonger:** Friendly and helpful little monster who operates a food truck called "Gonger's Foodie Truck."
- **Rosita:** Dedicated advocate for diversity and cultural inclusivity who also enjoys science experiments.
- **Zoe:** Imaginative young monster with a desire to explore the world around her.
- **Baby Bear:** Family-oriented bear who loves playtime and imaginative adventures.
- **Prairie Dawn:** Resident known for her love of learning and passion for the arts.
- **Telly Monster:** Beloved pink monster with an insatiable curiosity and deep appreciation for his friends.

- **Frazzle:** Clumsy yet endearing fuzzy monster with unparalleled sense of adventure.
- **Sherlock Hemlock:** Well-meaning and enthusiastic detective prepared to confront any neighborhood crime.
- **Betty Lou:** Cheerful student known for her curiosity and eagerness to learn.
- **Hoots:** Owl known for his jazzy personality and talent for playing the saxophone.
- **Mr. Johnson:** Patient and ambitious blue-collar worker.