

## How Philly Works Who is the Controller?

The candidates running for City Controller in the May 21 primary face off in a debate tonight from 6:30 p.m. – 8:00 p.m. at WHY?Y, 150 N. 6<sup>th</sup> Street. (The seats are taken, but you can submit a question to <http://www.yorn.com/yiphilly> or tweet it to @yiphilly with the hashtag #phillycontrollers.)

If you're wondering what the City Controller actually does, you're not alone. But with the city in the middle of some heated budget debates - it's important to know as much as you can about the office that watches your money and the candidates fighting for your vote.

As the race heats up, the Committee of Seventy will keep you informed about the [race](#) you can't afford to ignore, starting with this edition of **HOW PHILLY WORKS**.

--April 11, 2013

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### I'm almost afraid to ask...but what is the City Controller?

The City Controller watches over how city government handles the taxpayers' money. Among the Controller's many responsibilities is to conduct annual audits of city agencies, departments, boards and commissions; make recommendations on how government can be more efficient and review city spending transactions before they are officially recorded. (Check out the City Controller's [website](#) for more on specific responsibilities.)

### No offense. But it doesn't sound like the most exciting job.

You might not want to do it, but it's pretty important that someone does. A [study](#) by the government of Washington D.C. released in 2012 reported Philadelphia imposes the second-highest tax burden on families of the largest cities of each state. (Bridgeport, Connecticut came in first.) Keeping a close eye on spending helps ensure that more and more taxes aren't needed to pay for government services.

### Does the City Controller report to the Mayor?

No, the City Controller is an elected position written in to the Home Rule Charter (the governing document of the city) that is independent of both the mayor and City Council – which is good, because the Controller audits both of them. (Although, we do have to question how independent the office is when the Controller is from the same party as the mayor and most of the elected officials whose work is being audited.)

### What does the Controller look for during an audit?

The Controller checks to see if all city taxpayer-funded entities are working as well as they

should and, if not, recommends ways to be more efficient and for less cost. For example, last week the Controller's office found workers' compensation claims by city employees (to be reimbursed for bills related to work-related injuries) totaled \$54 million in fiscal year 2011 (\$11 million more than the previous fiscal year), with 386 city workers filing more than 11 claims each. In March, the office found \$12 million in savings in the city's procurement process.

### **Can the Controller force changes to happen?**

No, the Controller doesn't have enforcement power. But as long as the recommendations are open and transparent – and not political – former City Controller (and potential future mayoral candidate) Jonathan Sidel told us they stand a good chance of eventually be accepted and implemented.

### **Who audits the auditor?**

The Charter requires City Council to provide for an audit of how the Controller's office is doing its job by independent accountants at least once in three years.

### **Does the Controller influence city policy too?**

Yes, in a number of ways. For instance, the Controller sits on the Board of the Philadelphia Gas Commission, which recently had to decide whether or not to authorize Mayor Nutter to spend \$2.7 million to hire advisors to explore selling off PGW. (They did, but current Controller Butkovitz cast a "no" vote.)

### **And there's an election for City Controller this year?**

Yes, the Controller runs for four-year terms. Butkovitz is seeking his third term but faces fierce challenges by Brett Mandel and Mark Zecca in the May 21 Democratic primary. The winner will then run against Republican Terry Tracy (who is unopposed in the Republican primary) in the November 5 general election.

### **What's the scoop on the race?**

Brett Mandel, who was Director of Financial and Policy analysis when Sidel was Controller, is making his second run at unseating Butkovitz (he lost in the 2009 Democratic primary). Mark Zecca, a former attorney for the city's Law Department, is making his first run at political office. Alan Butkovitz is looking to win his third term as City Controller – but it's a pretty open secret that he wants to succeed Michael Nutter as mayor in 2015 too. The only Republican contender, Terry Tracy, has a decade of experience in retail strategy and management. You can find out a lot more about all the candidates (including answers to Seventy's Controller candidates' questionnaire) by going to our website [here](#).

### **Butkovitz wants to run for mayor in 2015? Can he do this if he wins reelection?**

He can, but he would need to resign as City Controller when he officially becomes a candidate, which means when he files nomination petitions or publicly announces his candidacy.

### Who should I vote for?

We can't help you on that one. Seventy is non-partisan and doesn't endorse candidates. But, as we said, we will continue to provide information on the Controller's race (including to-be-determined details about another debate on Channel 6) and other contests on the May 21 primary ballot. Stay tuned.

*Thanks for reading, and as usual, please send us any comments or suggestions for future topics we should cover to [futureofthecity@seventy.org](mailto:futureofthecity@seventy.org).*