

Civil Service system will live on

As Mayor Bloomberg's reign in City Hall nears an end, it appears unlikely that his administration will achieve its goal of gutting the century-old Civil Service system.

The effort was the brainchild of ex-Deputy Mayor Stephen Goldsmith, who pushed a series of "reforms" that would have obliterated many longstanding conventions — including much of the test-based system of hiring and promotions.

Unions slammed the proposals, noting that the testing system was adopted as a safeguard against rampant patronage.

Fortunately for workers, many of the proposed changes had to be handled at the state level.

"Albany was not willing to go along with any of their brilliant ideas," quipped Robert Croghan, a civil-service advocate who chairs the Organization of Staff Analysts.



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Goldsmith resigned in disgrace, after he was arrested following a domestic dispute with his wife at their Georgetown home in 2011.

Many of his ideas for reimagining city government were shelved after he left office.

"We had one meeting with the City Council to discuss [his proposals] and we never heard about it again," Croghan recalled.

— The city did adopt those measures that fell under its own jurisdiction, said Julianne

Cho, the spokeswoman for the Department of Citywide Administrative Services.

For example, the city has consolidated 40 job titles, and 23% of the exams administered in 2012 were based on a job seeker's education and experience.

That change has helped the city reduce its costs for writing new tests, which were steep.

The city has to spend \$98,000 to develop and administer each exam for its 1,000 competitive job titles, according to a "Workforce Reform" task force headed up by Goldsmith and drafted by former Administrative Services Commissioner Martha Hirst.

Many of the changes the panel recommended required the approval of the state's Civil Service Commission, or the consent of the affected unions through collective bargaining.

And organized labor saw these matters quite differently.

Municipal unions worried that dismantling the system would mean undoing rules that protect workers — conventions that have been in place for more than 100 years.

One change involved moving all senior management and executive titles out of competitive class — thereby eliminating the need for civil service tests.

The most controversial recommendation would have enabled the Department of Education to ignore the longstanding principle of seniority in making personnel decisions during a downsizing.

Albany lawmakers would not brook the change, heeding union protests that argued the city was looking for a way to purge the highest-paid veteran teachers.

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