



## Anthony Hairston, Cuyahoga County Council's youngest member, first paid his dues in Cleveland politics

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CLEVELAND, Ohio -- On Nov. 4, 2001, Election Day in Cleveland, 15-year-old Anthony Hairston stood on a street corner passing out literature and using a bullhorn on behalf of the unsuccessful mayoral campaign of Raymond Pierce.

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Cuyahoga County  
Councilman Anthony  
Hairston

Cuyahoga  
County

During a break, Hairston chatted with a Plain Dealer Publishing Co. reporter about his interest in politics and his ambitious goals for pursuing elected office.

"When I turn 18," he said, "I want to run for council."

Hairston did end up running for Cleveland City Council, but not until 2009, when at age 23 he finished fourth in a seven-way primary race in Ward 10, a race eventually won by Eugene Miller. He bounced back the following year, when he beat out Miller in a behind-the-scenes contest to lead the ward's Democratic club.

Then, after years of helping others with their bids for office, Hairston in February 2014 **successfully landed one of 11 seats on Cuyahoga County Council**, where at age 28 he is the youngest member by a decade.

Asked about the challenge young people or first-time candidates face in breaking into Cleveland politics, Hairston said they have to be willing to first pay their dues.

"Anything that you do is going to take time, it's going to take work. You have to build those relationships with these individuals in order to get engaged," he said.

"I didn't just come out of nowhere overnight," he added. "No. We were in the game, so to speak, for a very long time."

That perseverance has not gone unnoticed. Council President Dan Brady last month awarded a committee chairmanship to the Democratic representative for District 10, which includes Cleveland's Collinwood and Glenville neighborhoods, as well as Bratenahl, East Cleveland, Cleveland Heights and University Heights.

Brady, who rose through the ranks of urban politics on Cleveland's West Side in the 1970s and 1980s, said Hairston reminds him of himself in some ways.

"Anthony obviously is urban-centric, and I don't mean that in a negative way, that's the politics he came up in, and that's the politics he understands," Brady said. "So his challenge is to represent a district with over 100,000 people in it, including a large suburb like Cleveland Heights. It will be interesting to see if he can make that transition. I believe he can."

Hairston is viewed by supporters as a possible rising star in a local Democratic Party that has lost leaders to a public corruption scandal and suffered embarrassment from last year's dismal gubernatorial campaign by then-County Executive Ed FitzGerald.

"As it relates to politics, he's very seasoned for someone who's so young," said Cleveland Municipal Judge Pinkey Carr.

Friends and Hairston himself also described his ambition to climb the political ladder -- identifying local, statewide and federal offices he may aspire to hold one day -- and his willingness to put in the work needed to succeed in relationship-driven local politics.

Among his political mentors is Cleveland Councilman Jeff Johnson, who was himself appointed to City Council when he was 26.

"I think as long as he's a man of his word, and as long as he continues to have integrity, he'll continue to develop relationships that will assist him as he grows in his political career," Johnson said.

Check the timeline below to track Hairston since that Election Day in 2001.

## Anthony Hairston timeline

Click the individual boxes to show details, or click the Show All button below to open the entire list. You can click individual boxes to close them.

- **High school graduate**

- **2004**

- The son of working-class, Cleveland natives, Hairston serves on student council before graduating from Collinwood High School.

- **Cleveland State University student**

- **2009**

- Hairston, who previously took classes at Cuyahoga Community College, majors in business while attending Cleveland State University. He eventually graduates in 2011.

- **Losing City Council candidate**

- **2009**

- Hairston **loses to Councilman Eugene Miller**, who had been appointed to the seat earlier in the year to fill a vacancy. However, Hairston makes connections while running that prove to be helpful later.

- **Ward club leader**

- **2010**

- Hairston helps organize a slate of candidates vying for seats on the Democratic Party's central committee. Hairston himself is selected ward club president, beating out Miller for the spot. Hairston said he focused on building grassroots support among committee members -- by going door to door, meeting with community leaders and passing out fliers before and after class -- after realizing they were the key to getting a foothold in local politics.

- **Begins telecommunications company**

- **2011**

- Hairston and his mother, Tracy Hairston, incorporate North East Exclusive, a telecommunications company in March. The Hairstons with a business partner, Robert Graddic, also incorporate Shaker Wireless, which sells cell phones out of a storefront on Chagrin Boulevard in Shaker Heights.

- **Manages winning County Council campaign**

- **2011**

- Julian Rogers, with Hairston as his campaign manager, is elected to represent Cuyahoga County Council's District 10 in the November election. "Learning how to manage campaigns has led him to meet a lot of people, particularly within the Democratic Party," Rogers said in a recent interview, "and he's positioned himself that when the opportunity presented himself, he was able to step in and step up."

- **Manages winning judicial campaign**

- **2011**

- Hairston helps Pinkey Carr, then an assistant county prosecutor, mount a successful campaign for Cleveland Municipal Court. Carr said in a recent interview that Hairston has told her he wants to run for mayor of Cleveland someday.

- **DNC delegate**

- **2012**

- Hairston is chosen as a delegate to attend the Democratic National Convention in Charlotte, North Carolina.

- **Backs out as city council candidate**

- **2013**

- Hairston considers running for Miller's council seat again. Instead, he **decides to back Councilman Jeffrey Johnson**, who eventually beats Eugene Miller after a redistricting measure put Johnson's spot in jeopardy. Johnson hires Hairston as his deputy campaign manager.

- **Appointed to County Council**

- **2014**

- Hairston persuades a few dozen members of the Democratic Central Committee to appoint him to replace Rogers after Rogers resigns his County Council seat to take a job as an administrator with Cleveland State University. Rogers endorses Hairston as his replacement. Hairston says he hopes to connect residents with county services, improve public safety and encourage economic development in his district.

- **Community Liaison for CDC**

- **2014**

- With Johnson's support, Hairston is hired to work as a community engagement liaison for the St. Clair / Superior Community Development Corporation. Hairston's job is to help Johnson's Ward 10 constituents with their concerns, according to a written opinion issued by the county Inspector General's Office, which ruled the job does not pose a conflict of interest.

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