



# 150

**Kaupunginvaltuusto  
Stadsfullmäktige**  
1875–2025



Photo: Helsinki City Museum

# The history of the City Council in a nutshell



**150**

**Kaupunginvaltuusto  
Stadsfullmäktige**  
1875–2025

# Helsinki City Council 1875–1918

- ❖ The Helsinki City Council had its first meeting on 12 January 1875.
- ❖ Leo Mechelin was elected as the first Chair of the City Council.
- ❖ 48 Councillors were elected. From the year 1916 onward, the number was 60 Councillors.
- ❖ The City Council's term was three years.
- ❖ Elections were held every year, since 1/3 of the Council was about to resign at all times.
- ❖ Up until 1907, the language of the meetings and the documents was Swedish. After this, both Finnish and Swedish were used.
- ❖ Individuals were not voted into the Council; instead, people voted for a candidate list.
- ❖ City Councillors represented the wealthier layers of society.
- ❖ The City Council had its meetings in the Bock House, i.e. the Old City Hall (1875–1912) and in Pörssitalo (1912–1931).



150

Kaupunginvaltuusto  
Stadsfullmäktige  
1875–2025

# Leo Mechelin

Leo Mechelin (1839–1914) was the Vice Chair of the Economic Division (=Prime Minister) and Member of Parliament, Professor, and the first Chair of the Helsinki City Council.



150

Kaupunginvaltuusto  
Stadsfullmäktige  
1875–2025

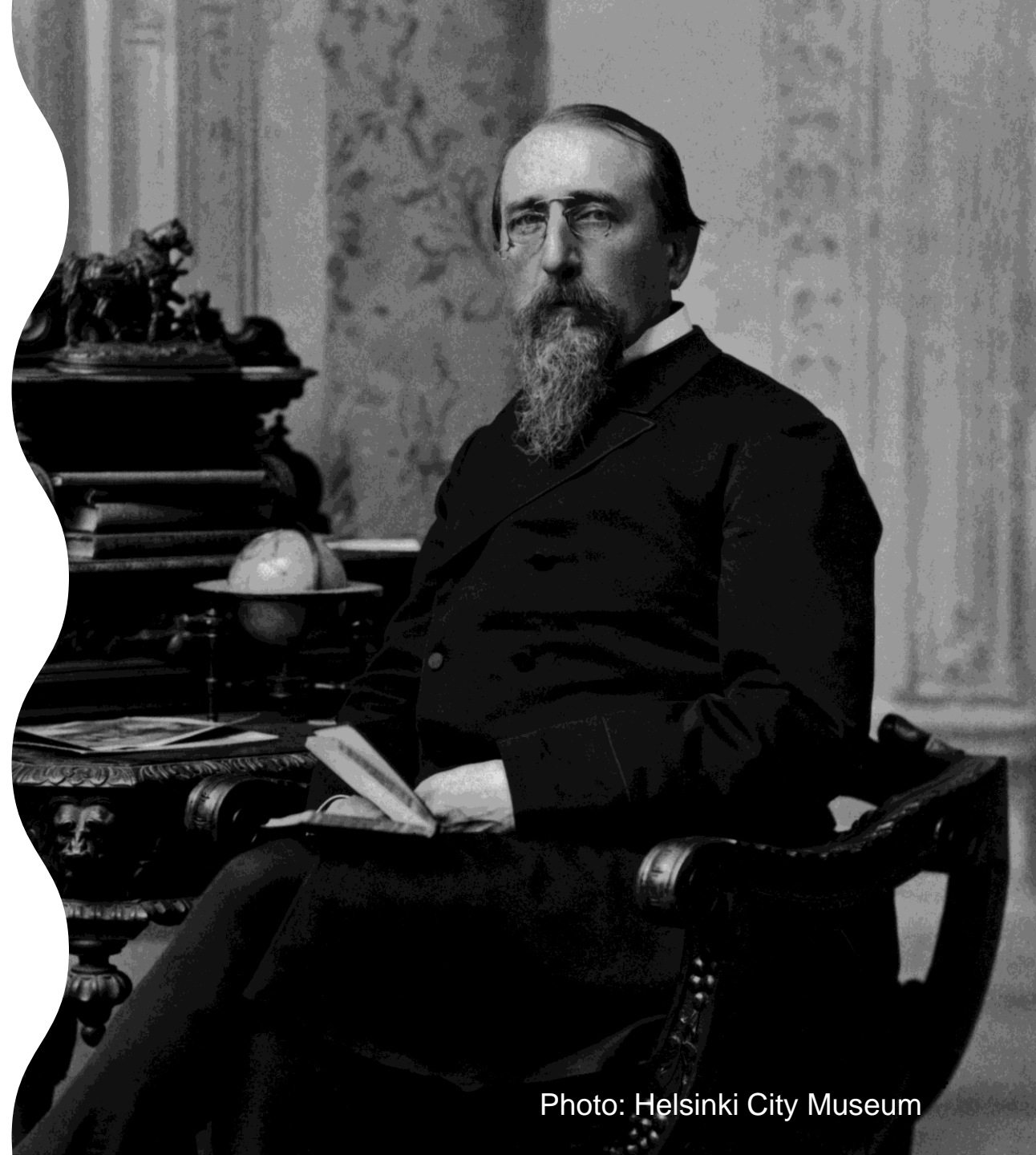


Photo: Helsinki City Museum

# Voters and Councillors 1875–1918

Only around one in ten of Helsinki residents had the right to vote.

- ❖ Persons who lived or owned a home in Helsinki, who:
  - paid enough taxes
  - were 25 years or older
  - were unmarried (women)
  - were not employed by someone else
- ❖ companies, associations, and estates.

A wealthy person or company may have had several votes at their disposal.

Within the party-list proportional representation system, the vote was for the candidate list, not an individual person.



**150**

Kaupunginvaltuusto  
Stadsfullmäktige  
1875–2025



# A Councillor candidate had to be

- ❖ male
- ❖ entitled to vote in elections



150

Kaupunginvaltuusto  
Stadsfullmäktige  
1875–2025



# The 1919 City Council elected by universal and equal suffrage

- For the first time, suffrage was **universal and equal**:
  - women and men over the age of 20 who lived in Helsinki had the right to vote.
- What was new about the City Council that began its work in 1919:
  - female councillors: “city mothers” alongside “city fathers” (9 female Councillors from a total of 60 Councillors)
  - Councillors represented all social classes: Social Democrats had 26 of the seats
  - more Finnish-speaking Councillors than before



150

Kaupunginvaltuusto  
Stadsfullmäktige  
1875–2025



Photo: Helsinki City Museum

Woman at Observatory Hill Park, photo taken around 1910.



**150**

**Kaupunginvaltuusto  
Stadsfullmäktige**  
1875–2025



# The City Council 1919–2024

- ❖ The number of city councillors has increased to 85 (since 1976) as the city's population has grown.
- ❖ Council office periods have extended to 4 years in 1956.
- ❖ Elections have been held every three years since 1925 and every four years since 1956.
- ❖ Candidate lists were used until 1950. From the year 1953 onwards, people started voting for individual candidates.
- ❖ The language of the meetings and the documents has been Finnish and Swedish.
- ❖ The City Council has had its meetings in
  - the Old City Hall in 1875–1912
  - Pörssisali in 1912–1931
  - the City Hall's Banquet Hall in 1931–1965
  - the White Hall 1965–1988
  - The City Council Hall from the year 1988 to this day.



**150**

Kaupunginvaltuusto  
Stadsfullmäktige  
1875–2025



Photo: Signe Brander / Helsinki City Museum

The City Council convened in the Old City Hall in 1875–1912 (now the Empire Room).



**150**

**Kaupunginvaltuusto**  
**Stadsfullmäktige**  
1875–2025



Photo: Helsinki City Museum

The City Council convened in Pörssisali in 1912–1931. The picture is from 1929.



150

Kaupunginvaltuusto  
Stadsfullmäktige  
1875–2025





The Council had its meetings in the City Hall's Banquet Hall from 1931 to 1965.  
The photo is from 1958.



**150**

Kaupunginvaltuusto  
Stadsfullmäktige  
1875–2025



Photo: Helsinki City Museum

The Council had its meetings in the White Hall from 1965 to 1988.



150

Kaupunginvaltuusto  
Stadsfullmäktige  
1875–2025



# Did you know that...

- ❖ During the Finnish Civil War in 1918, the tasks of the City Council were carried out by Helsingin työväenjärjestöjen eduskunta (Workers' Association's Eduskunta)
- ❖ The City Council that was elected in December 1936 sat until the year 1945, as no elections were held during the war.
- ❖ At the beginning of the Winter War on 3 December 1939, the City Council convened in the vault of the Pohjoismaiden Yhdyspankki bank (Aleksanterinkatu 30).

*Photo: Talvisota (The Winter War), 1940 The corner of Lönnrotinkatu and Abrahaminkatu. Houses damaged by bombardment.*



**150**

Kaupunginvaltuusto  
Stadsfullmäktige  
1875–2025



Photo: Helsinki City Museum

# Did you know that...

- ❖ A computer was first used as aid in counting votes at the 1968 municipal election.
- ❖ Advance voting has been possible since the 1972 election.
- ❖ The City Council stopped using physical agendas and minutes in 2011.
- ❖ The meetings of the City Council usually start at 18:00 and may last past midnight.

*Photo: Arja Alho, first female Chair of the City Council and first chair of the left parties 1993–1994.*



**150**

**Kaupunginvaltuusto  
Stadsfullmäktige**  
1875–2025



*Photo: Työväen arkisto (The Labour Archives).*

# Helsinki City Council today

- ❖ The Helsinki City Council turns 150 years in 2025.
- ❖ The Helsinki City Council is the highest decision-making organ of the city.
- ❖ Its decisions affect the way the city operates and develops.
  
- ❖ The City Council has 85 members.
- ❖ The City Council's term is four years.
- ❖ Every Helsinki resident over the age of 18 can vote for a candidate to the City Council.
  
- ❖ Anyone can follow the City Council's meetings from the council hall balcony or on the Helsinki Channel.



**150**

Kaupunginvaltuusto  
Stadsfullmäktige  
1875–2025





You can watch the City Council's meetings live on the Helsinki Channel.



**150**

**Kaupunginvaltuusto**  
**Stadsfullmäktige**  
1875–2025

# More information

The City Council's jubilee year:

<https://www.hel.fi/en/helsinki-city-council-150-years>

The Decisions service: [paatokset.hel.fi/en](https://paatokset.hel.fi/en)

The City Council:

[paatokset.hel.fi/en/decisionmakers/02900](https://paatokset.hel.fi/en/decisionmakers/02900)

Information on Helsinki's decision-making:

[paatokset.hel.fi/en/information-on-decisionmaking](https://paatokset.hel.fi/en/information-on-decisionmaking)

The Helsinki Channel: [helsinkikanava.fi/en/](https://helsinkikanava.fi/en/)

*Photo: The City Council's voting urn, used 1875–1931.*



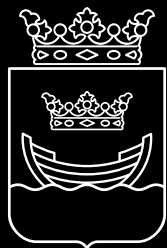
**150**

Kaupunginvaltuusto  
Stadsfullmäktige  
1875–2025



Photo: Helsinki City Museum





150

**Kaupunginvaltuusto**  
**Stadsfullmäktige**  
1875–2025