

Editorial: Paper Clip Court: How incumbents keep outsiders out

By [The Editorial Board](#)

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(Martin Child/Getty)

When Norridge resident Adam Chudzik [decided to run for village trustee](#) in the April 6 municipal election, along with two other independent candidates, he gathered signatures from registered voters and filed them with the local clerk, as required.

But Chudzik isn't just any candidate. He's a self-styled government watchdog in his town. He gets under the skin of local officials. And he has been trying to impose term limits on them. So naturally, the incumbent ruling party in small-town Norridge didn't want to see him or his fellow independents win seats on "their" board.

How to keep Chudzik and Co. off the ballot? Ah, the old paper clip trick.

State election code requires candidates when they turn in signatures to fasten the paperwork in a certain way. “Such sheets before being filed shall be neatly fastened together in book form, by placing the sheets in a pile and fastening them together at one edge in a secure and suitable manner, and the sheets shall then be numbered consecutively,” the statute reads.

Chudzik says he fastened his paperwork with a clip in the middle and slid the papers into a manila envelope that he sealed. The objector to his petitions, also connected to the ruling incumbent party, claimed the sheets arrived with no fastener. Chudzik violated Paper Clip Law. He would have to go to Paper Clip Court to defend his otherwise unobjectionable petitions.

Paper Clip Court — a local panel of hearing officers — was its own unethical event. The panel that decided whether he and his running mates stayed on the ballot was made up of members of the incumbent ruling party. The village president, Daniel Tannhauser and two outgoing trustees, Jacqueline Gregorio and Ursula Kucharski, are members of the Norridge Improvement Party. Four candidates of the Norridge Improvement Party are running for the same trustee seats as Chudzik and his slate, Anna Mitera and Andrew Charles Kopinski.

Can you say, conflict of interest?

After a nine-hour hearing in Paper Clip Court — yes, one of the Zoom hearings over the fastening of pages lasted that long — the panel voted to boot Chudzik and Co. from the ballot. Surprise, surprise.

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This is legal in Illinois, of course. The local “electoral board” that decides who makes it to the ballot and who does not can be comprised of members of the opposing party. It’s a ridiculous provision in the election code that protects incumbents and which the state legislature could, but has not, changed.

Chudzik and Co. have appealed the Paper Clip Court decision in Cook County Circuit Court. They’ll have to spend time and money fighting a case they shouldn’t have to. We can only hope a reasonable non-conflicted judge sees this for what it is — Norridge elected officials robbing Norridge voters of a choice.

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