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ALTERNATE FORMS OF CITY GOVERNMENT

HOWARD PROTTER'S REMARKS PRESENTED TO CITY OF NEWBURGH CHARTER
REVIEW COMMISSION EDUCATIONAL SESSION WEDNESDAY SEPTEMBER 28, 2006

A city charter commission faces a number of basic questions relating to the kind of city government it wants to propose and the form that government should take. The commission's work will require obtaining the necessary information to evaluate the alternatives. In Newburgh, making a complete review of the city government, the city charter commission must decide whether to change the form of the city government. I will outline the standard forms of city government in the United States and review some considerations involved in choosing among them.

City government forms fall generally into four broad categories.

1. The Council-manager Form

2. The Strong mayor-council form

3. The Weak- Mayor Form

4. The Commission Form

1. COUNCIL-MANAGER

The council-manager government is one of two main types of representative municipal government. This system is used in the majority of American cities

with populations more than 12,000.

In the council-manager form of government, an elected city council (typically between 5 and 11 people) is responsible for making policy, passing ordinances, voting appropriations, and having overall supervisory authority in the city government. In such a government, the mayor will perform strictly ceremonial duties or will act as a member and presiding officer of the council.

The council will hire a professional manager or administrator as the administrative head of the city; who will be responsible for supervising government operations and implementing the policies adopted by the council. The manager serves the council, usually with a contract that specifies duties and responsibilities. Ideally, the manager is apolitical, but this is often difficult. The manager usually serves at the pleasure of the council, has the power to appoint and remove department heads, recommends legislation, directs and supervises day-to-day municipal operations and prepares the budget. The manager does not have a veto power over council actions.

The council-manager system places all power into the hands of the legislative branch and can be analogized to a corporation. In a corporation, the board of

directors appoints a CEO, makes major decisions and wields representative power on behalf of shareholders. Likewise in council-manager government, the city council appoints a city manager, makes major decisions, and wields representative power on behalf of the citizens. The city manager can be viewed as a corporate CEO in providing professional management to an organization.

This form of government was first adopted by Staunton, Virginia in 1908; Dayton, Ohio became the first major city to use the system in 1913.

2.   MAYOR-COUNCIL

Mayor-Council government is another of two variations of government most commonly used in modern representative municipal governments in the United States. It is also used in some other countries. The Mayor-Council variant can be broken down into two main variations depending on the relationship between the legislative and executive branches.

Strong-Mayor Form

In the strong-mayor form the mayor is given almost total administrative

authority, with the power to appoint and dismiss department heads without council approval. Likewise, the mayor prepares and administers the budget, although that budget often must be approved by the city council.

In some strong-mayor governments, the mayor will appoint a chief administrative officer who will supervise department heads, prepare the budget, and coordinate departments. This CAO is responsible only to the mayor.

In a strong mayor-council form, the popularly elected mayor is the administrative and executive head of the city government and the council is the policymaking body. The mayor usually has extensive power to appoint and remove agency heads from office, to supervise and direct municipal operations and to prepare the budget.

The mayor ordinarily has broad veto powers over council actions as well. This form sometimes also provides for a professional administrator appointed by the mayor and is then called the mayor administrator plan.

3.   WEAK MAYOR-COUNCIL

In a weak mayor-council form of government, the mayor, even though popularly elected, is mainly a ceremonial figure. The council is not only the policymaking body, but also provides a committee form of administrative leadership and exercises the powers of appointment and removal of agency heads and budget preparation. There is generally no mayoral veto power, and committee chairmen tend to wield extensive powers.

In this form of the mayor-council government, the council possesses both legislative and executive authority. The council may appoint officials and must approve of mayoral nominations. The council also exercises primary control over the municipal budget.

Scholars have said "The weak-mayor plan is a product of Jacksonian democracy. It comes from the belief that if politicians have few powers and many checks, then they can do relatively little damage."

This form of government is most commonly used in small towns. It is a variant of City Commission government.

4.   COMMISSION FORM

The fourth category of city government is the commission form.

Commissioners, elected to head and administer the individual departments of the city government together form a council that is the policymaking and lawmaking body. In some cases, one of the commissioners may be designated to perform the ceremonial duties of the mayor.

In recent decades, most cities selecting a new government have chosen either the council manager or strong mayor-council form. The commission and weak mayor-council plans find little favor as ways of dealing with contemporary municipal problems.

The commission form has had no new adoptions for many years in New York State or in the rest of the country, so far as can readily be determined; nor has the weak mayor-council form been chosen with any frequency. Moreover, unsatisfactory performance of the weak mayor-council plan in many cities is the stimulus for many charter revision movements today.

As between the strong mayor-council and council-manager plans, a charter commission will find many advantages in both. There is no question, however, about the trend toward these two plans, the basic characteristic of which is that they provide a more centralized administrative direction of city activities. The council-manager form nationally is found most frequently in

younger cities of relatively homogeneous composition, with populations in the middle range (25,000 - 50,000). Very large and very small cities are more likely to use the mayor council form, as are older cities with more heterogeneous populations made up of a variety of ethnic or economic population groups.

It is interesting to compare New York with all cities in the United States as regards the use of the major forms of government.

Forty-one of New York's 62 cities, or 66%, operate under the mayor-council system. Eighteen, or 29%, use a council-manager system, while only three or 4.8% employ a commission system. Nationwide, the percentages are — roughly — 54% mayor-council, 37% council-manager, 3% commission, and 7% "town meeting" (a system not in use in New York).

SOURCE: New York Local Government Handbook (4th Ed.); ICMA Municipal Year Book (1990).

Obviously, the mayor-council form has greater relative popularity in New York than in the United States at large. This difference can probably be attributed to the diverse socioeconomic characteristics, as well as the age, of

many New York cities. The commission form, once promoted as a tool of municipal reform, has lost much of its popularity over the years.

STATISTIC ANALYSIS OF ACCESS TO GOVERNMENT ISSUES

From a Study prepared by James H. Svara, a professor of Political Science and Public Administration, North Carolina State University commissioned by the National League of Cities September 2003 and entitled "Two Decades of Continuity and Change in American City Councils".

In general the study revealed:

1.   City councils continue to grow more diverse in racial and ethnic terms with the percentage of people of color serving on city council doubling from 1979 to 2001 (7%- 13%)

2.   Representation of women increased in all size categories though there was no more gender diversity between 2001 and 1979.

3.   Council members are well educated 75% college degree, 40% professional or graduate degree.

4.   Council members typically receive little or only modest

compensation. Only 2% of council members from small cities (pop 25k-70k) receive $20k or more in salary.

5.   Effectiveness ratings tended to be lower in large cities than in small and medium cities.

Methodology

The 2001 study was based upon a mail questionnaire completed by a random sample of 664 council members in cities with populations of 25k and greater.

The Council Manager and the Mayor Council forms of government were primary respondents.

58%- Council-Mayor and 38% Mayor-Council.

Higher proportion of cities of over 25k use the council manager form.

Review for Outline – Study Commissioned by

National League of Cities, entitled "Two Decades of Continuity

And Change in American City Councils"

It was presented in September 2003 by James S. Vara. He is a professor of political science and public administration at North Carolina State University. The study itself was conducted in 2001 and it was based on a mailed questionnaire completed by a random sample of 664 council members in cities with populations of 25,000 and higher. Its results were compared with similar studies conducted by the National League of Cities in 1979 and 1989. Below are key highlights from the study related to the issue of access between various forms of government specifically those forms of government that are council vs. council manager.

Small cities are populations from 25,000 to 69,999. Medium-sized cities are populations from 70,000 to 199,999. Large cities are populations from 200,000 and more.

Demographic Characteristics.

• The council manager form is widely used in the west in cities of all sizes. The mayor council form is used in cities in the northeast. The mid-west is evenly divided between the two forms in small cities, but larger cities are more likely to use the mayor council form. Council manager governments have slightly more woman and fewer racial minorities on the council than do mayor council cities.

• Council members elected from districts are more likely to be from minority groups and are slightly younger on average and are equally likely to be female as council members

elected at large. (Page 4)

- The proportion of female council members is highest in western cities although regional differences are slight.

- African Americans are found most commonly among members in southern cities and minorities meaning Hispanics and Asians have the largest share of council seats in western cities.

Gender.

- The proportion of female respondents is slightly greater in council manager than in mayor council government types. (Page 5)

- There was very little difference based on form of government in the small cities but somewhat greater differences in the others.

- There is no difference in the percentage of women elected from districts or at large. Thus, by form of government, the survey in 2001 showed that on council manager types 70.5% are male, 29.5% are female and in mayor council types 73.1% are male and 26.9% are female. (Page 5)

- By constituency, again from the 2001 survey, elected from district 71.6% male, 28.4% female versus elected at large 71.7% male, 28.3% female. Again, very slight differences.

Race and Ethnicity.

- The proportion of minority members of the city council is very similar in small and medium-sized council manager and mayor council cities with the former, that is council manager, having a slightly higher proportion of minorities than the 11% in council manager versus 8% in mayor council in small cities and 20% and 17%, respectively, in

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medium-sized cities.

- More minority council members are elected from districts than at large – 18% versus 11%. The difference is particularly great for African American with 11% of the council members elected from districts compared to 5% elected from at large constituencies. (Page 7)

- When district elections are used in council manager cities, 21% of the council members are from minority groups compared to 15% minorities elected from districts in mayor council cities.

- Council members elected at large in both forms of government are equally likely to be from minority groups. District elections increased the representation of minorities and this effect is even greater in council manager than mayor council cities.

Age.

- There are fewer council members under 40 and more council members 60 and over than there were 10 years ago.

- However, this effect is most noticeable in small and medium-sized cities rather than large cities.

- There is a higher proportion of under 40 council members in mayor council than in council manager cities – 13% versus 7%. There is a slight tendency for younger council members to be elected from districts than in at large contests – 11% versus 8%. (Page 8)

Education and Employment.

- Council members are well educated in general. Less than 9% have not had at least some college education. Two in five have professional or graduate degrees beyond

undergraduate college.

- Council members are drawn heavily from business management and professional occupations.

Elections and Representation. (Page 13)

- Definitions of at large versus district elections. At large members are elected to serve the same constituency the population of the city as a whole. District elections select a single council member from a geographical selection or section of the city. Some cities combine these two methods and elect some council members at large and some from districts. The use of districts is widespread and the common method used in large cities. In council manager cities, 33% of the council members were elected from districts and 67% of the council members were elected at large.

- In mayor council cities, it is closer to the reverse – 60% are elected from districts and 40% are elected at large. (Page 14)

- There is a slight difference in the amount of time spent on constituency matters between those elected from districts versus those elected at large. Those elected from districts spend an average of 36% of their time on constituency matters versus those elected at large who spend 32% of their time responding to their constituents. (Page 14)

Representation and Reasons for Seeking Office. (Page 14)

- Council members elected from districts in council manager cities give greater emphasis to serving the entire city, 82% versus 65% in mayor council cities.

- At large members in mayor council cities were more likely to list enjoyment of politics as a very important reason for running (36%) than were the at large council members from

council manager cities (18%).

- At large candidates in council manager cities may reflect more of a traditional service orientation, however, their counterparts in mayor council cities have a stronger attraction to the political dimension of public office. (Page 15)

- However, overall most council members (81%) indicate a desire to serve the city as a whole as one very important factor for seeking office. (Page 14)

Groups Represented. (Page 15)

- The top ranked "Group" that council members often wished serve in deciding to run for office was neighborhoods.

- Elderly and racially minorities are second and third in the medium-sized cities and the order is reversed in the larger cities. In all sized cities the rank order for the next three groups is the same; women, ethnic groups and business, in that order of priority.

- However, there has been a substantial decline in the number of council members who attach great importance to representing groups since the 1989 survey. Council members are paying somewhat less attention to groups and not focusing on as wide a range of groups as they did previously.

- There doesn't seem to be any difference between the forms of government and the attitudes towards representing groups by council members. However, there is marked differences when it comes to white, African American, Hispanic and other minorities representing groups. African American, Hispanic and other minority council members are more sensitive to a wider variety of groups than are white council members (page 17). Female council members in comparison to males are much more likely to view the

representation of women and racial minorities as being very important.

Political Intentions and Council Characteristics. (Page 21)

•	In mayor council cities, members manifest greater interest in future political pursuits with one exception and that exception is the desire for seeking election among candidates elected in partisan contests where there is no difference between council manager and mayor council cities.

•	The desire for future political pursuits is slightly less in the council manager governments.

Council Organization and Process Council Committees. (Page 26)

•	Committee use is somewhat less common in council manager than in mayor council cities – 64% versus 85% of the council members, respectively, in cities with two forms of government report using committees. (Page 27)

•	Usage of committees in more common in mayor council cities of all sizes. In council manager cities 62% of the small cities 70% of the medium cities and 90% of the large cities use committees.

Citizen Relations and Public Image.   (Page 29)

•	Those who are physically close to all their constituents in districts appear to have a greater sense that the city is not doing enough to relate to citizens.

•	80% of the at large members in large cities rate public relations as good or better versus 59% of the district members. Over half the council members in cities of all sizes consider the city to be very receptive and 3 in 10 rate the city as moderately receptive to citizen input. Council manager cities are viewed as very receptive by 62% of the council

members compared to 44% of the mayor council representatives.

- As to assessing the level and quality of citizen's engagement, in other words, how active are citizens in participating in the public life. Almost half of the council manager representative rates participation as high compared to 37% of those from mayor council cities.

Variation by Form of Government. (Page 35)

- As between council manager and mayor council cities, there is little overall variation in the frustration levels of council members over specific types of issues. However, open meetings are a source of frustration to 25% in council manager cities versus 13% in mayor council cities.

- However, when the size of the city is considered, frustration levels as between the two types of government are exasperated.

- Council member conflict is a source of frustration and difference is pronounced between council manager and mayor council. In large cities, 25% of the council manager form of government consider council member conflict a problem versus mayor council form where 41% of the council members consider council member conflict an issue.

- Several other areas are different and there is a table on page 36 that outlines those. In general council members from different forms of government diverge in some areas as to their self-assessment.

- Mayor council councils believe they have a higher effectiveness in resolving citizen complaints, but there is no difference in the rating for responding to constituent demands.

- Council manager councils view themselves as slightly higher for approving the budget

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and addressing the problems of the city.

• In the remaining council functions that involve goal setting and oversight, there are substantially higher ratings in self-assessment from council manager cities than mayor council. (Page39 and Chart on page 41)

Roll Performance and Relationships. (Page 44)

• City councils in council manager cities higher and supervise the city manager who serves as the executive in this form of government.

• In mayor council cities, the executive is chosen by the voters for a 6th term and the council and mayor have offsetting powers. Thus, in the mayor council city the council and mayor operate more or less as equals. There is a chart on page 45 is somewhat interesting in that it is an assessment of world performance by the council members and it is broken down by small, medium and large and then the two forms of government, council manager and mayor council. For example, council members in mayor council cities are much more likely to agree that their intervention is necessary to secure adequate staff response to citizen complaints. In fact, 66% of council members in large mayor council cities versus 42% in council manager cities agreed that council intervention was necessary. So, in 2001, sentiment shifted towards the necessity of council member assistance with complaints in small cities and in medium-sized mayor council cities. Council members in medium sized and large council member cities are more likely than their counterparts in small council manager cities to stress getting services for constituents. But, less so than those in the mayor council cities except in large cities.

- In council manager cities, 39% of those elected from districts believe that council members need to get services for their constituents where as 33% of those elected at large take that position.

- As to governance, the council manager elected officials devote more attention to the governance role and are less involved in administrative details than the mayor council cities.

- Council members and council manager cities are less likely to feel that the council does not have enough time to deal with policy issues. They see themselves more as a leader in policy making and less as a reviewing and vetoing agency in city government. (At the top of page 48 there is a very good summary of the differences in terms of representational roles as between mayor council and council manager types of governments.)

Policy Process.

- On page 48 there is a table that summarizes by type of government and size of city how various representatives within the government rate among the council members; i.e. as very important source of initiating government policy.

- Over half of the council members in all cities regardless of size or form of government also feel that the city council is a very important source of policy initiation, not just approval.

- The relative importance of the mayor as a policy setter or policy initiator is naturally related to the form of government.

- When the mayor is the elected executive in the mayor council form, it's likely that the mayor will be a very important source of policy ideas. Fifty-seven percent of the mayor

council respondents consider their mayor to be a very important source of policy initiation.

- Almost two-fifths of the council members in the council manager form of government consider the mayor to be a very important source of policy initiation.

- On page 49 there is a fairly lengthy discussion of the differences in administrative position between the city manager and the mayor. There is a table on page 51 that basically indicates how well the executive, either the mayor in the mayor council cities or the city manager in the council manager cities, take direction from the council and provide the council with information, etc. Basically running the municipal organization. That is based on a response from the city council people.

- The city manager is the key official who acts visibly or behind the scenes as a policy advisor to the council. On the other hand, the mayor council city may not have a chief executive officer or any other equivalent official by any different title, and that official may be viewed as part of the mayor's office rather than a separate policy actor.

- The city manager is an employee of the council, whereas the mayor in the mayor council city is another elected official who is accountable to voters as are the council members. (Page 51)

- The city manager is viewed by the council members generally as an official who works for the council and supports its functions and is seen as accountable and forthcoming with alternatives and information.

- The mayor in mayor council cities who occupies a position with separate powers is seen by many council members as independent in pursuing goals and less open in providing

information to the council.

- Only two-fifths of the council members overall give the mayor positive ratings on providing sufficient alternatives as to policy and seeking to accomplish the goals of the council and providing information to support assessment of programs. (Page 52)

Conclusions and Implications. (Page 52)

- Council members have gotten progressively, but only slightly, better educated and councils keep getting slightly more diverse in racial and ethnic terms although there is no more gender diversity than in 1979.

- Council members continue to plan to run for another term on the council at the same or slightly higher rate than before.

- Council members are getting older. In 2001, only 9% were under 40 and 34% were over 60.

- In 2001, council members seem to have shifted a bit away from the delegate role and have re-established a bit more distance between themselves and their constituent groups in the city population. Council members are somewhat less likely to feel an obligation to speak for as many groups.

- Council members in both mayor council and council manager cities are committed to providing services to citizens.

- The council members in the mayor council cities, however, are more inclined to intervene with staff on behalf of their constituents, and to seek special benefits for their constituents.

- These council members who work within an elected executive mayor are less likely to

feel that they are effective and less likely to have a positive working relationship with the executive.

• The council members in council manager cities generally report a cooperative relationship with the city manager and rate their own effectiveness higher than their counterparts in the mayor council cities.

Chart I Gender and City Council Membership and Racial and Ethnic Minorities on Councils by City Size

By Form of Government, 2001 (n=639):	Male	Female
Council-Manager	70.5	29.5
Mayor-Council	73.1	26.9
By Constituency, 2001 (n+660):		
Elected from District	71.6	28.4
Elected At-Large	71.7	28.3
By Region, 2001 (n=655):		
East	73.0	27.0
Midwest	78.4	25.2
South	70.9	29.1
West	68.2	31.8

Racial and Ethnic Minorities on Councils by City Size, 1979-2001

	SMALL	MEDIUM	LARGE
1979	4.7%	7.6%	16.3%
1989	6.1%	11.1%	25.7%
2001	10.1%	18.3%	34.5%

5.   The proportion of female respondents is slightly greater in council-manager than mayor-council cities. There was little difference based on form of government in the small cities but greater differences in the others.

6.   The proportion of minority members of the city council is very similar in small and medium-sized council-manager and mayor-council cities with the former having a slightly higher proportion of minorities – 11% in council-manager versus 8% in mayor-council in small cities and 20% and 17% respectively in medium-sized cities.

7.   There is no difference in the percentage of women elected from district or at-large, whereas in 1989 a slightly lower proportion of women were elected from districts.

8.   As reported in previous studies, more minority council members are

elected from districts than at-large – 18% versus 11%. The difference is particularly great for African-Americans. Eleven percent of the council members elected from districts are African-American compared to 5% elected from at-large constituencies.

9.   In fact, when district elections are used in council-manager cities, 21% of the council members are from minority groups compared to 15% minorities elected from districts in the mayor-council cities. Council members elected at-large in both forms of government are equally likely to be from minority groups.

CHART II

Total Hours and Time Spent on Constituent Service

in Council-Manager and Mayor-Council Cities

	Small		Medium		Large	
	Council-Manager	Mayor-Council	Council-Manager	Mayor-Council	Council-Manager	Mayor-Council
Service Hours	5.9%	6.4%	8.2%	10.0%	14.7%	19.3%
Other Hours	13.2%	11.7%	17.8%	13.3%	22.6%	24.7%

• All <u>at-large</u> members are elected to serve the same constituency – the population of the city as a whole. <u>District</u> elections select a single council member from a geographical section of the city. Some cities combine these two methods and elect some council members at-large and some from districts.

• Among respondents from council-manager cities, 33% were elected from districts and 67% at-large. In mayor-council cities, the breakdown is close to the reverse: 60% are elected from districts and

40% at-large.

• Those elected from districts do spend a slightly higher percent of their time on constituency matters than those elected at-large. The former spends an average of 36% of their time, whereas the latter spend 32% of the time in responding to their constituents.

CHART III

VARIATION IN ATTITUDES TOWARD REPRESENTATIVE

BY CATEGORIES OF DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS

	White	African-American	Hispanic	Other
Race				
Representation of:				
Municipal employees	15%	35%	10%	40%
Neighborhoods	62%	76%	62%	87%
Women	20%	54%	38%	47%
Racial minorities	20%	68%	48%	47%
Ethnic groups	16%	53%	50%	40%
Political parties	2%	13%	14%	14%
Gender	**Male**	**Female**		
Women	19%	38%		
Racial minorities	22%	35%		
Age	**Under 40**	**40 - 59**	**60 +**	
Business interests	8%	20%	24%	
Municipal employees	10%	15%	23%	

• African-American, Hispanic, and other minority council members are more sensitive to a wider variety of groups than are white council members.

- Female council members in comparison to males are much more likely to view the representation of women and racial minorities as being very important.

- Thus, when councils are more diverse with respect to the presence of racial minorities and women, there is somewhat more direct representation of the groups from which these council members come.

CHART IV

EFFECTIVENESS TODAY COMPARED TO FIVE YEARS AGO

BY FORM OF GOVERNMENT

	Form of Government	
	Council-Manager	**Mayor-Council**
More effective	61%	48.4%
About the same	29.4%	36.8%
Less effective	9.5%	14.8%
(n=622)		

- Council members from cities with different form of government diverge in some areas in their self-assessments, as indicated above.

- Mayor-council councils have a higher effectiveness core in resolving citizen complaints.

- There is no difference in the ratings for responding to constituent

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demands.

- Council-manager councils have slightly higher ratings for approving the budget and addressing the problems of the city.

CONCLUSION

There are some clear choices in deciding upon the form of government. The trend is certainly in one direction.

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Council-Manager Government...
The Most Popular Form of U.S. Local Government Structure

Fast Facts About U.S. Cities:

- More than 92 million individuals live in cities operating under council-manager government.

- 63% of U.S. cities with populations of 25,000* or more have adopted the council-manager form.

- 57% of U.S. cities with populations of 10,000* or more have adopted the council-manager form.

- 53% of U.S. cities with populations of 5,000* or more have adopted the council-manager form.

*Source: *The Municipal Year Book 2005*, published by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), Washington, D.C. Percentages were derived by dividing the number of council-manager communities in a specific population range by the total number of cities in that population range.

FORM OF GOVERNMENT	2005	2004	2000	1996	1992	1988	1984
Council-Manager	3,475 (48.8%)	3,453	3,302	2,760	2,441	2,356	2,290 (35%)
Mayor-Council	3,091 (43.4%)	3,089	2,988	3,319	3,635	3,686	3,686 (56%)
Commission	145 (2%)	145	143	154	168	173	176 (3%)
Town Mtg.	338 (4.7%)	338	334	365	363	369	370 (6%)
Rep. Town Mtg.	63 (.8%)	63	65	70	79	82	81 (1%)
Unknown		3					
Total	**7,112	**7,091	**6,832	**6,668	**6,686	**6,666	**6,603 (100%)

**Totals for the number of U.S. local governments represent only those municipalities with populations of 2,500 and greater. There are close to 30,000 local governments with populations under 2,500.

Source for statistics inside table only: "Inside the Year Book: Cumulative Distribution of U.S. Municipalities" in *The Municipal Year Books* 1984-2005, published by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), Washington, D.C.   Revised 5/1/05

The Council-Manager Form of Government:

Answers to Your Questions

Q: **What is the council•manager form of government, which is used in so many cities, towns, and counties?**

A: The council•manager form is the system of local government that combines the strong *political leadership* of elected officials in the form of a governing body, with the strong *managerial experience* of an appointed local government manager. The governing body, commonly known as the *council*, may also be referred to as the *commission* or the *board.* The council-manager form establishes a representative system where all power is concentrated in the elected council and where the council hires a professionally trained manager to oversee the delivery of public services.

Q: **Is it a responsive form of government?**

A: In council•manager government, the *mayor* or *chairperson of the governing body* and *council members* are the leaders and policy makers elected to represent the community and to concentrate on policy issues that are responsive to citizens' needs and wishes. The *manager* is appointed by the governing body to carry out policy and ensure that the entire community is being served. If the manager is not responsive to the governing body's wishes, the governing body has the authority to terminate the manager at any time. In that sense, a manager's responsiveness is tested daily.

Q: **Are all council-manager governments structured the same way?**

A: No. One of the most attractive features is that the council-manager form is adaptable to local conditions and preferences. For example, some communities have councils that are elected at large while other councils are elected by district or by a combination of an at-large and by-district structure. In some local governments the mayor or chairperson is elected at large by the voters; others are elected by their colleagues on the governing body.

Q: What is the council's function?

A: The council is the legislative body; its members are the community's decision makers. Power is centralized in the elected council, which approves the budget and determines the tax rate, for example. The council also focuses on the community's goals, major projects, and such long•term considerations as community growth, land use development, capital improvement plans, capital financing, and strategic planning. The council hires a professional manager to carry out the administrative responsibilities and supervises the manager's performance.

Q: Where does the mayor or chairperson of the governing body fit in?

A: Mayors or chairpersons in council-manager communities are key political leaders and policy developers and their duties, responsibilities, and authorities depend on the organization's charter. In council-manager communities, typically the mayor or chairperson presides at council meetings, serves as a spokesperson for the community, facilitates communication and understanding between elected and appointed officials, assists the council in setting goals and advocating policy decisions, and serves as a promoter and defender of the community. In addition, the mayor or chairperson serves as a key representative in intergovernmental relations. The mayor or chairperson, council, and manager constitute a policy-development and management team.

Q: What is the manager's function?

A: The manager is hired to serve the council and the community and to bring to the local government the benefits of training and experience in administering local government projects and programs on behalf of the governing body. The manager prepares a budget for the council's consideration; recruits, hires, and supervises the government's staff; serves as the council's chief adviser; and carries out the council's policies. Council members and citizens count on the manager to provide complete and objective information, the pros and cons of alternatives, and long•term consequences.

Q: What is the cost to the local government of appointing a professional manager?

A: Local governments have found that overall costs actually have been reduced with competent management. Savings come in the form of reduced operating costs, increased efficiency and productivity, improved revenue collection, or effective use of technology.

Q: Does the manager participate in policy determination?

A: The manager makes policy recommendations to the council, but the council may or may not adopt them and may modify the recommendations. The manager is bound by whatever action the council takes.

Q: Is this form of government used only in certain kinds of cities?

A: No. In fact, it is not restricted to cities. It is used by towns and counties too. More than 3,400 cities operate under this form, and more than 371 counties operate under the council-administrator form. They vary greatly in size and characteristics.

Q: **How many Americans live in communities that operate under council-manager government?**

A: More than 89 million.

Q: **Is the form popular in large communities?**

A: Yes. Out of 237 cities with greater than 100,000 residents, 141 use this form of government. Some examples are Charlotte, North Carolina; Dallas, Texas; Las Vegas, Nevada; Oklahoma City, Oklahoma; Phoenix, Arizona; San Antonio, Texas; San Diego and San Jose, California; Virginia Beach, Virginia; and Wichita, Kansas. Large counties that use the structure include: Broward County, Florida; Clark County, Nevada; Fairfax County, Virginia; Hamilton County, Ohio; Mecklenburg County, North Carolina; and Santa Clara County, California.

Q: **How much citizen participation is possible under council•manager government?**

A: Successful examples of citizen participation in the local government service delivery

decision•making process are widespread among professionally managed communities. Because professional local government management offers government of the people, by the people, and for the people, it sets the stage for citizen activism by encouraging open communication between citizens and their government. Examples range from visioning, in which citizens play a major role in determining the future of their community, to neighborhood service delivery, which involves residents through the development of citizen/government partnerships, to community•oriented local government services.

Because political power is concentrated in the entire governing body rather than one elected official, more citizens have an opportunity to be elected to a position in which they have significant influence over the future of their community.

Q: What is the history of the council•manager form?

A: Born out of the progressive reform movement at the beginning of the 20th century, the council•manager system of local government is one of the few original American contributions to political theory. In 1908, Staunton, Virginia, instituted the first position legally defining, by ordinance, the broad authority and responsibility associated with today's professional local government manager. Sumter, South Carolina, was the first city to adopt a charter incorporating the basic principles of council•manager government in 1912. Westmount, Quebec, introduced the form to Canada in 1913. The first large city to adopt the plan was Dayton, Ohio, in 1914. The first counties to adopt it in the l930s were Arlington County, Virginia, and Durham County and Robeson County, North Carolina.

Since its establishment, the council•manager form has become the most popular form of government in the United States in communities with populations of 5,000 or greater. The form also is popular in Canada, Australia, the Netherlands, New Zealand, the United Kingdom, Honduras, Chile, and Brazil. For more than 94 years, council•manager government has responded to the changing needs of citizens and their communities.

Q: How can a community adopt this form of government?

A: Methods vary, but most communities can adopt council•manager government through a charter, a local ordinance, or a state enabling law. In many cases, adoption must be by vote of the local governing body. For information on how your community can adopt council•manager government, contact your state municipal league or association of counties. You can find the addresses of these organizations in ICMA's *Municipal Year Book* at your local library, or on the Internet.

Q: How is the manager selected?

A: The vacancy usually is announced in the *ICMA Newsletter*, and managers in other communities are invited to apply if they are interested. Managers, assistants, and others apply directly to the council, which reviews the applications and interviews qualified candidates.   ICMA makes no recommendations regarding candidates. Further information is available in the handbook *Recruitment Guidelines for Selecting a Local Government Administrator*, published by ICMA and available at http://jobs.icma.org/.

Q: Does the manager have to be a local resident at the time the appointment is made?

A: No. Local residence should not be required of applicants at the time the appointment is made. Managers are professionals who might serve several communities during their careers, bringing extensive experience coordinating public services and applying management techniques to a community.

Q: What salary does the manager receive?

A: Earnings of managers depend on their educational background and experience, the size and complexity of the local governments employing them, and the economic conditions of the regions where

communities are located. The council sets the manager's salary. Detailed information on salaries is compiled annually by ICMA and is available on request.

Q: Can the manager be fired?

A: Managers serve at the pleasure of the council or governing body. They can be fired by a majority of the council, consistent with local laws, ordinances, or employment agreements they may have with the council. Control is always in the hands of the elected representatives of the people.

Q: Where do managers get their experience?

A: Nearly 73 percent of managers surveyed by ICMA have a master's or a professional degree. Respondents indicated that they had spent an average of 17 years in the local government management profession.

Q: Do managers participate in local politics?

A: All managers who belong to ICMA are bound by its Code of Ethics, which states that every member of the Association shall refrain from all political activities that undermine public confidence in professional administrators and refrain from participation in the election of members of the employing legislative body.

Q: What else does ICMA's Code of Ethics cover?

A: The Code specifies 12 ethical principles of personal and professional conduct, including dedication to the cause of good government. ICMA members believe in the effectiveness of representative democracy and the value of government services provided equitably to residents within a community. ICMA members also are committed to standards of honesty and integrity more vigorous than those required by the law. Contact ICMA for a copy of the Code of Ethics or go to http://icma.org/ethics.

Q: What is ICMA?

A: In 1914, a group of appointed managers formed a professional association, eventually known as the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), to share their expertise and experiences in local government management.

Since that time, ICMA has been the professional and educational organization for administrators and assistant administrators serving cities, towns, counties, other local governments, and regional entities around the world. ICMA's membership also includes directors of state associations of local governments, other local government employees, academics, and concerned citizens who share the goal of improving local government. The purpose of ICMA is to create excellence in local governance by developing and fostering professional local government management worldwide. To that end, the Association provides technical assistance and publications for local government professionals to help them improve their skills and increase their knowledge. ICMA also serves as a clearinghouse for the collection, analysis, and dissemination of information and data about local government.

For further information on items referenced in this brochure, visit ICMA's form-of-government Web site at http://icma.org/formofgovt or see the contact information listed on the back panel of this brochure.

Q: Is there another organization that supports council•manager government?

A: Yes, the National Civic League is a nonpartisan citizens organization founded in 1895.   Its purpose is to serve as a clearinghouse for information on methods of improving state and local government; to encourage citizen participation in state and local government; and to provide guides, model charters, and laws on specific subjects. The League's *Model City Charter*, now in its seventh edition, has endorsed council•manager government since 1915.

For further information:

ICMA

777 North Capitol Street, NE

Suite 500

Washington, DC 20002-4201

Web site, http://icma.org/formofgovt

For form-of-government assistance in Alaska, California, Connecticut, Hawaii, Illinois, Indiana, Iowa, Maine, Massachusetts, Michigan, Missouri, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Nevada, Ohio, Oregon, Rhode Island, Vermont, Washington, and Wisconsin, contact: Michele Frisby at 202-962-3658; mfrisby@icma.org; or 202-962-3500 (fax).

For form-of-government assistance in Alabama, Arizona, Arkansas, Colorado, Delaware, District of Columbia, Florida, Georgia, Idaho, Kansas, Kentucky, Louisiana, Maryland, Mississippi, Montana, Nebraska, New Jersey, New Mexico, New York, North Carolina, North Dakota, Oklahoma, Pennsylvania, South Carolina, South Dakota, Tennessee, Texas, Utah, Virginia, West Virginia, and

Wyoming, contact: Martha Perego at 202-962-3668; [mperego@icma.org;](mailto:mperego@icma.org) or 202-962-3565 (fax).

National Civic League

1445 Market Street

Suite 300

Denver, Colorado 80202-1728

303-571-4343

Fax 303-571-4404

Web site, http://www.ncl.org/

Chart I
**Gender and City Council Membership and
Racial and Ethnic Minorities on Councils by City Size**

By Form of Government, 2001 (n=639):	Male	Female
Council-Manager	70.5	29.5
Mayor-Council	73.1	26.9
By Constituency, 2001 (n+660):		
Elected from District	71.6	28.4
Elected At-Large	71.7	28.3
By Region, 2001 (n=655):		
East	73.0	27.0
Midwest	78.4	25.2
South	70.9	29.1
West	68.2	31.8

Racial and Ethnic Minorities on Councils by City Size, 1979-2001

	SMALL	MEDIUM	LARGE
1979	4.7%	7.6%	16.3%
1989	6.1%	11.1%	25.7%
2001	10.1%	18.3%	34.5%

- As in previous surveys, the proportion of female respondents is slightly greater in council-manager than mayor-council cities. There was little difference based on form of government in the small cities but greater differences in the others.

- The proportion of minority members of the city council is very similar in small and medium-sized council-manager and mayor-council cities with the former having a slightly higher proportion of minorities – 11% in council-manager versus 8% in mayor-council in small cities and 20% and 17% respectively in medium-sized cities.

- There is no difference in the percentage of women elected from district or at-large, whereas in 1989 a slightly lower proportion of women was elected from districts.

- As reported in previous studies, more minority council members are elected from districts than at-large – 18% versus 11%. The difference is particularly great for African-Americans. Eleven percent of the council members elected from districts are African-American compared to 5% elected from at-large constituencies.

- In fact, when district elections are used in council-manager cities, 21% of the council members are from minority groups compared to 15% minorities elected from districts in the mayor-council cities. Council members elected at-large in both forms of government are equally likely to bef rom minority groups.

CHART II
Total Hours and Time Spent on Constituent Service
in Council-Manager and Mayor-Council Cities

	Small		Medium		Large	
	Council-Manager	Mayor-Council	Council-Manager	Mayor-Council	Council-Manager	Mayor-Council
Service Hours	5.9%	6.4%	8.2%	10.0%	14.7%	19.3%
Other Hours	13.2%	11.7%	17.8%	13.3%	22.6%	24.7%

• All <u>at-large</u> members are elected to serve the same constituency – the population of the city as a whole. <u>District</u> elections select a single council member from a geographical section of the city. Some cities combine these two methods and elect some council members at-large and some from districts.

• Among respondents from council-manager cities, 33% were elected from districts and 67% at-large. In mayor-council cities, the breakdown is close to the reverse: 60% are elected from districts and 40% at-large.

• Those elected from districts do spend a slightly higher percent of their time on constituency matters than those elected at-large. The former spend an average of 36% of their time, whereas the latter spend 32% of the time in responding to their constituents.

CHART III
VARIATION IN ATTITUDES TOWARD REPRESENTATIVE
BY CATEGORIES OF DEMOGRAPHIC GROUPS

Race	White	African-American	Hispanic	Other
Representation of:				
Municipal employees	15%	35%	10%	40%
Neighborhoods	62%	76%	62%	87%
Women	20%	54%	38%	47%
Racial minorities	20%	68%	48%	47%
Ethnic groups	16%	53%	50%	40%
Political parties	2%	13%	14%	14%
Gender	**Male**	**Female**		
Women	19%	38%		
Racial minorities	22%	35%		
Age	**Under 40**	**40 - 59**	**60 +**	
Business interests	8%	20%	24%	
Municipal employees	10%	15%	23%	

- African-American, Hispanic, and other minority council members are more sensitive to a wider variety of groups than are white council members.

- Female council members in comparison to males are much more likely to view the representation of women and racial minorities as being very important.

- Thus, when council are more diverse with respect to the presence of racial minorities and women, there is somewhat more direct representation of the groups fromwhich these council members come.

CHART IV
EFFECTIVENESS TODAY COMPARED TO FIVE YEARS AGO
BY FORM OF GOVERNMENT

	Form of Government	
	Council-Manager	**Mayor-Council**
More effective	61%	48.4%
About the same	29.4%	36.8%
Less effective	9.5%	14.8%
(n=622)		

- Council members from cities with different form of government diverge in some areas in their self-assessments, as indicated above.

- Mayor-council councils have a higher effectiveness core in resolving citizen complaints.

- There is no difference in the ratings for responding to constituent demands.

- Council-manager councils have slightly higher ratings for approving the budget and addressing the problems of the city.