

Mayoral Selection: By the Board vs. By the Voters

Under the original model of the council-manager system, the mayor was elected by and from the governing board, which is currently how North Carolina county boards of commissioners and boards of education elect their presiding officers. In council-manager cities, however, the direct election of mayor has become an increasingly popular adaptation. Frederickson, Johnson and Wood (2004) note: "The distinct majority of cities with council-manager statutory or charter legal platforms have altered those platforms to provide for the direct election of the mayor." Direct election of the mayor is also the overwhelming choice among cities and towns using the mayor-council form of government.

Possible effects of choosing board election or voter election of the mayor

Leadership effects

Direct election of the mayor is perceived to give the mayor more of a political mandate. Morgan and Watson (1992) cite research suggesting that direct election gives more strength to the position. "Kammerer (1964) also contends that direct election of mayors accords more strength to the position... Moreover, directly elected mayors tend to perform numerous ceremonial duties, thus increasing their public visibility. Consequently, as Wikstrom (1979) observes, the mayor may function as a local ombudsman, a role that in turn helps strengthen his or her political leadership."

Similarly, having the mayor selected by the board may give greater weight to the view of individual board members. DeSantis and Leal (1998) report: "managers whose mayors are elected from among the council are more likely than others to meet with individual elected officials to clarify their policy positions."

Nevertheless, if the mayor is elected by the board, this may indicate a willingness on the part of board members to take leadership direction from the mayor.

Voter perceptions

Direct election of the mayor allows voters to have more direct input in the political process while also maintaining the benefits of the council-manager system. This may increase voter satisfaction with the council-manager form of government.

- Frederickson, Johnson and Wood (2004) suggest that citizens want a combination of administrative and political leadership: "Citizens appear to want both the advantages of direct neighborhood representation and the assignment of overall political accountability to a mayor. But they also want professional leadership and a merit-based city administration functioning without political mischief."
- Protasel (1988) examined all cities that had abandoned the council-manager plan between 1976 and 1986. He found that only 26 percent of these cities allowed for the direct election of the mayor, whereas a 1986 survey found that 65 percent of council-manager cities allow for direct election of the mayor. He suggests that the combination of the council-manager form of government with mayors elected by the board may create a void

in leadership, which consequently leads to dissatisfaction and abandonment of the council-manager form of government.

Partisan politics

Directly-elected mayors in cities with partisan elections may be more likely to engage in partisan activity; some feel that partisan politics are more appropriate in state or national government. Morgan and Watson (1996) found: "Directly elected mayors tend to be more active in local party politics and are more likely to garner political support for their policy views."

Bibliography

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