How American City Governments Have Changed: The Evolution of the Model City Charter

H. George Frederickson, Curtis Wood, Brett Logan

We thank Terrell Blodgett, William Cassella, John Nalbandian, and James Svara for their thoughtful reading of an earlier draft of this article and for their suggested revisions.

Dynamic is hardly a word associated with government. Neither are changeable, malleable, adaptable, and responsive. Yet properly understood, many American cities, particularly seen over the long run, are all of those. Their structure and form change a bit here and a bit there, and when these changes are summed it is evident that cities are changeable things and that they change much more than is commonly understood.

The primary structural features of cities are based on generalized state statutes or specific city charters. They broadly fit into three forms: the mayor-council, or strong-mayor form; the council-manager form; and the commission form. Within each form there are rather wide differences in "detail," differences that are often important in terms of who has power, how democratic representation works, and what the quality of city administration is. These details are often in flux.

In simplified terms, these are the legal-statutory platforms of the three types of American city:

1. The mayor-council or strong-mayor form features separation of powers between the elected mayor and city council members; it also has checks and balances between them. The mayor has all executive powers while the council has all legislative powers. This form is similar to that of the state and federal governments; in comparative national terms it is often called the presidential model. About 40 percent of American cities have the mayor-council or strong-mayor legal platform.

2. The council-manager form features an elected council whose members together choose a professional city manager to whom all city departments report.
This model resembles the structure of a typical corporation and also has some similarities to the parliamentary form of national government, with its single executive, chosen by the legislature, to whom all departments report. About 60 percent of American cities use this legal-statutory platform.

3. The commission form is now rare in American cities, but it is still the dominant model of county government. In the commission form, the elected commissioners—there are usually three or five—have both executive responsibilities (such as being the commissioner for public works and roads) and legislative authority to act together to make law and policy for the city or county.

With this background, we return to the claim made earlier that American cities are quite changeable. One simple way to understand these changes is to trace the evolution of the Model City Charter.

The First Model City Charter

This examination of the evolution of the Model City Charter takes us back to January 25, 1894. On that day, in Philadelphia, 147 citizens gathered in response to a “Call for the First National Conference for Good City Government” issued by the Municipal League of Philadelphia and the City Club of New York. The impetus for this call was the wide perception of rampant graft, corruption, patronage, and spoils associated with city bosses and political machines. The reformers included Theodore Roosevelt, then a member of the U.S. Civil Service Commission; Charles W. Eliot, president of Harvard University; Marshall Field, a prominent Chicago businessman; and future cabinet members Charles Francis Adams and Charles J. Bonaparte. The purpose of this gathering was to consider how to rid cities of corrupt political machines. But there was another side to the story: “These primarily white, Anglo-Saxon, and Protestant reformers had looked upon civil service reform as one way to wrench power away from ethnic political machines. Under the spoils system, political parties obtained workers and money via political patronage and assessments . . . to obtain funds, however, the parties had to turn to businessmen and the wealthy for money. Political power was then transferred from the party members to the businessmen and other members of the elite who contributed to the party.”

Martin J. Schiesl describes the alternative as “the replacement of the ward system of public affairs with a centralized administration that would organize municipal services according to the business view of what was good for the community [thus reducing] the influence of lower-class groups in city government. . . .” The group assembled in Philadelphia voted to create a national municipal league and to help local leagues.

The National Municipal League (now the National Civic League, or NCL), founded in 1894, began producing and disseminating reports and papers. It was Edmund J. James, a political scientist at the University of Pennsylvania, who first introduced the concept of a model charter: “A Model city char-
ter must be . . . adapted to local and temporal conditions. . . . That scheme of
government is the ideal one . . . which under any given set of conditions makes
the working of good influence easy and of bad influence hard." A committee
of civic reformers and distinguished scholars was assembled in 1897 to
develop "a municipal program." The committee reported its recommendations
in 1899, and they were "published in 1900 as A Municipal Program."4

The first Model City Charter recommended the mayor-council form of gov-
ernment. Under this plan, the mayor would be directly elected and paid, have
veto power, and serve a two-year term. The members of the council would be
elected on a general ticket from the city at large and serve six-year staggered terms
without pay. The model charter recommended a city council of at least nine and
not more than fifty members, the precise number being determined by local con-
ditions.5 The charter called for an independent civil service commission, whose
"commissioners shall prescribe, amend and enforce regulations for appointment
to, and promotion in, and for examinations in the administrative service of the
city . . . ."6 Except for the at-large and nonpartisan components of this model, it is
very similar to a unicameral version of the state and federal governments.

The recommendation of a mayor-council form of city government was a
drastic departure from prevailing practice, and it gained little support. There was
reluctance to give the mayor such extensive powers. As a result, the tendency
was to place boards between departments and the elected chief executive, in the
desire to prevent scandal, but the result was to diffuse responsibility.7

In the same year as the adoption of the first Model City Charter, a tidal wave
hit Galveston, Texas. It is argued that "the special commission used to deal with
that emergency evolved into the commission form of government,"8 but there is
more to the story. A 1918 doctoral dissertation by a University of Iowa student sug-
gests that "the commission plan of city government, though popularly regarded as
being created by the city of Galveston to meet a special emergency, is by no means
in its essential principles an innovation of this century. . . . The old colonial system
of borough government, the New England town government, the government of
the national capital since 1878, the system of county government, and the plan of
appointing commissioners to manage their municipal affairs in times of emergency
adopted by various cities are all in some very important respect similar to the plan
initiated sixteen years ago by the Texas city on the gulf."9

The author further contends that Galveston, "which was governed by a
mayor and twelve aldermen elected by the people, had been characterized as 'one
of the worst governed urban communities in the whole country.'"10 The com-
mission form of government, which emerged in Galveston after the tidal wave,
happened not only because of the emergency but also in response to the poorly
managed affairs of the city. The commission plan was also not a new entity but
one that had been in existence for many years, particularly in American counties.

In any case, for a brief period the commission plan caught on, spreading to
"over four hundred . . . cities" by 1915;11 "typically, this form [of government] has
five commissioners elected at large. Collectively, they serve as the legislative body,
but each commissioner heads one administrative department or more. The National Municipal League found itself pressured to endorse the plan: "Then as now, however, the League rejected the commission plan because it fragmented the executive and permitted too little attention to policy development. The question was how to combine the 'short ballot' result that characterized the commission plan with the integrated, responsible executive provided in the League's first Model."

Revisions of the Model City Charter

1915 Model City Charter

In 1913, the league established a new committee on municipal reform to review the first Model City Charter and discuss other reform efforts. The man often credited with being the originator of the council-manager form of government appeared to strongly influence the drafting process of what would become the second Model City Charter. Richard S. Childs "promoted the ingenious combination of the experience in commission-governed cities and the basic organizational feature of private business—the appointed chief executive officer. The committee's first report in 1914 endorsed what came to be known as the council-manager plan."

The words "came to be known as" were used here because, initially, the plan was referred to as the "commission-manager" plan. Beginning in 1908, Staunton, Virginia, had a general manager serving a two-house council and sharing the executive function with the mayor. In 1912, the city of Sumter, South Carolina, had a manager who was responsible to a single elected council. By the end of 1915, eighty-two cities had adopted the council-manager plan. It is interesting to note that "Richard Childs himself, however, acknowledged in the early 1970s that the council-manager plan may date back to 1904, when the Ukiah, California Board of Trustees appointed an 'Executive Officer' to serve at its pleasure."

The council-manager plan in the second Model City Charter recommended a small council, elected by means of nonpartisan, at-large ballots, that would select a professional executive to manage the administrative functions of the city. The council could choose a ceremonial mayor who would serve a term of one or two years, with no veto power. The council's charge was to "elect one of its members as chairman, who shall be entitled mayor."

The duties of the mayor in this first council-manager charter were as follows:

The mayor shall preside at the meetings of the council and perform such other duties consistent with his office as may be imposed by the council. He shall be recognized as the official head of the city for all ceremonial purposes, by the courts for the purpose of serving civil processes, and by the governor for military purposes. In time of public danger or emergency he may, with the consent of the council, take command of the police and maintain order and enforce the laws. During his absence or disability his duties shall be performed by another member appointed by the council.
Thus it happened that between 1898 and 1915 the preferred form of American city government, at least as promoted by the reformers of the day, changed from the mayor-council to the council-manager plan.

1927 Model City Charter
In 1925, the 1913 Committee on a New Municipal Program was reconstituted and charged with further revising the Model City Charter, in light of ten years' experience with the council-manager plan. Although no important changes were found necessary, this third edition of the Model City Charter does have a number of innovations. It includes, for example, the first mention of the council selecting a vice-chairman or mayor pro tem. This person would serve if a vacancy occurred in the office of the mayor or if the mayor were absent or disabled.  

The first mention of council staff is also in the third edition of the model: "The council shall choose a city clerk and such other officers and employees of its own body as it may deem necessary. The city clerk shall keep the records of the council and perform such other duties as may be required by this charter or the council. Officers and employees of the council shall not be chosen for a definite term but shall continue to serve during the pleasure of the council."  

Finally, the third Model City Charter began the first of three editions that did not specify the terms of the mayor or council. With regard to the civil service department, adjustments were made regarding more centralized responsibility for administering city personnel systems.

1933 Model City Charter
By 1933, it was felt that the effects of the Great Depression warranted some revisions to the Model City Charter. National Municipal League President Murray Sengood appointed a committee that produced a model calling for a department of personnel, development of new provisions on slum clearance, new rules for counting ballots in a proportional representation election, and amplification of the sections on city planning and zoning. This edition of the model alludes to the clerk and other employees of the council being "in the classified service of the city, and shall be appointed, supervised and promoted, and may be reduced and removed by the city manager in accordance with the personnel section of this charter."  

1941 Model City Charter
The fifth edition of the model is referred to as the "completely revised fifth edition." The decision to further revise it was made in 1937 "in order that it might remain a modern document embodying the best that practical experience can offer." In light of advances in finance, personnel, planning, zoning, housing, elections, public utilities, and special assessments, eminent specialists were called upon to review and revise the 1933 Model City Charter, with the result that it was completely rewritten.

The 1941 model returns to the question of mayor-council government. The model recommends the council-manager plan, a ceremonial mayor and an
assistant mayor to be elected by the council, and a city manager also selected by the council. But it also suggested that many of the advantages of professional administration could be obtained in the mayor-council model of city government by changing the charter to provide for a professional administrator22: "The strong mayor form of government should be footnoted as 'second best alternative' to the city manager plan. Motion by Fesler seconded by Bauer, carried unanimously. Amendment to resolution suggested by Upson that in appendix actual draft of strong mayor form should be incorporated. Some difference of opinion left to Drafting Committee. Footnote should make clear that there should be no departure from fundamentals and that strong mayor plan is merely suggested in cities where manager cannot be adopted."23

The drafting committee decided to include a draft of the mayor-council form in the document but relegated it to an appendix entitled "General note as to election of Mayor, under a 'strong-mayor' form of government." Although the previous four editions of the model described merit principles such as examinations and classification systems, the fifth edition is the first to use the word merit.

The 1941 model charter favors the council-manager system, but it does provide guidelines for electing a mayor. Many features of the mayor-council system offered in the first model reappear in the fifth model. For example, the directly elected mayor would have veto power and his or her election would be at large. Department heads would report directly to the elected executive. However, the fifth model mentions that the elected mayor may appoint an "assistant mayor" who would serve as the administrative officer of the city. In this case, depending upon the duties assigned to that position, department heads could report directly to the mayor or to the mayor through the assistant mayor.

There are other differences between the first and fifth models. The first model, for example, specifies a two-year term for the elected mayor, while the fifth model does not specify term length. A number of changes were recommended regarding city councils. The first model called for at-large elections but does not specify the "Hare system" of proportional representation that is found in the fifth model. The recommended size of the council has decreased considerably, from nine to fifty members in 1900 to five to nine in 1941. The first model did not address the issue of council pay, but the fifth edition of the Model City Charter indicates that some pay is acceptable. Finally, bid and purchasing procedures, along with routinized budgeting, accounting, and auditing procedures, were not outlined in the first Model City Charter but are set out in some detail in the 1941 model.

1964 Model City Charter
The objective of the 1964 Model City Charter was to present a legal document in the form of a plan that was democratic but also capable of promoting efficiency and effectiveness.24 In the introduction to the sixth edition of the Model City Charter, Terrell Blodgett and William Cassella, Jr., describe two streams of thought concerning the purpose of the Model City Charter: "One view insists
that a Model present the 'ideal' structure of local government. The other view is to endorse a general principle of organization or process and present alternative means for achieving the basic end. For the first time, the model presents, in addition to the preferred provisions, alternatives for composing and electing the council and selecting the mayor. As Luther Gulick, chairman of the revision committee, stated in the introduction to the sixth model: "We recognize, of course, that there are cities, especially those in the largest population class, where the strong mayor plan is preferred. Provisions of the Model are appropriate for such a charter or can be readily adapted. This Model is not a text to be followed 'as is' but a guide and checklist, useful for all charters commissions and draftsmen. The charter for any city should be tailored to fit."

This move toward flexibility and tailoring can be seen especially in the alternatives offered with regard to council elections in cities using the council-manager form. These alternatives are at-large election, combination at-large election and nomination by district, combination district and at-large election, and proportional representation. In addition, the 1964 Model City Charter moved away from outlining rules, such as for personnel, instead suggesting that these matters are better dealt with in a separate model administrative code. The 1964 model once again addressed the issue of terms for council members. Having seven members of the council was suggested, with the three candidates receiving the highest number of votes serving for four years, and the four candidates receiving the next highest number of votes serving for two years.

As has been the case since the second edition of the model, the sixth edition endorses the council-manager form of government and describes other forms as options. For the first time, the model describes the option within the council-manager form of a directly elected mayor. A description of the mayor-council form of government is found in an appendix, and it is recommended that the mayor serve a four-year term. There is also a description of how easily the word mayor could be substituted for the word manager in the language outlining provisions for the mayor-council form of government. Further, the assistant-mayor concept first described in the fifth edition is explained in detail, particularly alternative titles for such a position: city administrator, executive officer, or chief administrative officer.

1989 Model City Charter
James H. Svara writes that there were two major concerns in revising the sixth edition of the Model City Charter: "First there was a perceived need to update the language and style of the charters, and it was feared that local groups considering charter revisions would give little credence to the documents because of their age. Second, there was a pervasive sense that the charters should confront issues regarding leadership and representation that had achieved greater salience since the previous editions were prepared."

This second concern is especially evident in larger-population cities with the council-manager form. As previously mentioned, two streams of thought
regarding the purpose of the model—ideal structure, or general principles with alternatives—were considered by this group of model drafters. What emerged was a “Model with Alternatives” that “will continue to endorse the council-manager plan, but will present alternatives for certain key provisions without indicating an absolute preference.”

The model outlines provisions for a mayor to be elected and to serve a four-year term in a council-manager system. Or the council may select a mayor and deputy mayor, who will serve at the pleasure of the council. In either case, the role of the mayor was expanded well beyond ceremonial duties to include presiding at meetings of the council; representing the city in intergovernmental relationships; appointing, with the advice and consent of the council, members of citizen advisory boards and commissions; presenting an annual state of the city address; and other duties specified by the council. As in the sixth edition of the model, the mayor-council form with a chief administrative officer is included, but it is in the appendix.

Although merit principles were endorsed in all previous models, the description of a full merit system appeared only in the seventh edition, which called for the city council to “provide by ordinance for the establishment, regulation and maintenance of a merit system necessary to effective administration of the employees of city departments, including but not limited to classification and pay plans, examinations, force reduction, removals, working conditions, provisional and exempt appointments, in-service training, grievances and relationships with employee organizations.”

The seventh Model City Charter describes the role of the mayor in council-manager government: “The mayor fills three facilitative roles that offer enormous leadership opportunities. First, the mayor can coordinate the activities of other officials by providing liaison between the manager and their council, fostering a sense of cohesion among council members and educating the public about the needs and prospects of the city. Second, the mayor provides policy guidance through setting goals for the council and advocating the adoption of policies that address the city’s problems. Third, the mayor is an ambassador who promotes the city and represents it in dealing with other governments as well as the public.”

From these new roles flow new responsibilities, such as appointing boards and commissions and giving the state-of-the-city message. The seventh charter then begins to rein in the expanding roles and responsibilities of the mayor by saying that “the mayor is preeminently a legislator, a member and leader of the council; the mayor is not an executive and not a full-time official.” The charter, however, goes on to say that this nonexecutive will need staff support, which can be provided by the city manager. Working together to offer this support, according to the seventh charter, “can often be arranged as part of a system whereby the mayor and the manager function as a team.” The 1989 charter then backs away from this newly forged “team” by saying that “the mayor and council collectively, as a body, oversee the operations of the city by the manager.”
Tying the Seven Model City Charters Together

It has been eleven years since publication of the last Model City Charter. The NCL is in the early stages of appointing committees and generally gearing up for the eighth Model City Charter in time for publication within the usual fifteen-year cycle between charters. The International City/County Management Association (ICMA), in a somewhat different fashion, is also considering generalized models of preferred forms of city government. ICMA does this in the form of "recognition."

On January 7–8, 2000, a twenty-one-member task force, convened by the ICMA executive board and chaired by Northeast Vice President Phil Schenck (town manager of Avon, Connecticut), met to examine ICMA's current council-manager recognition criteria and the process by which recognition should be determined in the future. The task force discussed how to simplify the process of determining who is a voting member of ICMA and how to develop a separate process for determining whether a jurisdiction operates under the council-manager government.

The task force recommended that ICMA define council-manager government in consultation with other relevant organizations, particularly the NCL, which develops and produces the Model City Charter. ICMA does not want to be viewed as the "sole, self-serving supporter of council-manager government." But ICMA would like to work closely with the NCL to update and revise the 1989 Model City Charter. If there are "serious reservations either during the process or with the end product," then the task force recommends ICMA decide on another course of action to define council-manager government. The task force recommendations were adopted by the ICMA executive board at its July 2000 meeting and are to be submitted to the membership for approval in early 2001.

As both the NCL and ICMA consider models and criteria for recognition, it is useful to review how things have changed. Fuller understanding of how things have changed is important to informed and reasonable development of future models. We tie things together in Table 1.

The Model City Charter has evolved from recommending a directly elected mayor with executive powers to recommending a mayor chosen by the council with more limited powers. Then, in 1941 (and ever since), the Model City Charter endorsed the ceremonial mayor in the council-manager form but found a directly elected mayor to be acceptable in both forms. Mayoral veto power was initially supported and then dropped for council-manager cities. Mayoral terms of office have generally moved from two years to four.

For eighty-five years, the Model City Charter has endorsed council-manager government, with a professional city manager chosen by the council on the basis of qualifications. Since 1941, the charters have also recommended an appointed professional executive in mayoral cities, selected on the basis of qualifications and chosen directly by the mayor. The model charter recommends that city
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Notes: aptoc = at the pleasure of council
Hare system = system of proportional representation
merit prin = merit principles (such as examination); merit sys = merit system (such as examination, pay, training, etc.)
MC = mayor-council form; CM = city manager or council-manager form
department heads report to the manager in council-manager cities and that the mayor retain executive control in mayor-council cities. Finally, all of the primary features of generally accepted good public management practices—a merit-based civil service; strict bid, contract, and purchase controls; an administratively developed budget, and so on—are found throughout the Model City Charters.

With this picture in place, we turn to the present and to the challenges faced by those who will develop the eighth Model City Charter.

Easily the biggest challenge has to do with the structural changes that mayor-council (Type I) cities and council-manager (Type II) cities have made. Over time, many mayor-council cities have changed structure to become more professional, efficient, honest, and accountable. Many council-manager cities have changed structure to foster political responsiveness in the form of directly elected political leadership and direct representation of districts and neighborhoods.

Using data from the 1996 ICMA survey, Frederickson and Johnson studied the institutional structures of 2,484 cities. They found that 3.7 percent of the cities were pure mayor-council (political) cities, 17.5 percent were pure council-manager (administrative) cities, and the balance of 78.8 percent of the cities were adaptations of the two forms, that is, adapted or Type III cities. To further differentiate among the large number of cities in the Type III category, Frederickson and Johnson created three types of adapted city: adapted political, adapted administrative, and mixed. The adapted political and adapted administrative cities are incrementally different from the pure political and pure administrative cities. However, the mixed city is a blending of, and a major departure from, either the mayor-council or the council-manager form.

Mayor-council cities are characterized by separation of powers between the mayor and council, considerable mayoral executive and administrative authority, and maximum political responsiveness for the council through district representation. Council-manager cities are characterized by a mayor who has neither political authority separate from the council nor administrative control and by a council elected by the entire community. Fully adapted cities are neither only political nor only administrative but a mix of both. The mixed city is characterized either by separation of powers between the mayor and council and little mayoral administrative control or by a mayor with ceremonial political authority and considerable administrative control.

The adaptations of mayor-council and council-manager cities have been incremental, step-by-step modifications to the city’s charter or statute base. Put another way, most council-manager cities have adopted several structural changes of the mayor-council form, although few have completely changed to the mayor-council form. The strong-mayor cities also have adopted structural modifications of the council-manager form, but few have entirely changed to the council-manager model.

The results of the 1996 ICMA survey were also examined and summarized in an article written by Tari Renner and Victor S. DeSantis. Table 2 shows
Table 2. Results of the 1996 ICMA Survey

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Mayor-council cities with a chief administrative officer</td>
<td>50.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attempts to modify structure or form:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayor-council</td>
<td>13.4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council-manager</td>
<td>14.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Council-manager cities with directly elected mayor</td>
<td>61.1 (1992)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Type of election system (all forms):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>At-large</td>
<td>60.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>District only</td>
<td>16.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mixed</td>
<td>22.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayor not on council:</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In council-manager form</td>
<td>15.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>In mayor-council form</td>
<td>65.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayor has voting power (council-manager form):</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>On all issues</td>
<td>74.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>To break a tie only</td>
<td>22.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Never</td>
<td>1.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mayor’s power to veto in council-manager form</td>
<td>11.1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

some of the results of the survey with regard to structural changes found in council-manager and mayor-council forms of government.

Ebdon and Brucato’s study of 193 cities with a population over one hundred thousand (1990 census number) between 1980 and 1994 found evidence of convergence between the council-manager and mayor-council forms of government. Mayor-council cities still use district elections more than council-manager cities, but the gap is narrowing. They found that more than one half of the larger council-manager cities use district elections. They also found that in 87 percent of the larger council-manager governments the mayor was chosen by direct election. Only 10 percent of the larger council-manager systems still had at-large elections for council members and a mayor who was selected from the council. The researchers conclude that “both forms, then, are increasingly combining these two values in their structural design.”

Recently, even more profound adaptations are evident. Some large council-manager cities (such as Cincinnati, Ohio, and Kansas City, Missouri) have enhanced the power of the mayor. Beginning in 2001, the mayor in Cincinnati will be directly elected at large, have veto authority, be able to nominate a city manager, initiate termination of the manager, appoint boards and committees, set the council agenda, present the budget, and hire assistants. In Kansas City, the mayor now has veto authority, can nominate a city manager, can appoint members to boards and commissions, and presents the budget to the council. Yet at the same time, these cities have retained the council-
manager form of government. Oakland, California, has recently changed its charter from council-manager to mayor-council. The mayor can now terminate the services of the city manager without the consent of the council. These larger cities appear to have changed their charters in such a way as to be mixed and are no longer clearly either council-manager or mayor-council forms.

It is important not to be preoccupied by the structural changes of a few large cities. The great majority of cities are still based on either the mayor-council platform (following the logic of separation of powers) or the council-manager platform (following the logic of unitary or parliamentary government). It is, however, also evident that the structures built on these platforms have changed—in some cases significantly—over the last fifty years.

To write the eighth Model City Charter, the NCL will be challenged to take these changes into account. Because the differences and distinctions between the two dominant statutory platforms—council-manager and strong mayor—are now blurred, a whole new approach may be necessary.

Bill Hansell, executive director of the ICMA, notes that council-manager cities increasingly have "direct election of the mayor, district or part at-large and part district elections of council members, higher compensation for elected officials, partisan elections, veto power for the mayor, mayoral appointments of council committee and chairs, and mayoral appointments of citizens to serve on authorities, boards, and commissions." He proposes four variations in city government structure:

1. A mayor-council-manager form, where the mayor is selected by his or her fellow council members
2. A mayor (at-large)-council-manager form, where the mayor is elected by the voters to the position of leader of the council with a council vote
3. A mayor (empowered)-council-manager form, where the mayor is separately elected by the people, with special veto power, authority to nominate a city manager, and the power to review the city manager's proposed budget before it is submitted to the council
4. A mayor (under separation of powers)-council-manager form, where the mayor does not serve on the council and does not vote; in this alternative, the mayor serves as the chief executive officer and appoints a city manager subject to approval by the council

On the basis of their research, Frederickson and Johnson write that "the formal legal description of a given city as either council-manager or mayor-council is less accurate than the particular structural variations that the citizens of a given community have chosen to adopt in order to make their government reflect citizens' preferences and values." Earlier research by Adrian is complemented by Frederickson and Johnson's recent work, which suggests that "distinctions between cities on the basis of their legal platforms
are less and less meaningful and have little explanatory power. The eighth Model City Charter will have to respond to these new realities.

For a century, the seven Model City Charters have served as guides and templates to anyone interested in how to organize and manage cities. Looking back, we conclude that the Model City Charters are splendid documents illuminating the changing values and beliefs of the leading city specialists of each era. In the sweep of history, these charters reflect the dynamics of structural adaptation. The evidence is clear: American cities are anything but static.

The challenge at hand is to somehow capture the range of beliefs and opinions as to how best to organize, govern, and manage the American city. The task before the NCL is nothing less than to develop a guide and a template for the American city in the twenty-first century.

Notes

23. Model City Charter Committee. "Memorandum as to Decisions Reached at Meeting of Model City Charter Committee." (Memorandum.) Chicago, June 4–6, 1937.
44. Frederickson and Johnson (unpublished).
46. Frederickson and Johnson (unpublished).

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