

Mayor / Council

Features

Voters directly elect a mayor and Council. The Council size varies from 7 to 15. The mayor is the chief executive who appoints key officials and all or some boards, and prepares budget, approves contracts, negotiates with unions and oversees administration. A mayor may be empowered to veto some Council actions. The elected Council is the legislative body, and adopts budgets, adopts laws (ordinances, zoning, etc.), approves indebtedness (bonding), and may be empowered to approve or veto some Mayor appointments. The council also may appoint some boards and committees. Mayor is also usually a voting member of school committee. A limited number of boards and/or commissions may be elected.

Pros

- Chief executive elected directly
- Small legislative body
- Frequent meeting of legislative body

Cons

- Potential for political appointments to administrative positions
- Smaller citizen participation in decision-making
- Less potential for professional administration in technical areas

See Charters for:

Fall River: fallriverma.org/ordinances_link.htm

Newton: www.ci.newton.ma.us/Legal/Ordinance/title.htm

Town Council / Town Manager

Features

Voters elect Council and the Council appoints a City or Town Manager. Manager is chief executive, appoints key officials, prepares budget, approves contracts, negotiates with unions and oversees administration. The elected Council is the legislative body and adopts budgets, adopts laws (ordinances, bylaws, zoning, etc.), approves indebtedness (bonding), and may be empowered to approve or veto some Manager appointments. A town 'manager' is voting member of school committee but only on union contracts; a town 'administrator' sometimes serves in this role. A limited number of boards and/or commissions may be elected.

Pros

- Smaller legislative body
- Frequent meeting of legislative body
- Ability to establish experience and qualifications for chief executive
- Ability to remove appointed chief executive at any time by vote of elected council

Cons

- Smaller citizen participation in decision-making

See Charters for:

Franklin: www.franklin.ma.us/auto/town/charter/default.htm

Cambridge: www.cambridgema.gov/cmanager.cfm

Open Town Meeting / Selectmen Town Manager or Administrator

Features

All voters are eligible to debate and vote on budgets, bylaws and all matters brought before town meetings, and approve indebtedness (bonding). Town Meeting acts as the legislative body of the town. The executive branch of government consists of the selectmen and manager. An elected board of selectmen (usually 3 or 5) appoint a manager, sets policy, appoints boards and committees and may be authorized to approve or veto some of manager's appointments and approve union contracts. The manager is the chief administrative officer (CAO), appoints department heads and other employees, prepares budgets, awards contracts, negotiates with unions, and oversees administration. A town 'manager' is voting member of school committee but only on union contracts; a town 'administrator' sometimes serves in this role. Fair number of boards and/or commissions may be elected.

Pros

- Direct and broad citizen participation in government
- Ability to establish qualification for appointed chief executive
- Appointed executive can be removed at any time by elected board

Cons

- Cumbersome decision making by legislative body
- Legislative body less likely to be knowledgeable on issues
- Shared executive authority between elected board and appointed manager can obscure responsibilities.

See Charters for:

Bedford: www.town.bedford.ma.us

Sturbridge: www.town.sturbridge.ma.us

Representative Town Meeting (RTM) Selectmen / Town Manager or Administrator

Features

A limited number of voters are elected, usually by district, to represent all voters in a representative town meeting (RTM). Size can vary widely (less than 100 to more than 300). RTM is the legislative body of town and it debates and approves budgets, bylaws, and all matters brought before town meeting. RTM also approves indebtedness (bonding). The executive branch of the government consists of the selectmen and the manager. An elected board of selectmen (usually 3 to 5) appoint a manager, set policy, appoint boards and committees and may be authorized to approve or veto some manager's appointments. The board also approves union contracts. The manager is the chief administrative officer (CAO), appoints department heads and employees, prepares budgets, awards contracts, negotiates with unions, and oversees administration. A town 'manager' is voting member of school committee but only on union contracts; a town 'administrator' sometimes serves in this role. Smaller number of boards and/or commissions may be elected.

Pros

- Somewhat larger (than Council) representative legislative body participates directly in government
- Legislative body more likely to be informed on issues that open town meeting.
- Ability to establish qualifications for appointed chief executive
- Ability to remove appointed executive at any time by elected board.

Cons

- Difficulty in achieving broad community 'representation', achieving quorums, and keeping the 'status' of town meeting members up to date
- The size of the legislative body can present challenges in trying to educate and provide information to this group prior to the decision making process

See Charters for:

Danvers: www.danvers-ma.org/bylaw.htm

Shrewsbury: www.shrewsbury-ma.gov