



# Charter Review

## Form of Government Subcommittee Agenda

Tacoma Municipal Building North, 733 Market Street, Room 12

[www.cityoftacoma.org/charterreview](http://www.cityoftacoma.org/charterreview)

March 24, 2014 – 5:30 p.m.

1. Call to Order
2. Roll Call
3. Review and Discuss Preliminary Subcommittee Report
4. Review Next Steps
5. Public Comment
6. Committee Comments
7. Adjournment



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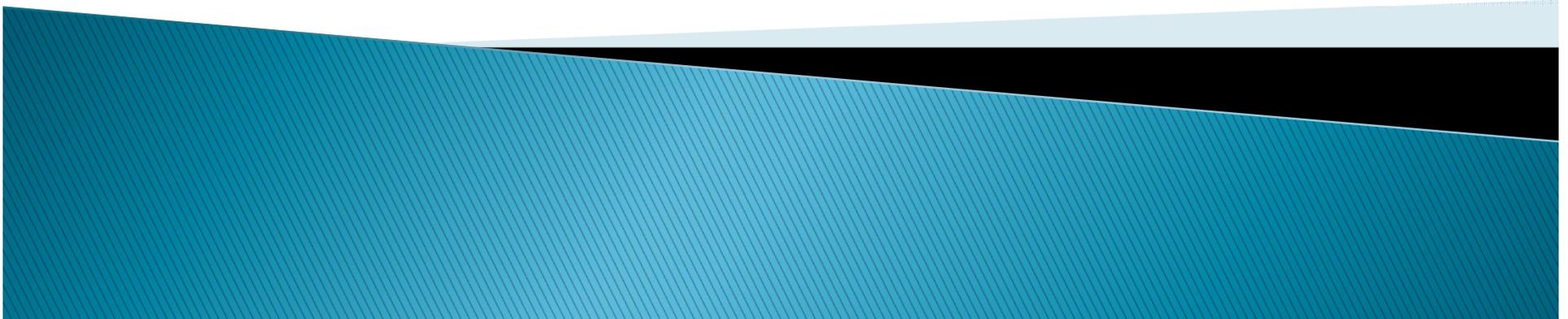
**2014 TACOMA CHARTER REVIEW**  
A LOOK AT HOW YOUR CITY WORKS

# Preliminary Report

Form of Government Subcommittee

City of Tacoma Charter Review Committee

March 24, 2014



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## The Form of Government Subcommittee [FOG] has seven members:

- ▶ Bill Baarsma [appointed by Mayor Strickland]
- ▶ Gary Brackett
- ▶ Mabel Edmonds [appointed by Deputy Mayor Woodards]
- ▶ Jim Merritt [appointed by Council Member Boe]
- ▶ John Messina [appointed by Council Member Ibsen]
- ▶ Ken Miller, Chair
- ▶ Justin Van Dyk, Vice Chair [appointed by Council Member Lonergan]

We've had staff support from Jeanne Harris, April Larsen, and Doris Sorum; and from two student interns from the University of Puget Sound, Brian Gerrity and Sarah Hoffman.



## DRAFT

As part of the larger Charter Review Committee we heard testimony on the subject of Form of Government from 19 individuals, including:

- ▶ Stan Finklestein, former Executive Director, Association of Washington Cities
- ▶ Mayor Marilyn Strickland
- ▶ former Mayor Brian Ebersole
- ▶ former Mayor Mike Crowley
- ▶ former Mayor Harold Moss
- ▶ City Manager T.C. Broadnax
- ▶ former City Manager Doug Sutherland
- ▶ former Federal Way Mayor Skip Priest
- ▶ former Spokane Mayor John Powers
- ▶ Tacoma City Council Members Anders Ibsen, Robert Thoms, David Boe, Ryan Mello, Victoria Woodards, Marty Campbell, and Lauren Walker
- ▶ former Tacoma City Council Members Connie Ladenburg and Rick Talbert
- ▶ former Pierce County Executive John Ladenburg



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FOG has met six times and members have worked outside subcommittee meetings to answer two questions:

- ▶ Is the form of government sufficiently important that the City Council should place the issue before the voters?
- ▶ If so, do we have a view as to which form of government is preferable?



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## To answer these questions, FOG used 11 criteria for research and analysis

- ▶ Some criteria are conceptual or philosophic.
  - Rather than “measure” how well the forms of government match these criteria, we used logic and political theory to determine whether one form or the other is superior.
  - “Organizational Clarity” is an example of a conceptual criterion. We analyzed model charters and discussed their strengths and weaknesses regarding “clarity.”
- ▶ Other criteria are more quantitative or factual.
  - We looked for correlations between form of government and criteria such as poverty or the size of city.
  - As a data base we used 86 U.S. cities with populations between 150,000 and 250,000. Tacoma, with a population of 200,000, is in the middle of this group.



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## Here is an overview of the 86 cities in our benchmark group:

- ▶ Half – 43 cities – are in four states: California, Texas, Florida, and Arizona
- ▶ Two-thirds of the cities have the Council/Manager form of government
- ▶ 38 of the cities are represented in Congress by Republicans, 56 by Democrats (a vacancy affects two cities)
- ▶ 60 percent of the cities are in so-called “right to work” states
- ▶ the percent of people in poverty ranges from 6 to 35 percent
- ▶ the median age of the cities ranges from 26 to 45 years old



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# Criteria Overview

Criteria [Lead Analyst]	Council/Manager	Mayor/Council	Mayor/Council/CAO
Diversity [Merritt]	no distinction among forms of government		
Power of the People [Edmonds]	somewhat limited or diffused	most empowering for voters	between the other two
Responsiveness/Accountability [Merritt]	somewhat limited or diffused	highly responsive and accountable	between the other two
Organizational Clarity [Messina]	responsibility may be blurred	responsibility is clear	responsibility is clear
Balance of Power [Brackett]	no distinction among forms of government		
Geo-political Considerations [Messina]	the City is somewhat weakened in interaction with other governments, investors et al.	the City has a clear spokesperson and leader	between the other two

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# Criteria Overview Continued

Criteria [Lead Analyst]	Council/Manager	Mayor/Council	Mayor/Council/CAO
Fiscal Accountability [Van Dyk]	no distinction among forms of government		
Corruption [Van Dyk]	no distinction among forms of government		
Business Climate [Brackett]	no distinction among forms of government		
Demographics [Miller]	cities with high % of college graduates and fewer people in poverty seem more likely to have Council/Manager; otherwise no distinction among forms of government in terms of party affiliation, size of city, ethnic mix.		
Vision and Strategic Thinking [Baarsma]	emphasis is on operational effectiveness	emphasis is on setting and achieving strategic goals	maximizes the benefits of the other two



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# Diversity

- ▶ We define diversity as the vigorous participation of all segments of a city in government.
- ▶ We also define diversity as a richness of thought and experience, so city government is constantly refreshed and challenged.
- ▶ We found neither data nor logic nor political theory to say one form of government is better than another at promoting diversity, except in so far as one form may be more generally responsive than another.



# Power of the People

- ▶ We define power of the people as meaning the ability of the electorate to select – and remove – the leaders of government, as well as the rights of initiative, referendum and recall.
- ▶ In this regard, logic and political theory tell us the Mayor/Council [M/C] and the Mayor/Council/CAO [M/C/CAO] forms are more empowering; not only the legislative branch but also the executive branch are led by directly elected officials.
- ▶ At least one sub-committee member has a divergent view: that because an elected executive Mayor may accumulate power, s/he may be able to act against the interests of the electorate.
- ▶ Most sub-committee members believe elections and the rights of initiative, referendum and recall are adequate protection against this risk. These latter rights exist regardless of the form of government.



# Responsiveness and Accountability

- ▶ We define this topic to mean how well elected officials respond to the needs and wishes of the electorate, and to what extent officials are held responsible.
- ▶ Responding to needs and wishes does not mean automatically meeting them; rather it means evaluating them in good faith and communicating decisions in a clear and timely manner.
- ▶ Political theory, logic and our experience tell us the M/C and – to a lesser extent – the M/C/C forms will be more responsive, if for no other reason than it is easier for the electorate to hold the Mayor accountable than to hold an appointed manager accountable.



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# Organizational Clarity

- ▶ This means it's easy for citizens to understand who does what in government.
- ▶ We strongly believe the C/Mgr form is not clear in terms of direction-setting and decision-making. This lack of clarity is in fact dangerous in a democracy, as it can erode the confidence of citizens in their government.
- ▶ The C/Mgr form has an additional disadvantage in that it is counter to the form of government at the federal, state and county levels, and so confusing to many people.



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# Balance of Power

- ▶ Balance of power refers to the appropriate division of power between the legislative branch – in this case, the City Council – and the Executive branch, which the current charter calls Administrative.
- ▶ At other levels of government we have well-established and valid checks and balances between the branches, to ensure vigorous debate and to prevent one person or faction from accumulating a dangerous amount of power.
- ▶ There are balance-of-power differences among the forms of government, but we believe they are minor and off-setting.
- ▶ In the C/Mgr form, the Council has the power to dismiss the Manager. In practice this happens about as often as the voters decide to change their elected officials; the average tenure of a city manager is about seven years.
- ▶ The C/Mgr form tends to obscure the political maneuvering between the two branches, and promotes the fiction that the legislative branch has a monopoly on power.



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# Geo-political Considerations

- ▶ We define geo-politics as the relationships between the city and other entities, whether other local governments, regional organizations, cities in other parts of the U.S. or the world, and potential stakeholders like investors.
- ▶ We believe a clearly identified and empowered city leader – an executive mayor, in other words – is better able to engage the world outside the city. Such a leader is better able to commit executive resources and to garner political capital, and so will be more effective.



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# Fiscal Accountability

- ▶ We take this criterion to mean the diligent and transparent management of the city's resources.
- ▶ We find neither data nor political theory nor logic to suggest one form of government is superior in this regard.



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# Corruption

- ▶ The C/Mgr form emerged in part as a “good government” response to the corruption of the political machines in northern and mid-western cities. A career city manager – especially those who expected to move from city to city over their careers – was thought to be less corruptible than an elected mayor who was enmeshed in local webs of power.
- ▶ We looked at our benchmark cities, using Department of Justice data, and found virtually no difference between the forms of government in terms of corruption.
- ▶ Over the past five years, only two mayors – from Orlando, Fl. and Providence, RI. – were convicted of corruption; no city managers were indicted during that period.
- ▶ Based on logic, political theory and local experience, there is no reason to think one form of government is superior to another in terms of promoting or protecting against corruption.



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# Business Climate

- ▶ We define business climate as conditions which encourage or discourage successful private sector activity [including the nonprofit sector]. Typically factors include the type, amount and stringency of regulation, tax burden, workforce quality, and infrastructure.
- ▶ The C/Mgr form took hold during the post-World War II population shift to the south and west, primarily into so-called “right to work” states. These stood in contrast with the heavily unionized – and Democrat-leaning – northern cities. As a result, the C/Mgr form came to be considered “good for business.”
- ▶ We find neither data nor logic nor political theory to suggest one form is superior in modern times.



# Demographics

- ▶ This is actually a cluster of criteria. We looked for links between form of government and several factors including
  - a) percent of population non-Hispanic white; b) percent of population in poverty; c) percent of population over age 25 with at least a Bachelor's degree; d) cities represented in Congress by either Democrats or Republicans; and e) size of city.
- ▶ We found two possible correlations: cities in which more than 30 percent of the people had at least Bachelor degrees were all C/Mgr cities; and cities with more than 20 percent of the population in poverty strongly tended to be M/C cities.
- ▶ Otherwise there was no apparent correlation with size of city, political party, or ethnicity.



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# Vision and Strategic Thinking

- ▶ This criteria asks whether one form of government is more likely to promote an aspirational, long term approach to leadership; we believe this kind of leadership can rally the entire community to pursue a better future.
- ▶ Based on political theory, logic and experience, we believe the M/C and M/C/C forms are superior in this regard, for a few reasons.
- ▶ The C/Mgr form is focused on “doing things right.”
- ▶ Obviously this is necessary; but it may not be sufficient.
- ▶ Sometimes cities also need to focus on “doing the right things,” or put another way, charting a course into the future.
- ▶ We believe at this point in its history Tacoma is such a city.
- ▶ Managers focus on stability and predictability; when change occurs they prefer it to be gradual and measured.
- ▶ Leaders seek vaulting change, which by its nature is disruptive. An administrator can’t muster the political capital to cause such a change; and a council, no matter how courageous, by its nature is diffused.
- ▶ Because we believe Tacoma needs – and is primed for – transformation, we believe a different form of government is appropriate.



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Based on our research and analysis, we answer FOG's two starting questions as follows:

- ▶ Does the form of government rise to such a level of importance that the City Council should place the issue before the voters?
- ▶ If so, do we have a recommendation as to which form of government is preferable?

We ask the Charter Review Committee to endorse our answers and pass them on to the Tacoma City Council with a strong “do adopt” recommendation.



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# Options

We see three possible recommendations to the City Council:

- ▶ Make no change in the current Council/Manager form
- ▶ Modify the current Council/Manager form in a few specific ways [to be determined]
- ▶ Recommend a change to the Mayor/Council/CAO form

And the City Council has at least three options:

- ▶ Put nothing on the ballot regarding form of government, de facto endorsing the current form
- ▶ Offer modifications to the current form
- ▶ Recommend a change to the Mayor/Council/CAO form
- ▶ Ask voters to choose among three options: [current, modified current, Mayor/Council/CAO]

