

CITIZENS LEAGUE REPORT

No. 23

A Fact Sheet
Terms of Office for Alderman and
elected Executive Officials

May 1954

Forms and Structure of Government Committee
 Sub-Committee on Four Year Term

PART SHEET
 ON
 TERMS OF OFFICE FOR ALDERMEN AND ELECTED
 EXECUTIVE OFFICIALS

1. What does the Minneapolis Charter now provide?

Chapter 2, Section 6 of the charter, as amended by vote of the people on June 11, 1951, reads:

"At the next general City election held more than six (6) months after the adoption of this amendment and at each subsequent general City election, there shall be elected a Mayor, a Treasurer, a Comptroller and one (1) Alderman from each ward for a term of two (2) years. The term of each of said Officers shall commence on the first Monday of July following the date of his election. The terms of all aldermen in office on the date of such next general City election held more than six (6) months after the adoption of this amendment shall terminate on the first Monday of July following."

2. Why was the term for aldermen decreased from four to two years in 1951?

The chief issue in the 1951 amendment was the reduction in size of the City Council from 26 aldermen to 13. One person who was close to the campaign to reduce the Council's size has said that the proponents of the measure wanted to continue the four year term with the smaller Council. However, the two-year term was suggested by the Charter Commission and proponents of the smaller Council did not want to jeopardize their bigger goal by insisting on the four-year term.

The term for Mayor, Treasurer and Comptroller was two years in the charter adopted in 1921.

The following data relate to terms of councilmen.

3. What is the practice in other cities?

Table 1 shows terms of office and other data on councilmen in the 35 United States cities with populations of 250,000 to 1,000,000. Data on term in 1953 may be summarized by size of city and form of government as shown on page 2.

APPENDIX A

TERMS OF OFFICE AND OTHER DATA ON COUNCILMEN

United States Cities with 1950 Population of 250,000 to 1,000,000: 1934 and 1953

1934

1953

City	Population (in 000's)	Form of gov't.*	No. of councilmen elected:			Over- lapping	Population (in 000's)	Form of gov't.	No. of councilmen elected:			Over- lapping
			at large	by distr.	Term				at large	by distr.	Term	
Baltimore	805	MC	1	18	4	No	950	MC	1	20	4	No
Cleveland	900	MC	0	33	2	No	915	MC	0	33	2	No
St. Louis	822	MC	0	29 ⁽¹⁾	4	Yes	857	MC	1	29	4	Yes
Boston	781	MC	0	22	2	No	801	MC	9	0	2	No
San Francisco	634	MC	11	0	4	Yes	775	MC	11	0	4	Yes
Pittsburgh	670	MC	9	0	4	Yes	677	MC	9	0	4	Yes
Milwaukee	578	MC	0	27	4	No	637	MC	0	27	4	No
Houston	292	Com	4	0	2	Yes	596	MC	3	5	2	No
Buffalo	573	MC	5	9	4	2-Distr. Yes 4-at lar. No	580	MC	6	9	4	2-Distr. Yes 4-at lar. No
New Orleans	459	Com	5	0	4	No	570	Com	1	7	4	No
MINNEAPOLIS	464	MC	0	26	4	Yes	522	MC	0	13	2	No
Cincinnati	451	Mgr.	9	0	2	No	504	Mgr.	9	0	2	No
Seattle	366	MC	9	0	3	Yes	468	MC	9	0	4	Yes
Kansas City Mo.	400	Mgr.	5	4	4	No	457	Mgr.	5	4	4	No
Newark	442	Com.	5	0	4	No	439	Com.	5	0	4	No
San Diego	148	Mgr.	7	0	4	Yes	435	Mgr.	1	6	4	Yes
Dallas	260	Mgr.	9	0	2	No	434	Mgr.	2	6	2	No
Indianapolis	364	MC	0	9	4	No	427	MC	9	0	4	No
Denver	288	MC	0	9	2	No	416	MC	0	9	4	No
San Antonio	232	Com	5	0	2	No	408	Mgr.	9	0	2	No
Memphis	253	Com	5	0	4	No	396	Com.	5	0	4	No
Oakland	284	Mgr.	9	0	4	Yes	385	Mgr.	9	0	4	Yes
Columbus Ohio	291	MC	7	0	4	No	376	MC	7	0	4	Yes
Portland	302	Com	5	0	4	Yes	374	Com	9	0	4	Yes
Louisville	308	MC	12	0	2	No	369	MC	0	12	2	No
Rochester, N.Y.	328	Mgr.	5	4	4	Yes	332	Mgr.	5	4	4	Yes
Atlanta	270	MC	13	26	3	No	331	MC	0	27	4	No
Birmingham	260	Com	3	0	4	No	326	Com	3	0	4	No
St. Paul	272	Com	6	0	2	No	311	Com	7	0	2	No

City	Population (in 000's)	Form of gov't.*	1934 No. of Councilmen elected:		Term	Over- lapping	Population (in 000's)	Form of gov't.	1953 No. of Councilmen elected:		Term	Over- lapping
			at large	by distr.					at large	by distr.		
Toledo	291	MC	0	21	2	No	304	Mgr.	9	0	2	No
Jersey City	317	Com	5	0	4	No	299	Com	5	0	4	No
Fort Worth	163	Mgr.	9	0	2	No	279	Mgr.	9	0	2	No
Akron	255	MC	3	10	2	No	275	MC	3	10	2	No
Long Beach	142	Mgr.	9	0	3	No	251	Mgr.	5	4	4	No
Omaha	214	Com	7	0	3	No	251	Com	7	0	3	No

* MC - mayor-council

Mgr. - council-manger

Com - commission

SOURCE: Municipal Year Book, 1954 and 1953

March 26, 1954

Form of government	Number of cities with:		
	Two year term	Four year term	Other
<u>500,000 to 1,000,000 population</u>			
Mayor-Council	4	5	1
Council-Manager	1	-	-
Commission	-	1	-
	<u>5</u>	<u>6</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>250,000 to 500,000 population</u>			
Mayor-Council	2	5	-
Council-Manager	4	5	-
Commission	1	5	1
	<u>7</u>	<u>15</u>	<u>1</u>
<u>All cities 25,000 to 1,000,000 population</u>			
Mayor-Council	6	10	1
Council-Manager	5	5	-
Commission	1	6	1
	<u>12</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>2</u>

Pronounced tendencies are:

1. The mayor-council cities in the 250,000 to 500,000 population bracket favor the four year term.

2. Commission form cities decidedly favor the four year term.

Otherwise there is a fairly even split among these cities between the two-year and four-year term for aldermen.

4. Is there any trend in length of term?

Table 1 also shows data for 1954, the first year in which this information was compiled in the Mississippi Year Book, compared with 1953, the latest year. Municipal

Summarized, the data for cities between 250,000 to 1,000,000 population are:

	Two year term		Four year term		Other	
	1934	1953	1934	1953	1934	1953
Mayor-Council	6	6	8	10	3	1
Manager	3	5	4	5	1	-
Commission	3	1	6	6	1	1
	<u>12</u>	<u>12</u>	<u>18</u>	<u>21</u>	<u>5</u>	<u>2</u>

There has been a slight increase in number of cities with four year terms, due to changes from three year terms in three cases.

Minneapolis is the only city to reduce her term between 1934 and 1953.

The three cities that changed their forms of government - Houston San Antonio and Toledo - all kept the two year terms they had under the earlier form.

5. Is there any trend in the overlapping feature?

	Overlapping		Not	
	1934	1953	1934	1953
500,000 - 1,000,000	4	3	4	4
250,000 - 500,000	4	6	7	9
	8	9	11	13

These figures reflect the increase in number of four-year term cities more than anything else.

6. What are the opinions of political scientists and other authorities on municipal government regarding the terms of councilmen?

The Model City Charter was drawn up by a committee of experts in municipal government brought together by the National Municipal League, and represents their best thinking on municipal charters.

The Model Charter leaves blank the number of years for councilmen's terms, and says nothing about overlapping terms.

Following are comments on the subject which are representative of views expressed by textbook writers:

From American City Government and Administration, Austin F. McDonald 1949, page 168:

"Annual election of councilmen was the rule for many decades. The people had an abiding faith in short terms as a sure cure for all political ills. In recent years, however, two years terms have become the rule, and in the larger cities even longer terms predominate. More than half of the cities with populations in excess of 50,000 now elect their councilmen for four years."

From American City Government, Ernest Schulz, 1949, page 351:

"In most cities terms are staggered in order to prevent a thorough-going change in personnel. Since councilmen often are re-elected, it is doubtful if the overlapping arrangement results in greater continuity of membership. Nor is there conclusive evidence that the presence of hold-over councilmen raises the quality of the council's action. On the other hand, it is clear that the overlapping term interferes with the exercise of effective popular control inasmuch as it prevents changes in the overall complexion of the council corresponding to shifts of opinion among the voters. A party may remain in control of the council even after losing the support of a majority of the electorate."

April 1, 1954

7. How do present and recent aldermen, and other City officials regard the four-year term?

To determine the answer to this question, the sub-committee interviewed the 13 incumbent aldermen, the Mayor, Comptroller and City Treasurer, and persons who were on the Charter Commission when the 13 man council amendment was submitted but have since left the Commission.

Of the 37 persons in this group, replies were received from 30, including all 13 of the incumbent aldermen and the present Mayor, Comptroller and City Treasurer. The 30 replies are tabulated in some detail in Appendix A.

(a) There is an overwhelming preference for the four-year term for aldermen. This preference was shown by present aldermen, the recent aldermanic incumbents, the ex-Charter Commission members and the three elected executives.

The principal reasons given were:

1. The two-year term requires too much campaigning time of the person in office and his official duties suffer. Estimates varied as to how soon before election the incumbent begins campaigning for reelection. But all seemed to think that about twice as much time was taken up under the two-year system than under the four-year system.
2. More money for campaigning is also needed under the two-year term. In closely contested wards, it was estimated that a campaign costs between \$2,000 and \$3,000. It was also felt that this adds expenses of election to be paid out of public funds.
3. It was felt that two years is too short a time for an alderman to gain the experience needed to cope well with the difficult problems facing the Council.
4. Two years is too little time for a new alderman to make a record. One respondent felt this is a particular handicap on the independent-minded alderman.
5. Qualified persons find the two-year term a deterrent to their running for office.

The small minority opposing the four-year term said:

1. Requiring aldermen to run every two years makes them more accountable to the voters.
2. The necessity for spending money on a campaign is over-rated, especially as more publicity is being given to incumbents' stands on issues.
3. While continuation of the two-year term with all incumbents standing for re-election at the same time, raises the possibility of a complete or substantial turnover in the Council, this possibility is remote.

The experience of the U. S. House of Representatives and the State Legislature is cited. Even if it is a possibility, the public should have the right to make a complete change if they wish.

4. Two years is sufficient time for a candidate to prove his worth.

(b) While there was definite preference for staggering of terms for aldermen, it was not as substantial as in the case of the four year term.

The principal reason given for staggering was that it preserves continuity and gives the Council stability. Experience and knowledge are carried over, since the whole Council can not be changed at once.

One respondent said that if staggering is coupled with the practice of giving committee chairmanships to newly-elected aldermen, Council work will be on a higher plane. "Men govern best the further away they are from an election."

Against staggering, it was said that:

1. The public should have the right to turn the Council out all at one time.

2. Staggered terms would allow those nearest to an election to hide behind others on controversial questions.

3. Staggering is a needless precaution against the dangers of lack of continuity since in practice the incumbents usually are re-elected.

4. The U. S. House of Representatives and the State Legislature have not suffered because of non-staggered terms.

(c) There was substantial support for four year terms for the Mayor, Comptroller and City Treasurer. Generally it was felt that these are largely administrative positions, especially the Comptroller and City Treasurer, and the longer term permits the incumbent the needed time to learn his job. Avoidance of costly campaigns and loss of time from duty, and the need for providing continuity in administration were also mentioned.

A respondent who favored the two year term for aldermen favored the same term for Mayor, seeing virtue in having the terms conform to one another.

It is perhaps important to note that almost six of the respondents felt that because of the largely administrative duties of the Comptroller and City Treasurer, these offices should be appointive, not elective.

(d) The sub-committee thought it might be enlightening to determine whether Charter Commission Members who had voted for the two-year term in 1951 had changed their minds after observing the system in operation. It was planned to ask only those who have since left the Commission, since those reappointed might not feel in a position to declare themselves.

Results of the effort have been inconclusive.

8. View of the League of Women Voters

In a letter to the Charter Commission sub-committee studying the four-year term, the League of Women Voters of Minneapolis stated it favors a four-year, non-staggered term for aldermen. It favors four years to save campaigning time and expense and to give new aldermen adequate time to make a good record. It opposes the staggered term because it feels aldermanic elections interfere with regular Council business and having them every two years instead of four years doubles the frequency of this interference. The League does not think it likely that all aldermen will be turned out at any one time.

The League states it would not press its opposition to staggering to the extent of sacrificing the four-year term.

May 4, 1954

APPENDIX A
TABULATION OF RESULTS OF QUESTIONNAIRE ON FOUR-YEAR TERM

1. Do you favor or oppose a four year term for aldermen?

Favor: Bank, Boye, Christensen, Christiansen, Egan, Fortier, Hansen, Leitschuh, Hannula, Hoyer (if terms staggered), E. Johnson, G. Johnson, Marters, Gladys Miller, Moulton, Nordstrom, O'Keefe, Pratt, Riley, Short, Stokowski, Straiton, Swanson, Wallace, Wilson, Wolinski.

Reasons: Two years term takes up too much time in campaigning. Men have more experience in four-year term. More economical for candidate and city. Short period discourages good candidates. Person has better chance to make a good record.

Oppose: Arthur, Haberland.

Reasons: Two years better for keeping aldermen responsible. Campaign cost is minor factor, particularly with greater publicity being given to voting records. Little possibility of all incumbents being defeated. No adverse effect of two year term in House of Representatives or State Legislature. Candidates can prove self in two years.

COMMENTS: Wallace says term issue should not be tied in with question of increased salaries for aldermen.

2. Do you favor a term other than two or four years? If so, what terms, and why?

No respondent suggested any other term.

3. Do you favor or oppose staggered terms for aldermen? Why?

Favor: Boye, Christensen, Christiansen, Haberland, Hansen, Hoyer, E. Johnson, G. Johnson, Martens, Miller, Moulton, Nelson, Nordstrom, O'Keefe, Pratt, Riley, Short, Stokowski, Straiton, Wallace, Swanson, Wilson, Wolinski.

Reasons: Provide stability in City Council. Assure experience. Offset possible collusion among aldermen. Shorten ballot.

Oppose: Arthur, Bank, Fortier, Leitschuh, Hannula.

Reasons: Public should have the right to turn council out all at once. Staggered terms would allow those nearest to election to hide behind others on controversial questions. Non-Staggered elections have no adverse effect in Congress, State Legislature. Not feasible except with two aldermen per ward. Needless precaution, since few seeking re-election ever fail.

TABULATION 2

COMMENTS: H. P. Christensen, new alderman of 6th Ward, wants more time to study this question.

4. (To be asked of those who were Charter Commission members in June 1951, when the former four year term was cut to two years.)

Did you favor or oppose the reduction to a two year term in 1951? Why?

Haberland - thinks he favored two year term, as he does now.

Fortier - opposed. Four years needed to get feet on ground.

Boys - favors four-year term.

5. (a) Do you think the terms of the mayor, comptroller and treasurer should be increased from two to four years? Why?

Favor four year term for all three: Bank, Boys, Fortier, Haberland, Hansen, Leitschuh, Hannula, Miller, Pratt, Riley, Straiton, Swanson, Wolinski.

Favor four year term for Comptroller, and Treasurer: Christiansen, Wilson.

Favor four year term for Mayor only: Martens, Moulton, Nelson.

Reasons: Generally the reason for favoring longer term is the need for gaining experience in the job, providing continuity in an administrative office.

A number of respondents considered the administrative aspects of these jobs, and drew different conclusions from them. Some felt that this was an argument for longer tenure. This was also recognized by those who merely said the jobs of comptroller and treasurer should be appointive, not elective (see below).

Oppose four year term for all three: Arthur, Nordstrom.

Reasons: Mayor's term should conform with Council's (Arthur favored two-year Council term). Comptroller and Treasurer should be appointed.

Oppose four year term for Mayor only: Christiansen.

Reason: Work not too heavy.

COMMENTS: O'Keefe said if Comptroller and Treasurer sit on policy-making boards, their terms should be two years. Favors four year term for Mayor, since his job is mostly administrative.

5 (b) If you favor a four year term for these three officials, do you think their terms should be staggered?

Favor: Riley (stabilize executive and administrative side of govt).

Moulton would stagger Comptroller's office. Believes this is way to play up the importance of this office which he feels is overlooked.

Oppose: Bank, Boye, Arthur, Christiansen, Haberland, Hansen, Leitschuh, Hannula, Hoyer, Miller, O'Keefe, Pratt, Straiton, Swanson, Wilson.

Indifferent: Fortier.

May 3, 1954
CITIZENS LEAGUE OF GREATER MINNEAPOLIS