

# Massachusetts Forms of Government

Presentation to Town Government  
Study Committee

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# Presentation Overview

- Forms of Government in Massachusetts
  - Historical Perspective
  - Four Current Forms
- Review of Trends and Current Status
- Discussion

# Historical Perspective

- Plymouth
  - Town Meeting
  - Moderator
  - Town Clerk
  - Board of Selectmen and executive authority
- Boston-the first City (1822)-Special Act
- Expansion of Municipal Government and the Long Ballot
  - Planning Function early 1900's
- Brookline-the first Representative Town Meeting (1915)
- Model City Charters (1915-)
- Norwood-the first professional management (1915)
  - Special Act Charters
- Home Rule Act
  - Local Control of Structure and Processes

# The Four Basic Forms

- Open Town Meeting with Board of Selectmen and some Professional Management
- Representative Town Meeting with Board of Selectmen and some Professional Management
- Elected Council with Professional Management
- Elected Council with Elected Mayor

# Open Town Meeting

- Uniquely New England
- “Perfect exercise of self-government” Jefferson
- Praised for its “sense of community” and tradition
- Role of Finance Committee
- Questions about its effectiveness in current-day
- Considerations
  - Complexities of government
  - Changing methods of citizen participation
  - Long debates often on the more minor issues
  - Limited to 1-3 times per year (Division of Annual Meeting)
  - Packing for Issues
  - Limited participation as a % of voters
    - New Hampshire S2

# Representative Town Meeting

- Elected representatives by precinct
  - Achieves geographical representation
- Informed and responsible
  - Carry-over of information and of decision results
- Finance Committee
- Considerations
  - Effect on tradition
  - Lessened impact of interest groups
  - Appropriate size
  - General Attendance is higher
  - Competition for seats
    - Pool of Candidates
  - Impact on Citizen participation
  - Standing committees
  - Deliberative Body not Representative Assembly?

# Council-Manager

- Most common form of government in US
- Retains Professional Executive
- Establishes clear line of executive and legislative functions
- Enforces unity of direction
- More timely action on issues
- Considerations/Variations
  - Citizen awareness of representative(s)
  - Council size
  - District and/or at large seats
  - Election of Council President
  - Any role for Select Board?
  - Any role for Town Meeting?

# Council-Mayor

- Becoming a city
- 2<sup>nd</sup> most common form of government in US
- Creates Political Executive
- Establishes clear line of executive and legislative functions
- Risks unity of direction
- More timely action on issues
- Considerations/Variations
  - Citizen awareness of representative(s)
  - District and/or at large seats



# Form of Government Breakdown and Recent Trends

# Questions and Discussion