

Camas Form of Government: Frequently Asked Questions

Answers to common questions about the two options being discussed for Camas

1. What does this actually change for me?

Day-to-day city services, like police, streets, permits, and utilities, don't change because of this vote. What changes is who's in charge of running those departments and who that person answers to.

2. Do I still get to vote for my Mayor either way?

Yes. Under both options being considered, Camas residents directly elect the Mayor. That doesn't change.

3. Why is this being discussed right now?

Camas has grown quickly. The city's population has grown from about 15,000 in 2004 to about 28,000 today, nearly doubling in two decades. As a city grows, running it gets more complex: bigger budgets, more staff, more infrastructure, more regulatory requirements.

The Council is raising this question now so residents can weigh in on which form of government best fits a growing city's future. Many growing Washington cities revisit this question periodically, as part of normal long-term planning, regardless of who holds office at the time.

4. Will there be chaos while the city switches over?

State law lays out the transition step by step, and current officials keep serving throughout, so there's no gap where nobody is in charge. If this moves forward, February 2027 is the target election date, chosen specifically because it falls before candidate filing opens in April 2027. That gives anyone considering a run for Mayor time to know which system they'd be running under, and it means the change would take effect at the natural end of the current Mayor's term, not in the middle of it.

Neighboring Washougal went through this exact transition in 2018. The sitting Mayor simply continued serving, the new council reappointed her to keep leading, and the sitting City Administrator was appointed as the city's first City Manager. Leadership and staff carried over without a gap.

5. If Camas switches and doesn't like it, can it switch back?

Not right away. State law requires a city to operate under a newly adopted system for at least six years before voters can hold another election to change it again. If voters instead choose to keep the current system, there's no waiting period before it could be raised again later.

6. Has this actually worked well in other Washington cities?

Results have varied. Washougal, right next door to Camas, adopted this change in 2018. The transition was smooth: the sitting Mayor continued in her role, and the sitting City Administrator was appointed as the city's first City Manager, so there was no disruption in leadership or staff.

Woodland considered the same change twice, in 2009 and again in 2021, and voters said no both times. In 2021, the sitting Mayor actually supported the change himself, even though it would reduce his own authority, but the measure still failed. The outcome depends on what each community decides for itself, not on any inherent success or failure in the mechanics of the change.

7. Does this cost taxpayers money?

If this question goes to voters, it's expected to appear alongside other items already scheduled for that same February election, so the added cost of the ballot measure itself should be minimal.

Both types of governments have similar costs. If voters approved the change, the city would need to hire a City Manager, and would not have the salary cost of the elected full-time Mayor and City Administrator. The salaries are comparable according to city staff for the Administrator and Manager positions.