

Form of Government

Presented to Camas City Council - June 1, 2026
Co-Chairs: Nan Henriksen & Greg Anderson

Agenda

1. Committee Overview
2. Context & Purpose
3. Scope & Process
4. Analysis & Findings
5. Recommendations

Meet the Team

Co-Chairs

- Nan Henriksen, *former mayor & council member*
- Greg Anderson, *former council member*

Team Members

- Ellen Burton, *former mayor & council member*
- Don Chaney, *former council member*
- Dan Durringer
- Kim Sogge
- Terry Wiener



Executive Summary

Camas is a growing, evolving community with an ambitious vision for 2025–2030. Delivering on that vision requires a governance structure built for the future.

This committee undertook a comprehensive review of the different forms of government to ensure the the City of Camas is well-positioned to meet growing complexity and rising community expectations.

After thorough analysis, this committee recommends:

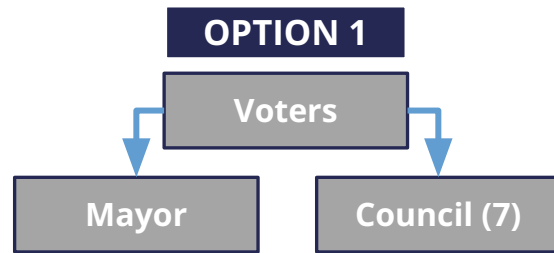
- Transitioning to a council–manager form of government with an elected mayor
- Conducting robust community engagement
- Placing a ballot measure before voters in November 2026, February 2027, or August 2027

The form of government alone does not guarantee quality governance — the skills, experience, and commitment of elected leaders always matter. But the right structure positions Camas to meet the demands of a growing community, provide greater stability, mitigate the risk of outsized influence by any single individual, and deliver on its commitments for years to come.

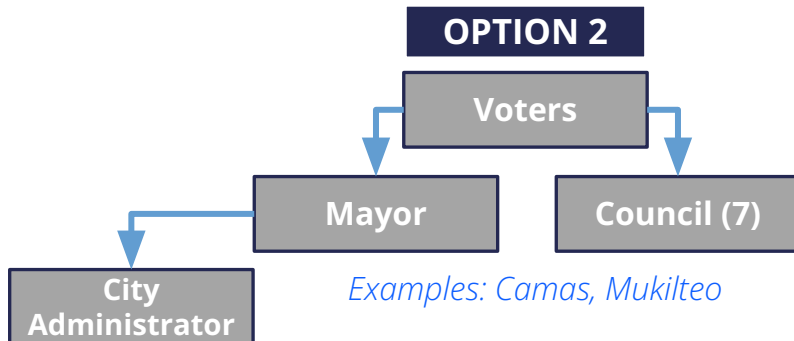
Context & Purpose

Two Primary Forms of Government

MAYOR-COUNCIL

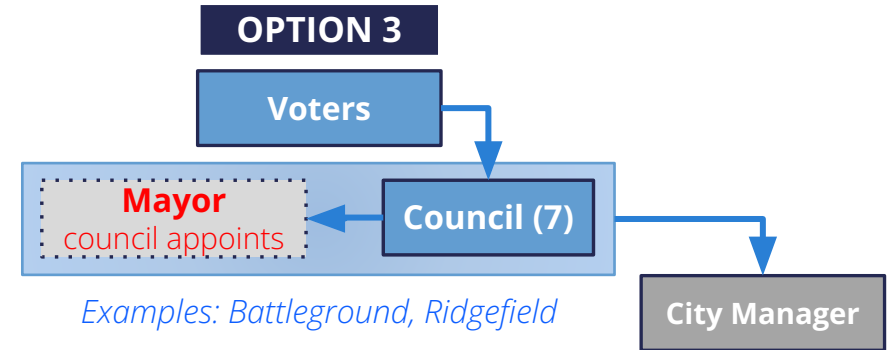


Examples: Anacortes, Edmonds

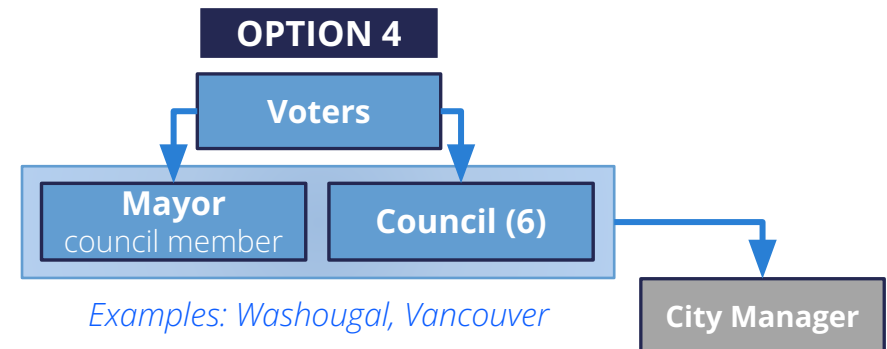


Examples: Camas, Mukilteo

COUNCIL-MANAGER



Examples: Battleground, Ridgefield



Examples: Washougal, Vancouver

Why Now?

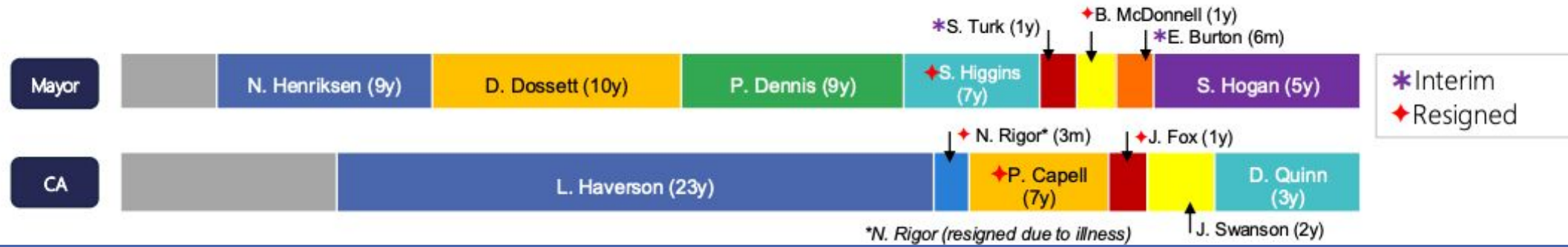
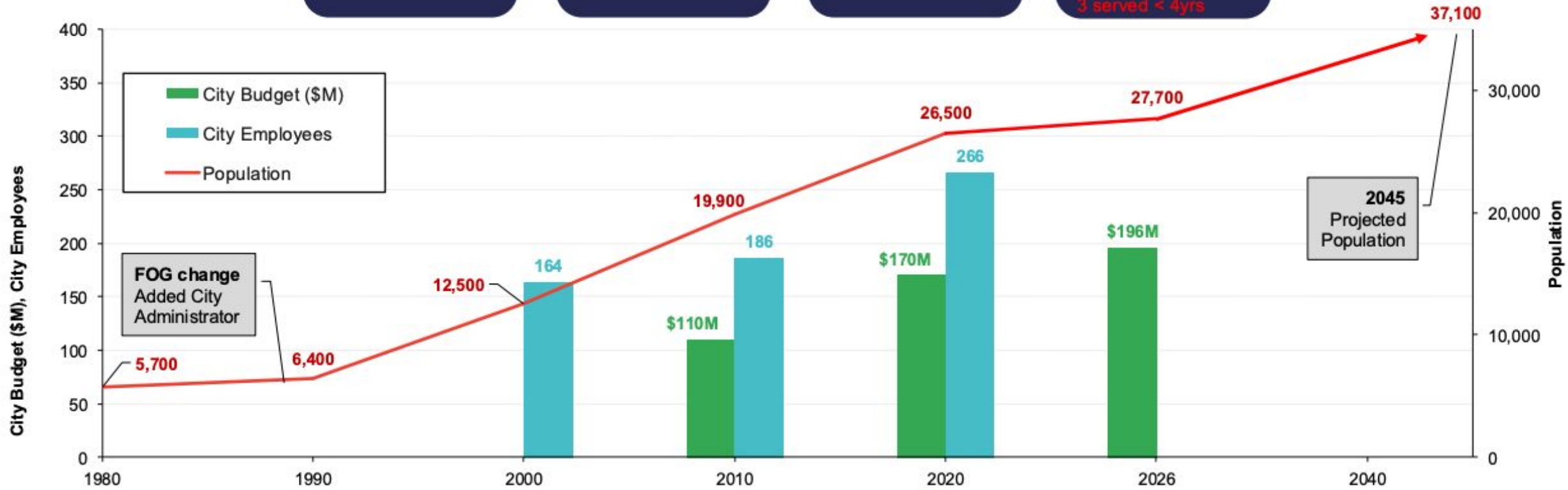
- **Proactively prepare the community for a prosperous, fiscally responsible future that reflects our shared values, before a crisis occurs**
- **Instability:** 5 mayors in 15 years (2011–2026), including 2 resignations
 - Creates an unpredictable operating environment and erodes business confidence
- **Increasing complexity:** The role of mayor has expanded significantly in scope and demand
 - Effective leadership requires extensive organizational and operational experience
 - Qualified candidates are scarce, leaving voters at risk of electing under-qualified individuals
- **Rising expectations, shrinking resources:** Community expectations grow while funding remains flat or declines
 - Erodes public trust and makes effective governance increasingly difficult
 - Professional, experienced leadership is imperative

POPULATION
27,700
 ▲ 386% since 1980

CITY BUDGET
\$196M
 ▲ 78% since 2010

CITY EMPLOYEES
266
 ▲ 62% since 2000

MAYORS
9
 since 1980;
 3 served < 4yrs



Two mayors resigned; as a result, there were two interim mayors as a statutory requirement.

2025-2030 Strategic Plan: Preparing for the Future of Camas

This committee undertook a comprehensive review of the forms of government, and found strong alignment with the Strategic Plan.

The community's vision for 2025–2030 is ambitious, and delivering on the Strategic Plan requires the right governance foundation.

- **Leadership & Governance** was identified as one of 11 key themes during the plan's development, reflecting community recognition that strong leadership is essential.
- **Engaged Workforce** is one of 9 key priorities in the Strategic Plan, each supported by robust goals and actions. One of those goals calls for greater transparency, accountability, and role clarity.

Scope & Process

Scope

In Scope

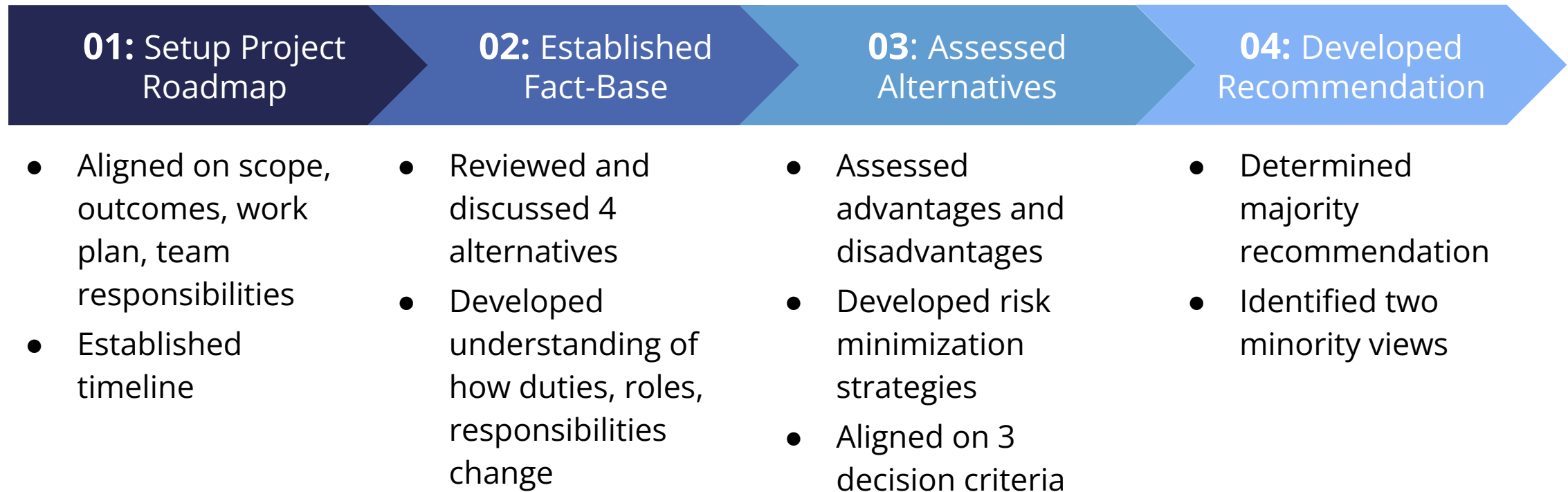
The project will address whether changing the current City of Camas form of government from a hybrid strong mayor-weak council would benefit the city and community members.

Out of Scope

- Assessment of what it means to the unions
- Organizational charts
- Ballot information:
 - Resolution
 - Voter pamphlet content
- FAQs
- PR materials
- Recommended policy updates
- Council voting reporting system

Process

Four 90-minute working sessions of structured discussion and analysis

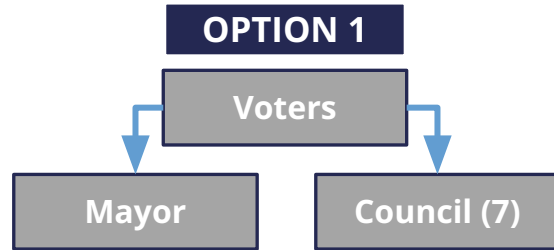


Decision Criteria

	Criteria	Examples
1	Fiscal Responsibility with Taxpayer Money	City has an AAA bond rating. This enables the city to borrow at a lower rate, saving taxpayers millions of dollars. When building a new road, city leadership considers and budgets for all known and expected costs, including future maintenance and replacement costs.
2	Long-Term Sustainability	City leadership and council plan and execute to a long-term vision and current strategic plan. They consider both the short and long-term impact of decisions regardless of election cycles.
3	Qualified and Knowledgeable Leadership and Staff	City leadership and directors have relevant experience, education, and aptitudes to meet/exceed their job requirements.

Analysis & Findings

Form of Government: Mayor-Council

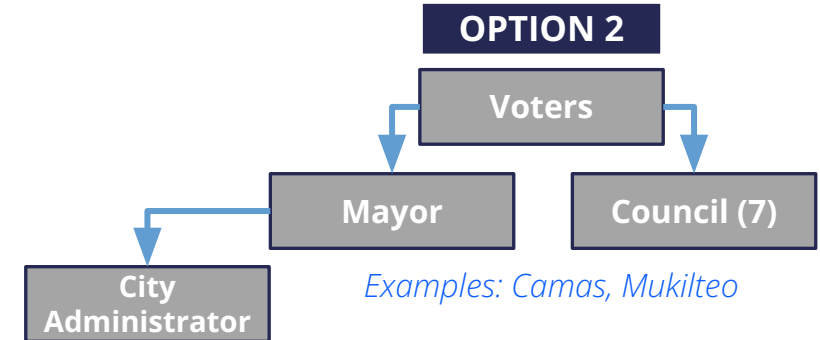


Examples: Anacortes, Edmonds

Intent:

- Separation of powers
- Political leadership
- Strong central executive

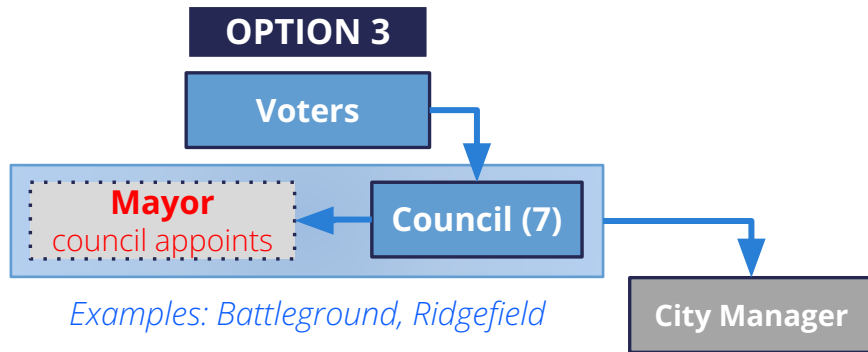
Examples: State & Federal governments.
Most common form.



Examples: Camas, Mukilteo

MAYOR (OPTIONS 1 & 2)	COUNCIL (OPTIONS 1&2)	CITY ADMINISTRATOR (OPTION 2)
Executive	Legislative	n/a
Accountable to voters	Accountable to voters	Accountable to mayor
Qualifications: resident & registered voter	Qualifications: resident & registered voter	Experienced professional
Manages daily ops & staff, proposes policy, represents city	Develops policy	Manages daily ops & staff, proposes policy per mayor
Proposes budget	Approves budget	Advises on budget
Can't vote, unless tie-breaker	Votes as council member	Can't vote
Can veto council decision, 5 council members can override	N/A	N/A
Remove via resignation/recall election	Remove via resignation/recall election	Mayor hires, fires, directs

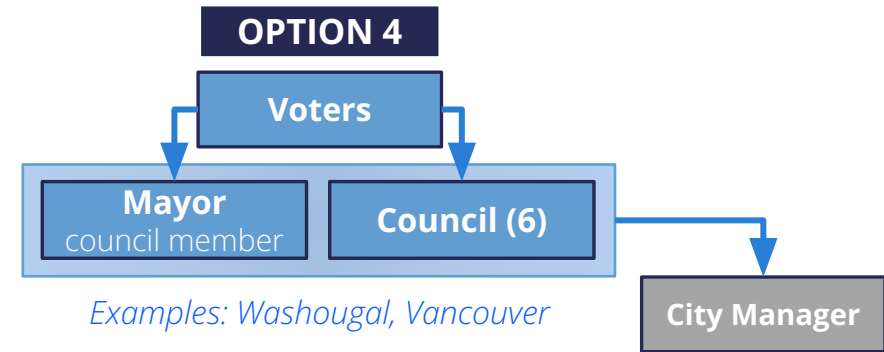
Form of Government: Council-Manager



Intent:

- Separation of politics from administration
- Promotes economy and efficiency through professional management
- Strong central executive
- Follows business model

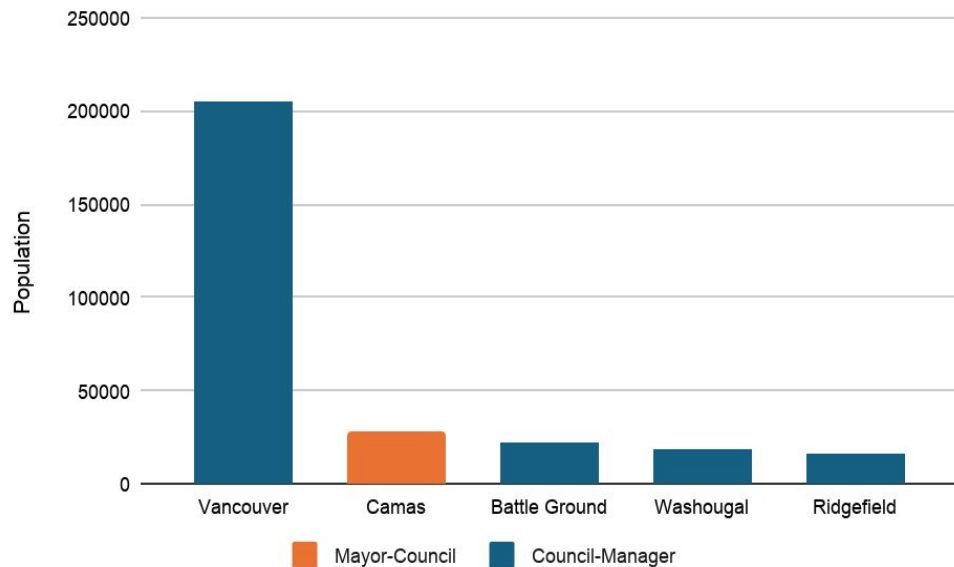
Examples: School districts, corporations.
Most new WA cities have adopted since 1970.



MAYOR (OPTION 3)	COUNCIL (OPTIONS 3&4)	CITY MANAGER (OPTIONS 3&4)	MAYOR (OPTION 4)
Council member, appointed	Legislative	Executive	Council member, voters elect
Accountable to council	Accountable to voters	Accountable to council	Accountable to voters
Qualifications: resident & registered voter	Qualifications: resident & registered voter	Experienced professional	Resident & registered voter
Represents city	Develops policy	Manages daily ops & staff, proposes policy	Represents city
Approves budget as council member	Approves budget	Proposes budget	Approves budget as council member
Votes as council member	Votes as council member	Can't vote	Votes as council member
No veto vote	No veto vote	N/A	No veto vote
Remove via resignation/recall election	Remove via resignation/recall election	Council hires/fires/directs	Remove via resignation/recall election

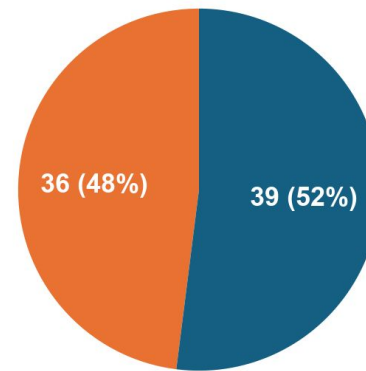
Forms of Government in WA

Clark County Cities by Population and Form of Government

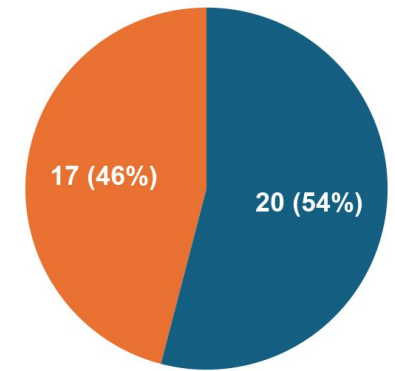


- Of the comparable cities in Clark County, only Camas uses the mayor-council form of government
- 88% of city residents in Clark County are governed in a council-manager system

Form of Government of 75 largest cities in Washington (pop 14k-over 800k)



Form of Government of Similar Sized Cities in Washington (pop 16k-38k)



Mayor-Council Council-Manager

- Across the state, cities use both forms of government
- Since 1970, most new cities use the council-manager form
- Of the comparison cities, most are council-manager (54%)

How Mayor's Role Changes mayor-council to council-manager

FROM Mayor in mayor-council
Acts as official and ceremonial head of the city
Elected by voters
Qualified if city resident and registered voter
Leads city as CEO and Chief Administrative Officer
Manages departments and employees
Hires/fires/directs city administrator (Camas)
Ensures law and order is maintained
Supervises administration of government & all city interests
Reports on affairs of city, financial and other city needs
Recommends measures for consideration & action
Proposes budget
Presides over council meetings, votes as tie-breaker
Holds Veto power, council can override – 5 votes



TO Mayor in council-manager
Acts as official and ceremonial head of the city
Either appointed by council (Opt. 3) or elected by voters (Opt. 4)
Qualified if city resident and registered voter
No administrative duties
Hires/fires/directs city manager as member of council
Presides over council meetings, votes as council member
No veto

How City Administrator's Role Changes mayor-council to council-manager

FROM City Administrator in mayor-council
Hired based on qualifications
Reports to & assists mayor, acts under their authority & direction
Acts as the administrative and executive supervisor under Mayor
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Manages daily operations - Hire/fires/directs city staff - Supervises administration of government & all city interests - Recommends measures for consideration & action - Assists with budget preparation
No vote



TO City Manager in council-manager
Hired based on qualifications
Leads city as CEO and Chief Administrative Officer
Manages daily operations
Hire/fires/directs city staff
Supervises administration of government & all city interests
Recommends measures for consideration & action
Proposes budget
Advises on financial conditions and future city needs
Ensures laws and ordinances executed
No vote

How Council's Role Changes mayor-council to council-manager

FROM Council Member in mayor-council	TO Council Member in council-manager
Approves budget prepared by mayor	Serves as the primary governing authority
Limited influence on budget development	Shapes budget priorities through the city manager
No oversight of administration	Provides direct oversight by evaluating the city manager
Confirms hiring of city administrator and department heads; cannot hire or fire them	Hires, evaluates and removes the city manager; cannot confirm hiring of department heads
Policy influence can be fragmented	Policy direction is unified and professionally run
Legislative decisions may face mayoral veto; 5 council members can override	Legislative decisions are final; no veto exists



Key Advantages & Disadvantages between forms of government

	Advantages	Disadvantages
Mayor-Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Executive (mayor) accountable to voters • Mayor accountable at legal level 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Potential disruption in administration due to election cycle • Voters don't evaluate mayor's administrative experience in terms of complexity of city operations
Council-Manager	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Professional manager appointed by and accountable to council (clear roles & responsibilities) • Consistency of executive management since manager is not subject to election cycle • Council may evaluate prior administrative experience during hiring process • Separation of powers • Better representation, more equitable 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Council may not be able to effectively evaluate manager • Appointed executive not accountable to voters • Non-elected manager initiates policy & budget changes • Professional manager, CEO, may be new to community

Disadvantages & Risk Minimization mayor-council

Disadvantages	Risk Minimization of Disadvantages
<p>Potential disruption in administration due to election cycle</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is an opportunity cost of electing new mayors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Elect qualified candidates that understand role/duties/responsibilities • Educate candidates before candidate declarations due: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Host small group information session ○ Offer job shadow for potential candidates • Ensure smooth transition <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop and use repeatable on-boarding materials and process based on best practices once elected ○ Change to council-manager form
<p>Voters don't evaluate mayor's administrative experience in terms of complexity of city operations</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Educate voters to increase knowledge of mayor's role/duties/responsibilities: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Host Civics 101 class for community ○ Communicate role/duties/responsibilities of council and mayor ○ Develop and publicize checklist of role/duties/responsibilities from a non-partisan group ○ Improve city social media and webpages to use for educational purposes

Disadvantages & Risk Minimization council-manager

Disadvantages	Risk Minimization of Disadvantages
<p>Council may not be able to effectively evaluate manager</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure council steps up engagement • Develop and implement repeatable evaluation process based on best practices <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Add to employment contract ○ Use ICMA best practices ○ Hold periodic evaluations ○ Engage public as part of the council process to evaluate manager; communicate engagement to public
<p>Appointed executive not accountable to voters</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Manager reports to council which is accountable to voters • Ensure council stays engaged • Make council member voting records easily accessible and usable for the public • Develop and implement evaluation process based on best practices (see above) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Engage public as part of the council process to evaluate manager; communicate engagement to public
<p>Non-elected manager initiates policy & budget changes</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ensure council steps up engagement • Improve budgeting process so it includes more opportunities for public to participate • Dynamic structure • Council must approve these which is the same as in the mayor-council form
<p>Professional manager, CEO, may be new to community</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consider residency parameters as part of employment contract <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Note: need to be realistic

Key Takeaways

- The form of governance will not guarantee quality of governance.
 - The skills, the experience and the commitment of the individuals on the council, and the leadership matter.
- Camas has been forward-thinking, trying to be proactive before a crisis or adversity.
- Consistency in government leads to more satisfied community members and businesses.
- Complexity continues to increase, either both in regulations and/or community expectations to solve evolving issues.

Recommendations

Recommendation

- Transitioning to a council–manager form of government with an *elected mayor*.
- Placing a ballot measure before voters in November 2026, February 2027, or August 2027, and conducting robust community engagement.
- Special elections were permitted as of 2009. We are confirming whether this change applies to Camas.

	November 2026	February 2027	August 2027
Advantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voter turnout – highest • Cleaner transition - candidates will know what roles they're running for in 2027 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voter engagement: more time • Ballot measure stands out; not buried with other issues in the general election • 2027 candidates will know what they're running for 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voter engagement: more time • Voter turnout -medium
Disadvantages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voter engagement: limited amount of time • Communication: difficult to break through • Ballot measure buried in general election 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voter turnout - low 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Voter turnout - medium • Communication: change affects immediately and will impact role of 2027 elected officials

Reference Sources

- AWC, Association of Washington Cities
- Camas budgets
- Camas Municipal Code
- Camas Strategic Plan 2025 edition
- Camas 2045 Comprehensive Plan
- MRSC, Municipal Research Service Center
- Washington State RCWs
- Representative from City of Snohomish, WA
- Representative from 2018 Washougal Form of Government Change, Chuck Carpenter
- Mayor Hogan and City Administrator Quinn
- Various AI chats used by members during information gathering

Appendix

Minority Reports (two reports, A1 and A2)

Additional documents:

1. Meeting notes and final report from the committee formed on this topic in 2018
2. Meeting summary notes for the four 2026 committee meetings

A1. Minority Report: Strong Council with Appointed Mayor

I support the strong council recommendation with a council-manager form of government, but prefer an appointed mayor rather than a separately elected one.

When you examine the qualifications and responsibilities required for mayor versus council member under a council-manager system, there's no clear distinction. All council members are elected to represent their constituents and make policy decisions together, while the professional city manager handles day-to-day operations. If the role requirements are essentially the same, conducting a separate mayoral election seems unnecessary.

Having council members work together to select the mayor from among themselves promotes collaboration from the very start of their term. The appointed mayor must maintain the confidence and support of their peers, which naturally encourages cooperative relationships within the governing body. This collaborative approach to selecting leadership reinforces that the council functions as a unified team.

Importantly, every council member—including the mayor—remains directly elected by and accountable to voters. The only difference is that council, rather than a separate election, determines who serves as presiding officer. This approach delivers effective, collaborative governance under a strong council-manager structure.

A2. Minority Report: Strong Mayor with City Administrator (current form of government)

The primary advantage of retaining a mayor/council/administrator form of government is enhanced political accountability. In Camas, individual councilors' voting records are buried in lengthy meeting minutes, making it difficult for voters to hold them accountable in its non-partisan elections. The elected CEO-style mayor, who does not typically vote on council matters, stands as a singular focal point for voters to evaluate the city's overall performance. This provides a vital check on council power, protecting from groupthink and isolation among elected officials.

Proponents of change argue that the current mayoral position is too technically demanding, even with a professional administrator, thus deterring candidates. However, Camas has delegated extensively to its professional administrator for decades. While administration involves complex budgets, infrastructure, and operations, these are substantially delegated to the administrator, who handles execution under the mayor's policy direction.

What truly tests a mayor is the political dimension: articulating a vision, balancing competing community interests, navigating public scrutiny, building consensus on council, and making tough calls on priorities that reflect voter values. These leadership and political skills are precisely what voters evaluate when choosing a mayor. Technical proficiency can be hired; political judgment and accountability is a gift to the community that should be lauded.

The city has successfully navigated significant growth, endured the challenges of a global pandemic, and recently achieved a 'AAA' bond rating, clear evidence of strong fiscal management and competent governance. If a change in governance is to be seriously considered, public engagement is critically needed.

Accepted Form of Governance: elected boards/ commissions and appointed executive

Elected boards and commissions with professional executives are well accepted as a form of governance and are successfully implemented in many types of public organizations

School Districts:

- Camas School District
- Evergreen School District
- Vancouver School District
- Washougal School District

Ports:

- Port of Camas-Washougal
- Port of Vancouver

Fire Districts:

- Clark-Cowlitz Fire District
- East County Fire & Rescue (ECFR)
- Fire District 3
- Fire District 6
- Future Camas Washougal Regional Fire Authority approved by voters in 2025

Utilities: Clark Public Utilities

Forms of government

Characteristics	Mayor-Council	Council-Manager
Legislative authority	Council	Council
Executive authority	Elected mayor	Appointed manager
Selection of CEO	Popularly elected	Appointed by council on the basis of experience
Removal of CEO	Recall election	Removed by a majority vote of the council
Tenure of executive	4-year term	Indefinite
Tenure of council	4-year term	4-year term
Appointment of department heads	Mayor (with council confirmation if provided)	Manager (no council confirmation)
Removal of department heads	Mayor	Manager
Veto	Mayor	Manager has no veto
Policy development	Mayor can propose	Manager can recommend
Policy implementation	Mayor	Manager
Underlying principles	Separation of powers Political leadership Strong central executive	Separation of politics from administration Promotes economy and efficiency through professional management Strong central executive Follows a business model

Source: MRSC.org

Trend since 1990: council-manager form

Year	Mayor-Council		Council-Manager		Commission		Total No. of Cities	Total Inc. Pop
	No.	% of Inc. Pop.	No.	% of Inc. Pop.	No.	% of Inc. Pop.		
1970	233	57%	24	37%	8	6%	265	1,907,182
1980	230	55%	29	40%	6	5%	265	2,125,392
1990	228	54%	37	45%	3	1%	268	2,287,498
2000	224	50%	54	50%	1	<1%	279	3,387,824
2010	228	58%	52	42%	1	<1%	281	4,196,962
2020	227	58%	54	42%	--	--	281	4,990,730

Source: MRSC.org



First-class cities: government structures

City	Year Incorporated	Population	Form of Government	Council	Mayor
Aberdeen	1890	17,080	Mayor-council	12 (2 each from 6 wards)	Elected
Bellingham	1903	95,960	Mayor-council	7 (6 wards, 1 at-large)	Elected
Bremerton	1901	44,640	Mayor-council	7 (7 districts)	Elected
Everett	1893	114,200	Mayor-council	7 (5 districts, 2 at-large)	Elected
Richland	1958	63,320	Council-manager	7 at-large	Appointed from council (2-year term)
Seattle	1865	779,200	Mayor-council	9 (7 districts, 2 at-large)	Elected
Spokane	1881	232,700	Mayor-council	6 (2 each from 3 districts)	Elected
Tacoma	1884	222,400	Council-manager	9 (5 districts, 3 at-large, mayor)	Elected (4-year term)
Vancouver	1857	199,600	Council-manager	7 (6 at-large, mayor)	Elected (4-year term)
Yakima	1886	98,650	Council-manager	7 (7 districts)	Appointed from council (2-year term)

How Mayor's Role Partially Shifts to City Manager

mayor-council to council-manager

FROM Mayor in mayor-council
Acts as official and ceremonial head of the city
Elected by voters
Qualified if city resident and registered voter
Leads city as CEO and Chief Administrative Officer
Manages departments and employees
Hires/fires/directs City Administrator (Camas)
Ensures law and order is maintained
Supervises administration of government & all city interests
Reports on affairs of city, financial and other city needs
Recommends measures for consideration & action
Proposes budget
Presides over Council Meetings, votes as tie-breaker
Holds Veto power, Council can override – 5 votes



TO City Manager in council-manager
Appointed by Council based on experience and qualifications
Qualified if relevant experience, skills, attributes
Leads city as CEO and Chief Administrative Officer
Manages departments and employees
Hires/fires/directs City Staff
Ensures law and order is executed
Supervises administration of government & all city interests
Advises on financial conditions and future city needs
Recommends measures for consideration & action
Proposes budget
No vote
No vote

