

## Form of Government 2026: Summary and Recommendation

At the council’s direction, the mayor appointed an advisory committee of two former mayors, two former council members, and three interested citizens. We agreed to review the available form of government options so we could use objective criteria to assess whether Camas has the best governance for our future, to accommodate growth, and is set up for the success our citizens deserve.

### Why Now:

Camas has experienced significant leadership instability over the past 15 years, cycling through five mayors since 2011 — including two resignations — creating an unpredictable operating environment and eroding business confidence.

The role of mayor has expanded significantly in scope and demand. Effective leadership requires extensive organizational and operational experience. Additionally, qualified candidates are scarce, leaving voters at risk of electing under-qualified individuals.

Meanwhile, community expectations continue rising even as funding remains flat or shrinks, eroding public trust and making effective governance increasingly difficult. It’s critical we prepare the community for a prosperous, fiscally responsible future that reflects our shared values, before a crisis occurs.

Taken together, these pressures mean professional, experienced leadership is imperative.

### Our scope:

Address whether changing the current City of Camas form of government from a hybrid mayor- council would benefit the city and community members. Our starting point was the report from April 2018.

### Our process:

Over four 90-minute meetings, we followed a facilitated process with prepared agendas supporting our agreed upon workplan and scope of work. The early meetings were designed to educate members to better understand the workings of city government. In the later meetings the team identified key values and elements to establish and evaluate criteria objectively. This work led to robust discussions of the available options, their attributes, their advantages and disadvantages, as well as identification of risks and ways to minimize them. The decision-making process was as transparent and objective as possible.

### Our assessment: key advantages and disadvantages between forms of government:

	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
<b>Mayor-Council</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Executive (mayor) accountable to voters</li><li>● Mayor accountable at legal level</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>● Potential disruption in administration due to election cycle</li><li>● Voters don’t evaluate mayor’s administrative experience in terms of complexity of city operations</li></ul>

	<b>Advantages</b>	<b>Disadvantages</b>
<b>Council-Manager</b>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Professional manager appointed by and accountable to council (clear roles &amp; responsibilities)</li> <li>● Consistency of executive management since manager is not subject to election cycle</li> <li>● Council may evaluate prior administrative experience during hiring process</li> <li>● Separation of powers</li> <li>● Better representation, more equitable</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>● Council may not be able to effectively evaluate manager</li> <li>● Appointed executive not accountable to voters</li> <li>● Non-elected manager initiates policy &amp; budget changes</li> <li>● Professional manager, CEO, may be new to community</li> </ul>

**Our key takeaways from the committee’s evaluation of the different forms of government:**

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

**Our recommendations:**

- A clear majority, five of our members, selected the council-manager form of government. Of those five, four preferred an elected mayor while one preferred an appointed mayor.

**Rationale for council w/elected mayor:** The council-manager form of government provides clear separation of powers with a professional manager appointed by and accountable to the council, ensuring consistent executive leadership free from election cycles. This structure allows the council to evaluate candidates based on actual administrative experience, while delivering better and more equitable representation for the community — this structure also reduces the risk of poor or inconsistent leadership. The addition of an *elected mayor* preserves a direct democratic connection between residents and their government, providing a visible community leader and public voice while keeping daily management in the hands of a qualified professional.

- Two members voted to retain the existing mayor-council hybrid form with a city administrator.
- Each minority position is documented and included in this report.
  - Rationale for Council w/appointed Mayor (see appendix A1)
  - Rationale for Mayor w/City Administrator (see appendix A2)

**Our implementation plan with timeline options:**

We propose placing a ballot measure before voters to change our governance to council–manager, with an *elected mayor*, and conducting robust community engagement. Options for timing are November 2026, February 2027, or August 2027. Special elections were permitted as of 2009. We are confirming whether this change applies to Camas.

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

**Our conclusion:**

For the last 50 years, most newly incorporated Washington cities have adopted the council-manager form of government rather than the mayor-council model. As city operations have become increasingly complex — particularly in full-service cities such as Camas — communities have recognized the value of professional management. This structure allows a trained and experienced city manager to oversee administration and daily operations, while the mayor focuses on serving as the city’s official and ceremonial leader and representing the community.

The council-manager system also significantly reduces organizational risk. When executive leadership depends primarily on election outcomes rather than professional qualifications, cities can face gaps in experience, shifting priorities, and costly leadership transitions. A professional city manager provides continuity, institutional knowledge, and operational accountability that are not tied to the election cycle. As the demands of managing a city such as Camas continue to grow, that stability becomes increasingly important to maintaining effective and consistent city services.

**Our 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 were used by members during information gathering

**Respectfully submitted,**

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**APPENDIX:**

**Our appendixes**, including our charts and tables that we created and used to build team knowledge and understanding of the relationships are both listed here and attached:

1. Minority Reports (two reports, A1 and A2)
2. Form of Government presentation showing fact base, analysis and conclusions
3. Meeting notes and final report from the committee formed on this topic in 2018
4. 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.