

Winthrop's Council-Manager Form of Government: Answers to Your Questions

Q: What is the council-manager form of government which is used in Winthrop?

A: Winthrop's council-manager form combines the political leadership of elected officials in the form of a governing body (the town council), with the managerial experience of an appointed town manager. The council-manager form establishes a representative system where all power is concentrated in the elected council and where the council hires a professionally trained manager to oversee the delivery of public services

Q: Is it a responsive form of government?

A: In Winthrop's council-manager government, the council president and council members are the leaders and policy makers elected to represent the community and to concentrate on policy issues that are responsive to citizens' needs and wishes. The manager is appointed by the governing body to carry out policy and ensure that the entire community is being served. If the manager is not responsive to the council's wishes, the council has the authority to terminate the manager at any time. In that sense, a manager's responsiveness is tested daily.

Q: Are all council-manager governments structured the same way?

A: No, One of the most attractive features is that the council-manager form is adaptable to local conditions and preferences. Winthrop, for example, has a nine member council made up of the council president, who is elected by the voters of the town, two at-large councilors and six precinct councilors. All members of the council serve four year terms with the exception of the council president whose term of office is two years.

Q: What is the council's function?

A: The council is Winthrop's legislative and policy making body. The elected council approves the budget and determines the tax rate. The council also focuses on the community's goals, major projects, and such long-term considerations as community growth, land use development, capital improvement plans, capital financing, and strategic planning. The council hires a professional manager to carry out the administrative responsibilities and supervises the manager's performance.

Q: Are council meetings open to the public?

A: Yes. Meetings of the town council are subject to the Open Meeting Law of Massachusetts. The council meets on the first and third Tuesdays of each month in the Joseph Harvey Hearing Room at Town Hall (One Metcalf Square in Winthrop). Meetings are televised on public access television (WCAT, channel 16). The meetings are broadcast live and are rerun several times.

Q: What role does the council president play?

A: The council president is a key political leader and policy developer. The president's duties, responsibilities, and authorities are clearly delineated in Winthrop's charter. The Council-Manager form of government

president presides at council meetings, serves as a spokesperson for the community, facilitates communication and understanding between elected and appointed officials, assists the council in setting goals and advocating policy decisions, and serves as a promoter and defender of the community. In addition, the council president serves as a key representative in intergovernmental relations, perhaps most visibly in his/her role as a voting member of the school committee. The council president, town council, and manager constitute a policy development and management team

Q: What is the manager's function?

A: The manager is hired to serve the town and to bring Winthrop the benefits of training and experience in administering local government projects and programs. The manager prepares a budget for the council's consideration; recruits, hires, and supervises town employees; serves as the council's chief adviser; and carries out the council's policies. Council members and citizens count on the manager to provide complete and objective information, the pros and cons of alternatives, and long-term consequences.

Q: What is the cost to the local government of appointing a professional manager?

A: Local governments have found that overall costs actually have been reduced with competent management. Savings come in the form of reduced operating costs, increased efficiency and productivity, improved revenue collection, or effective use of technology.

Q: Does the manager participate in policy determination?

A: The manager makes policy recommendations to the council, but the council may or may not adopt them and may modify the recommendations. The manager is bound by whatever action the council takes....

Q: How many Americans live in communities that operate under council-manager government?

A: Nationwide, nearly 4000 local governments operate under the council-manager form. More than 89 million Americans live in communities that operate under this form of government.

Q: How much citizen participation is possible under Winthrop's council-manager government?

A: A spirit of altruistic volunteerism has always been a hallmark of Winthrop. It is not an understatement to say that, without the dedicated service of so many citizens serving on boards, commissions and committees, the town simply would not function. In addition to opportunities to serve the town in various capacities, input from citizens is welcome and is facilitated in a number of ways. The town manager is accessible and responsive. Councilors each have voicemail and e-mail accounts through which citizens can make their opinions and concerns known. In addition, citizens are encouraged to express themselves publicly at council meetings at which two periods of public comment are included on each agenda. Finally, the council hosts two meetings each year, one on financial matters and the other on delivery of services by the town, at which time the floor is open for comments from Winthrop's citizens.

Q: Where can I find out more about Winthrop's council-manager form of government?

A: A good starting point is Winthrop's website (<http://www.town.winthrop.ma.us/>) where you will find the town's charter and other valuable information. You can reach the town manager's office at 617.846.1077 with specific questions.