

# City of Sioux Falls New Form of Government 1995

Following are some quotes from the Sioux Falls City Charter voters approved on September 13, along with comments from the principal drafters of that Charter regarding the underlying philosophies which went into it. This is intended to give guidance on how the new government should operate.

## MAYOR

Section 3.01 "The executive and administrative power of the city shall be vested in a mayor."

Section 4.01 (a) "The mayor may establish city departments...and may prescribe the functions of all departments...."

Section 4.01 (b) "All departments...under the direction and supervision of the mayor shall be administered by one (1) or more officers appointed by and subject to the direction and supervision of the mayor. The appointment of any officer or employee having final authority over more than five (5) percent of the city's employees or budget shall only be effective with the advice and consent of the council."

The mayor will likely need a chief of staff, chief administrator or assistant to help with administrative or management duties, but not ceremonial duties.

Section 5.02 "...the mayor shall submit to the city council a budget for the ensuing fiscal year...."

Section 2.03 "The mayor shall serve as a member of the city council."

Section 2.11 (c) "...the mayor shall only vote as necessary to break a tie."

Section 3.03 "The mayor shall preside at meetings of the council...."

Section 3.04 "If an ordinance or resolution is vetoed, the mayor shall attach a written statement explaining the reasons for the veto. Ordinances vetoed by the mayor shall be considered at the next regular meeting of the council, and the council may pass the ordinance over the veto by the affirmative vote of six of its members."

Section 9.05 "The Mayor shall receive an annual salary in 1995 in the amount of \$75,000 and each other council member in the amount of \$7,500. No meeting fees shall be paid to the mayor nor city council members."

## CITY COUNCIL

Section 2.01 "All powers of the city shall be vested in the city council... The council shall act as a part-time, policy making and legislative body, avoiding management and administrative duties."

Section 2.04 "The mayor, but not the council members, shall participate in the city's employee benefits programs...."

It is not anticipated that the city council will have any offices nor dedicated support staff in City Hall. The mayor's staff should be able to handle their periodic clerical and support staff needs.

Section 2.05 (c) "...the council or its members shall deal with city officers and employees...solely through the mayor...."

Section 2.11 (a) "The council shall meet regularly at least once in every month...."

Section 5.05 (b) "...the city council may adopt the budget with or without amendment."

The main jobs of the city council are to consider and enact legislation (ordinances or resolutions), and approve the budget.

It is estimated that the council members will put in about ten to fifteen hours of work per week. One of the first important tasks facing the council may be cleaning up some of the less important and detailed type responsibilities which the city commission has typically handled at its weekly meetings and delegating them to appropriate staff.

Joe P. Kirby and Dale Froehlich 9/94

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# Sioux Falls serves as good example

It's getting difficult to recall the last really ugly turf fight in Sioux Falls city government.

Maybe it came in 1993, when the former city commission stripped the responsibility of overseeing the Health Department from one of its members.

Or maybe it was 1994, when some incumbent commissioners resisted the city's switch to a new form of government.

There is one certainty: The low point didn't occur in 1995, the first year of the city's new council.

Looking back, Sioux Falls has made a surprisingly smooth transition to a new city charter the past year. Under the charter, it switched from a city commission with five full-time members to a council with eight part-time members and a full-time mayor.

There might be a few shortcomings in the new charter to improve. And the new council may still be finding its niche in the strong-mayor system of government. Overall, however, the city's new governing board has functioned well.

The city's switch is serving as an example to another Midwestern city considering a similar change.

The Cedar Rapids, Iowa, Gazette, recently profiled Sioux Falls in a package of flattering news stories. An accompanying editorial advised Gazette readers to look to Sioux Falls as a good example of governmental reform and efficiency.

The Gazette recounts how Sioux

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Falls Mayor Gary Hanson, a former city commissioner, initially opposed the switch from a city commission to a city council. Since then, as Argus Leader readers know, Hanson has become a supporter of the new system.

"I strongly believe this is a better form of government," Hanson told the Gazette. "I surprised myself."

Hanson holds the most powerful position in Sioux Falls government. So his assessment of its performance cannot be considered highly objective. Even so, there is other evidence that the change has been for the better, such as the reorganization of city departments. The strongest evidence might simply be the lack of bitter turf disputes between council members.

The current mayor and council members still disagree somewhat on who is responsible for what. But unlike the days of the old commission, there have been no disclosures of hidden problems or big power grabs.

City Council members no longer perform as both policy-makers and administrators. Council members are legislators, and the mayor is the chief administrator.

Fundamentally, the new system is better. Cedar Rapids would be wise to make the switch.

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# New government paying off for city

Sioux Falls' switch to a new form of government is paying off.

Financial savings are only a secondary benefit.

City voters decided 13 months ago to abolish the city's five-member city commission and replace it with a nine-member city council.

The old commission had five full-time commissioners who served individually as department heads and collectively as a legislative body.

The new council, which took power in January, has eight part-time council members and one full-time mayor. Five of the council members represent specific areas of the city; the other three represent the city at large.

The biggest advantage of the new system is the way it separates and consolidates administrative power in one elected official: the mayor.

Other council members help set policy and provide oversight. The part-time nature of council positions is a plus because it allows people to serve without having to

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quit their regular jobs.

We favored switching to the council form because it seemed like a better system of government. Time is beginning to show that voters made a wise decision.

Board members don't seem to get caught up in as many secondary disputes as in the past.

The switch is also proving to be a good move financially. Budget projections for 1996 indicate that the mayor-council government is less expensive than the old commission form.

Savings from 1996 compared to 1994, when the commission was still in place, are modest: about \$68,500. But government savings of any size are worth noting.

We suspect savings to taxpayers in the future will be greater, and the savings will have nothing to do with the cost of salaries or benefits. The savings will come from better representation and improved decision-making.

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## City reformists on right track

It's natural for government incumbents to support the status quo. When the government they lead comes under attack, their jobs fall into jeopardy.

It's understandable that a majority of the five members on the City Commission don't particularly like the idea of Sioux Falls changing to a new form of government.

City Commissioner Bob Jamison recently accused businessman Joe Kirby, a reform advocate, of having a hidden agenda in promoting change.

We happen to think Kirby and other reformists generally are on the right track, with one proviso: Their election schedule should allow enough time for a study committee appointed by Mayor Jack White to complete its research on government options.

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Kirby, a member of White's study committee, also leads a separate group that wants to place a measure on the June ballot to change the city's form of government. The group is leaning toward an option in which the city would have a full-time mayor and eight part-time council members. Four of the council members would represent districts within the city; the other four would represent the entire city. The City Council would set policy, and the mayor would have the power to hire staff members to help administer policy.

Kirby's group has a draft charter ready that would place that option before voters. But if public sentiment favors another option, the proposal could be revised before petitions are circulated, he said.

The city's current form of government is an oddity. City departments are divided into five groups, and one full-time commission member oversees each group. In effect, politicians are elected to serve as department heads. In some cases, they do little more than oversee other department managers.

City Commissioner Gary Hanson, who oversees city water and sewer operations, said recently that anyone who thinks city government can be conducted by part-time council members is naive. We respect Hanson, but that's nonsense.

The school district, which has a larger budget than the city, is governed by a part-time, policy-making board. So is Minnehaha County and the state of South Dakota. The Legislature only meets about two months every year.

Sioux Falls could benefit from the centralized leadership of a full-time mayor and the input of citizen council members who serve only part-time. We welcome the prospect of change.

Argus Leader publisher Mary Devish is a member of Mayor Jack White's study committee and the daughter of City Commissioner Bob Jamison. She did not participate in this editorial.

# Citizens propose revised City Hall

Commission form  
outdated, group says

By **CORRINE OLSON**

Argus Leader Staff

If a group of concerned citizens has its way, Sioux Falls voters will decide in June whether they want a different form of city government.

"I think there are a lot of concerns out there about the way the city is growing and the way we deliver services," said Kip Scott, a downtown businessman and member of the group. "We have to at least consider what other options we have."

Joe Kirby, president of the Sioux Falls Area Chamber of Commerce and leader of the group, said its members would speak first to service groups and other organizations to find out whether people are interested.

If they find agreement that the commission form of government is not right for Sioux Falls, they will circulate petitions that would bring the issue to a vote in the next city election.

If voters want a change, new officials would be elected in November, and the new form of government could begin operating in January 1995.

Commissioner Gary Hanson said that he is willing to look at different forms of government but that the timetable the group is operating under is much too short.

"I definitely don't feel we should rush into a change," he said.

Kirby said individuals and the League of Women Voters have been talking about government changes for at least a year and are ready for action.

"It's hard to find people outside of government who would have anything good to say about the commission form," Kirby said. "I have a fear that someone will come up with a goofy form and put it forward."

The group, which includes business people, laborers, teachers and even some city employees, has decided tentatively that the best form of government for Sioux Falls would be a full-time mayor and eight part-time council members.

Under that form of government, the mayor would be the person responsible to the electorate, Kirby said.

The council members would be policymakers rather than administrators.

Hanson said anyone who thinks Sioux Falls government can be conducted by part-time council members is naive.

"They just don't have any idea what it takes. You cannot run a city like this one with a part-time council," he said.

Hanson said that he would consider a switch to a council form but that he thinks the council members would have to be full-time officials.

The citizens group said one of the goals of having a part-time council is to involve qualified leaders who cannot afford or do not choose to leave their full-time jobs.

The group said the commission form is an outdated form of government that is being abandoned by other large cities.