

Protocol Column- Home Rule

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locally by charter, unless state law or something in the state constitution expressly prohibits the change.

Forms of Town Government

Although there is much variation among towns within each form, political scientists generally classify Connecticut town governments into one of three types.

1- Selectmen-Town meeting

This is the traditional government of New England towns, and the one which the general statutes prescribe. In its pure form, the three-member elected board of selectmen is the executive and the town meeting itself is the legislative body. Other officials and boards are also elected such as the clerk, tax collector, treasurer and board of finance. In towns which still operate under the general statutes, this form prevails.

2- Council-Manager

The council-manager form has an elected legislative body (usually chosen at-large) and an appointed chief executive or manager. One council man may hold the title of mayor, but the manager has the authority to appoint the heads of departments and other personnel.

The Winchester charter has features of both the selectmen-town meeting form and the council manager form.

3- Mayor-Council

In this type of government, an elected mayor is the chief executive, and the legislative body is the council, often with the members elected from wards or districts instead of at-large. In the "weak mayor" variation, other administrative officials may also be elected, or appointed by the council. In the "strong mayor" form, the chief executive can appoint and remove other administrative heads, and may have veto power over the council.

Can a Town Change Its Form of Government?

A town can change its form of government by revising an existing charter, by creating a charter for the first time, or by revoking an existing charter. There are two ways the

process can be started. One is by two-thirds vote of the legislative body which then appoints a bipartisan commission of five to fifteen members. The other is by proposal initiated by 10 percent of the electors. The proposal may include a list of specific recommendations. The proposal triggers the appointment of a charter revision commission.

Many town charters contain a provision which requires that a commission be created and charter review conducted at least every so many years, usually three to five. (The Winchester charter does not have such a provision.) Unless the appointing authority specifies a date, the commission has 16 months in which to complete its work. Public hearings are required. If the appointing authority accepts the report, the charter amendments must be published and submitted to an election within 15 months of such approval.