



CITY OF LA CROSSE

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LEGISLATION STAFF REPORT FOR COUNCIL

File ID 26-0071 Caption

A CHARTER ORDINANCE to create Section 20 of Appendix A of the Code of Ordinances of the City of La Crosse creating the position, duties and responsibilities of the Office of the City Administrator and removing duties from the Office of the Mayor.

Staff/Department Responsible for Legislation

Requestor of Legislation

Council Member Aron Newberry

Location, if applicable

Summary/Purpose

This charter ordinance creates the position of City Administrator to provide professional management of day-to-day city operations. The Administrator will serve as chief administrative officer responsible for budget preparation, department supervision, and policy implementation, while the Mayor retains authority as chief political executive responsible for strategic vision, policy priorities, and external representation. The ordinance establishes clear lines of authority, includes transition provisions, and explicitly protects the current Mayor's term and compensation.

Background

La Crosse operates under a mayor-council system where the Mayor serves as both chief executive and chief administrative officer. As city government has grown more complex, this dual role has created operational challenges.

Mayor Washington-Spivey and several Council members campaigned on professional city management in 2025. The Council established a City Administrator Working Group that conducted community engagement and presented findings in December 2025.

This ordinance is intended to replace the 2011 version City Administrator ordinance (File 24-1287) currently under review. Legal and structural issues identified require a new ordinance rather than amendments.

Key differences from 2011 version:

- High-level governance structure vs. detailed job duties
- 3-5 year contract term (not indefinite)
- Joint evaluation by Council and Mayor
- 15-mile residency (not city limits only)
- Broader qualifications
- Explicit Mayor and Administrator role definitions
- Clear lines of authority and transition provisions
- Explicit protection of current Mayor's term and compensation

A majority of comparable Wisconsin cities use professional city management.

Fiscal Impact

Staff Recommendation