

City of LaCrosse

City Council Planning Meeting

12-9-25

Municipal Administrator Discussion

Background – Mayor vs. Administrator Information Paper

a. City of La Crosse City Administrator History

- i. The City of La Crosse faced this question in the past, most recently in 2012 when the voters defeated a ballot question, with 10,206 votes cast, No votes 5,941 (58.21%) and Yes votes 3,936 (38.57%).
- ii. Former Mayor Mitch Reynolds introduced the need for a City Administrator in his State of the City address on January 11, 2024.
- iii. A Charter ordinance creating a City Administrator was introduced on October 10, 2024.
- iv. The Common Council, through a resolution, created a City Administrator Working Group on November 14, 2024, with a charge to report back to the Common Council by May 2025.
- v. The Common Council voted, in May of 2025, to refer the vote to February 2026, to provide additional time to gather community input.

WI Municipal Administrative Structures

Government Form	Legislative Role	Mayor Role
Mayor-Council	The elected Council serves as the legislative body.	Mayor is the CEO and head of government, with significant administrative authority, and elected separately from the Council.
Mayor-Council Administrator	The elected Council serves as the legislative body. The Mayor-Council hires the administrator who implements the council policies	Administrator is Chief Administrative Officer or Chief Operating Officer
City Manager – Council (Chapter 64) No Mayor (except Oshkosh)	The elected Council acts as the legislative body.	The City Manager is the chief executive and administrative officer, hired by the council and serving at its pleasure.

WI Cities/Villages with an Administrator or Manager - Source: UW Oshkosh Whitburn Center

Wisconsin Cities	Totals	City Manager	City Administrator	Administratio n% of Total
City Manager or Administrator (professional administration)	190	10	91	53%
Wisconsin Villages	Totals	Village Manager	Village Administrator	
Village Manager (all in SE-WI) or Administrator (professional administration)	415	9	54	15%

Typical Administrator Duties

- Administer / Manager day-to-day operations
- Coordinates all city department activities
- Sometimes has a second specific job (economic development)
- Hiring, promotion, discipline, and firing staff – typical council oversight for department heads
- Implement council directives and legislative policies/goals
- City Spokesperson – many times, the Mayor has this role
- Citizen contact
- Budget development, implementation, administration, and reporting

Reporting Structure

- Who does the Administrator Report To
 - Council
 - Mayor & Council
 - Mayor
- *Ordinance assumes council only*
- **What other Cities Do?**

Wisconsin Municipalities with Population 20,000 and above (42 total)					
#	City	Population	Form of Government	Manager or Administrator	Comments
1	Kenosha	99,894	Mayor–Council	Administrator	Works with Mayor, responsible to the Mayor and Council
1	Racine	78,065	Mayor–Council	Administrator	Appointed by Mayor and confirmed by council - Reports to the Mayor
1	West Allis	60,624	Full Time - Mayor–Council	Administrator	Works with Mayor, responsible to the Mayor and Council
1	Sheboygan	48,775	Mayor–Council	Administrator	Responsible to the Council
1	Wauwatosa	47,102	Mayor–Council	Administrator	Responsible to the Mayor and Council
1	Menomonee Falls	38,504	Village Board	Village Manager	Responsible to the President and Council
1	Franklin	36,278	Mayor–Council	Administrator	Chief Administrative Officer
1	Oak Creek	35,053	Mayor–Council	Administrator	Responsible to the Mayor and Council
1	Sun Prairie	31,752	Mayor–Council	Administrator	Responsible to the Mayor and Council The Mayor provides general supervision to the City Administrator.
1	West Bend	31,692	Mayor–Council	Administrator	Responsible to the Mayor and Council
1	Fitchburg	27,154	Mayor–Council	Administrator	Responsible to the Mayor and Council
1	Mount Pleasant	26,293	Village Board–Administrator	Administrator	Responsible to the Village President and Board
1	Caledonia	24,708	Village Board–Administrator	Administrator	Responsible to the Village President and Board
1	Mequon	23,509	Mayor–Council	Administrator (CAO and CFO)	Responsible to the Mayor and Council
1	South Milwaukee	21,236	Mayor–Council	Administrator (CAO)	Responsible to the Council
1	Grand Chute	20,919	Town Board–Administrator	Administrator (CAO)	Reports to the Town Board
1	Pleasant Prairie	20,400	Village Board–Administrator	Administrator (CAO)	Responsible to the Village Board
1	Germantown	19,901	Village Board–Administrator	Administrator	Appointed by Village President and confirmed by Board - Reports to the Board
1	Waukesha	71,489	Full time - Mayor–Council	Administrator	
19	Totals / % of grand totals	45%	Out of 42 Municipalities		

Wisconsin Municipalities with Population 20,000 and above (42 total)

#	City	Population	Form of Government	Manager or Administrator	Comments
1	Eau Claire	67,684	Council–Manager	Manager	City Council approves and amends the City Manager’s employment agreement.
1	Oshkosh	66,621	Council–Manager	Manager	Position includes a negotiated employment agreement as part of council-manager governance.
1	Janesville	64,009	Council–Manager	Manager	Position includes a negotiated employment agreement as part of council-manager governance.
1	Fond du Lac	42,917	Council–Manager	Manager	City Manager appointed by Council; governance structure indicates formal agreement.
1	Beloit	36,881	Council–Manager	Manager	City Manager works under a contract; recent news confirmed contract renewal discussions.
1	Menomonee Falls	35,974	Village Board–Administrator	Manager	Village Manager role typically includes an employment agreement, though not confirmed.
1	De Pere	24,555	Council–Manager	Manager	City Manager appointed by Mayor and Council; operates under a professional agreement.
1	Watertown	23,891	Council–Manager	Manager	Recruitment postings specify salary ranges and qualifications, implying formal agreement.
8	Totals / % of grand totals	19%	Out of 42 Municipalities		

Wisconsin Municipalities with Population 20,000 and above (42 total)				
#	City	Population	Form of Government	Manager or Administrator
1	Milwaukee	599,642	Mayor–Council (Strong Mayor)	None
1	Madison	245,691	Mayor–Council	None
1	Green Bay	104,891	Mayor–Council	None
1	Appleton	73,971	Mayor–Council	None
1	La Crosse	52,440	Mayor–Council	None - 2012 Advisory Ref - Administrator rejected by 58% majority
1	New Berlin	40,392	Mayor–Council	None
1	New Berlin	39,842	Mayor–Council	None
1	Wausau	39,302	Mayor–Council	None - 2015 Advisory Ref - Administrator rejected by 52% majority (67% of registered voters did not vote)
1	Brookfield	37,982	Council–Manager	None
1	Greenfield	37,157	Mayor–Council	None
1	Manitowoc	33,102	Mayor–Council	None
1	Superior	26,705	Mayor–Council	None
1	Stevens Point	26,658	Mayor–Council	None
1	Neenah	25,855	Mayor–Council	None
1	Muskego	24,621	Mayor–Council	None
15	Totals / % of grand totals	36%	Out of 42 Municipalities	

Hiring Process / Timeline Considerations

- Use a qualified search firm or not
- At-will employment (Ordinance assumes at-will)
 - Buy-out – 12 usual ask – 6 months, increase one month for each year of employment
 - Salary – Defer to HR Study
 - Benefits – Standard to municipality – Relocation allowance – Deferred comp, car allowance, phone allowance, Tuition repayment,
- Contract – 1-3 years
 - Length of term (*Ordinance is indefinite*)
 - Buy-out – 12 month, usual ask – On approach - 6 months, increase one month for each year of employment
 - Salary & Benefits – See above
- Public Engagement
 - Public Interviews (Council, Department Heads, Key local leaders)
 - Meet and Greet with public
 - *No Ordinance provision*

Department / Staff Authority

- **Does the Administrator have responsibility and authority over the Staff?**
 - Department Heads – all
 - Department Heads – some
 - All or some of Staff – **Exceptions due to state statutes - Library, Police & Fire examples**
- **Council is the last Grievance step for**
 - All Staff
 - Department Heads only - **Typical**
 - *Ordinance - Council for Dept heads 3(b), and Appropriate Officer 3(d) staff*
- **Ordinance**
 - Administration of day-to-day operations
 - Plan of administration
 - Establish administrative procedures
 - Council approves Dept heads hiring. Is firing clear?
- **What other Cities Do?**
 - Typical to run day to day operations
 - Hire or promote dept heads – with council approval
 - Discipline or fire department heads -

LaCrosse Departments

Authority / Responsibility over Department Heads and Staff

- Airport
- Assessor
- Building & Inspections
- City Clerk
- Engineering
- Finance
- Fire Department
- Human Resources
- Information Technology
- La Crosse Center
- City Attorney
- Library
- Municipal Court
- Municipal Transit (MTU)
- Parks, Recreation & Forestry
- Planning & Development
- Police & Parking
- Refuse & Recycling
- Street
- Utilities
- Crisis Management

Budget - Finance

- What is the Administrator's Role in the Budget Process
 - None
 - Initial Development leading to final approval – *Ordinance*
- What other Cities Do?
 - Typically, Administrator leads the budget process, internal staff, then with the appropriate committees and final governing body approval.

Mayor's duties - Removes oversight of day-to-day operations, management, and administration to Administrator (*Ordinance*)

- What other Cities Do?
 - Mayor is part-time (West Allis and Waukesha have full time mayors and administrators)
 - Chair meetings of the Common Council with the ability to break a tie vote and veto
 - Some Mayors work closely with the Administrator
 - Acting as chief spokesperson for the City.
 - Mayor (and Council) continues oversight
 - Promoting positive public and intergovernmental relations.
 - Presenting the annual budget to the Common Council.
 - Providing constituent service.
 - Appoint citizens and Aldermen to City boards, commissions and committees
- Assure that City ordinances and State laws are observed and enforced and that all City officers and employees perform their duties
- Exercise emergency powers as are necessary and expedient for the health, safety, welfare and good order of the City
- Facilitate work of the Common Council
- Serve as head of the Police and Fire Departments
- Represent the City as chief advocate at municipal, county, state and federal levels
- Represent the City at important ceremonial functions
- Chair meetings of the Plan Commission
- Serve on the Water Utility Commission
- May sit as ex officio member on boards, commissions and committees

What does the transition look like

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Questions?

- Happy to assist with future research if needed
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