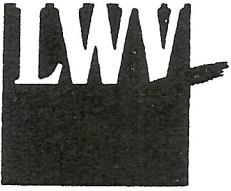


The League of Women Voters Education Fund
CITY GOVERNMENT: Portland, Oregon

Part II

A 1991 Update



INTRODUCTION

The charge to the committee by the League of Women Voters' convention was to compare Portland's form of government to alternative forms and to evaluate the budget process, the efficiency of operation and the political effectiveness. In the first year study, the committee described the current structure of Portland's government and its historical background, alternative forms of municipal government, the functions of city bureaus, and the budget process.

In this study, the committee discusses the criteria for judging forms of municipal government and reviews the viable forms with their advantages and disadvantages. The committee includes tools to help members decide if a change in our current form of government is desirable, and if so, what kinds of changes are indicated. These tools include the advantages and disadvantages of the different forms, statistics about cities of approximately the same population but with different forms of government, and perceptions and opinions of experts inside and outside of government.

WHAT IS A CITY?

"... The whole story of man's achievement is mainly the stories of a few cities," says Eugene McQuillin in The Law of Municipal Corporations.

A city is a municipal corporation, not dissimilar to a private business corporation. The state charters both corporations. "A corporation is an 'artificial person,'" McQuillin continues, "It can own property, sell property, sue and be sued, borrow money,

loan money, enter into contracts, and carry on similar business operations. If you sue a corporation, you are not suing the members thereof — a corporation is something different and apart from its members."

A city generally comes into existence when its citizens want more or better services. The city as a corporation carries on business in which the residents of the city, like the stockholders of the business corporation, are collectively interested.

CRITERIA

What criteria can citizens use to determine whether or not their city is well managed? Carl Abbott, professor of Urban Studies and Planning at Portland State University suggests five characteristics to consider: accountability, responsiveness, equity, efficiency and effectiveness. These criteria provide a framework for assessing city government.

1) Accountability

Dr. Abbott defines an accountable government as one that provides citizens with access to information in order to make informed choices. An example of how a government can block citizen access to information is presented in a Checklist for Well-Managed-Cities prepared by the City of Sunnyvale, California. "Frequently cities bury the costs of benefits, retirement, equipment, and space, and therefore the decision maker does not have a good handle on what a particular service actually costs. This reduces the opportunity of the decision maker to address the question of whether the service at that level is really worth the cost, and presents a major barrier to the analytical review of whether contract services can be

provided at less cost."(p.3)

Other sources additionally define an accountable government as one which provides citizens with the power to make changes through elections. Appointed officials may be less accountable, in this sense, than elected officials because they do not serve at the will of the people.

2) Responsiveness

The ability of a government to be flexible and to change with the times — and to recognize that times are changing — is the hallmark of responsiveness. Responsiveness is particularly important for Portland today, according to the final report of the 1989-90 Portland Civic Index Project. "The image many of us carry about Portland — its size, demographics and role in the region — is no longer accurate. Portland is undergoing a period of significant change, change that will redefine our concept of our civic character."(p.3) Changes mentioned in the report include the addition of half a million people to the metropolitan area by 2010, increased ethnic and social diversity, and the onset of big city problems such as traffic congestion and gangs.

3) Equity

A city should provide services such as police protection, street repairs, and park maintenance on an equitable basis regardless of the race, class or location of its citizens. An example of inequitable service provision can be found in Chicago's 1979 snow removal program which underserved black neighborhoods. Many analysts attributed the mayor's subsequent defeat to that inequitably administered program.

4) Efficiency

Efficiency is measured by how much service citizens get for each tax dollar spent. One feature of a well-managed city, as noted in the Sunnyvale checklist, is its ability to keep abreast of cost-saving technologies. "Many new products are consistently hitting the market that . . . increase service levels while maintaining or cutting costs."(p.1) The authors of the checklist also encourage using the merit principle for hiring and promotion. They believe it is essential, with scarce dollars, that those most quali-

fied gain entry into government jobs and are promoted according to merit.

5) Effectiveness

The government should accomplish what the citizens want accomplished. Is the crime rate declining? Does the fire department have a good fire prevention program and also few fires?

David Ammons, of the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia, studied fourteen cities that "demonstrated consistently high marks on performance indicators in seven traditional local government functions." His indicators of high performance were the following:

- Police - the number of motor vehicle thefts per 100,000 people
- Fire - the public protection classification (these are Insurance Services Office ratings)
- Refuse collection - the number of collections per week and whether they were curbside or at the back door
- Streets - the percentage of paved and curbed streets
- Library - the per capita circulation
- Parks and recreation - the number of lighted tennis courts per 5,000 population
- Financial administration - whether or not the city has a Municipal Finance Officers' Associations Certificate of Conformance.

Dr. Ammons chose these examples to represent the wide variety of services and activities provided by cities.

TOOLS

Citizens need tools to determine whether or not a particular form of government would be suitable for Portland. Understanding the various forms of city government and their strengths and weaknesses is a first tool. A second tool is availing oneself of the opinions of experts who have studied city governments, or who have been elected or appointed city officials. Such experts offer valuable insights into what works and what often fails. Finally, the third tool is comparing statistics of cities similar in size to Portland. Interesting portraits of these cities' relative accomplishments emerge. In the following pages we provide such tools.

Forms of Municipal Government

COMMISSION

The most significant aspect of the commission form of government is that all power of municipal government rests in one body, the commission.

In the purest form, five to seven commissioners are elected at-large in non-partisan elections. Each commissioner is in charge of a department. Commissioners both formulate and administer policy. Ordinances, budgets, contracts, and many appointments are approved by a majority vote of the commissioners. A mayor is selected from among the commissioners by the commissioners. Because the mayor has a single vote on the commission, she/he is a titular mayor only. The mayor presides over the commission but has no veto power.

Variations in the form have evolved to accommodate the needs of cities. A commissioner may receive a department assignment by running for a specific position, by receiving it through a vote of the commission, or by mayoral appointment.

The method of mayoral designation also varies. The mayor may be selected by fellow commissioners on a rotating basis, appointed permanently to the position by fellow commissioners, or elected to the specific position by a vote of the citizens. Occasionally the mayor is assigned no department but is responsible for general supervision. The mayor may have veto or appointive and removal powers.

Portland is the only large city that still uses the commission form. Although it has adapted the form to serve Portland, it is typical in many ways. The commission is composed of five commissioners elected at-large in non-partisan elections. According to the charter, each of the positions has a specific title, though none but the position of mayor has specific duties or responsibilities.

The mayor presides over the council and has the authority to assign departments. The mayor has a single vote just like the other commissioners and no veto.

Advantages and disadvantages to the "text-book" commission form do not necessarily apply to Portland's commission form.

Advantages

1. It is a simple plan. Powers of government are all concentrated and, therefore, voters can hold the elected public officials accountable.

2. The commissioners have both legislative and executive power, making it easier for them to respond directly to the needs of the people.

3. Non-partisan, at-large elections of the commissioners reduce the power of political organizations in the election process.

4. Commissioners administer the departments assigned to them, thus preventing unelected department heads from gaining too much power.

Disadvantages

1. The electorate may choose commissioners who may not be skilled administrators.

2. Commissioners may not provide a check on public spending. The elected commissioners who vote on the budget are also the ones who spend the money in their roles as department heads. There is little incentive for a thorough overall examination of the budget of other departments for fear of retaliation from other commissioners.

3. The multi-executive form of the commission government tends to create deadlocks and unyielding factions because of a lack of leadership and a generally acceptable negotiator.

4. There is no separation between policy determination and policy implementation, that is between legislative and administrative powers. Checks and balances are thus not built into the system.

5. Since each commissioner oversees a department, administrative reorganization or realignment is difficult.

6. Because no one has overall charge of departments, coordination between various departments is not assured.

COUNCIL-MANAGER

The council-manager form of city government was formulated to provide professional, non-partisan, expert management for a city. Most large cities do not have the council-manager form; however, 40 percent of cities with populations over 5,000 have adopted it. It does not have a separation of powers, but it does have a separation of functions. The council performs the legislative duties; the city

manager is hired by the council to perform administrative duties.

The council members, from three to twenty in number, may be elected at-large, from districts, or as a mix of at-large and from districts. Most often the council members are elected for four years. They have two functions: to legislate and to hire the manager.

One of the council members may be designated mayor, or a mayor may be directly elected. This mayor is titular only, with no appointive or veto powers. The mayor presides over the council and is usually a full-fledged member of the council. The mayor often has emergency powers.

The manager is hired by, fired by, and works for the council, rather than the citizens. The manager appoints and removes department heads and supervises their activities. The council, however, has no direct authority over the manager's subordinates. Enforcement of laws and ordinances and preparation and execution of the budget are also the responsibility of the manager. The manager is not the policy maker, but the manager may certainly influence policy to the degree that the council listens to and accepts the manager's recommendations.

Cincinnati, Ohio, is an example of a city using the council-manager form of government. Nine council members are elected for two-year terms. All legislative powers are vested in the council. At the council's first meeting, one of the members is elected for two years to be the presiding officer and to serve as mayor.

Cincinnati's mayor presides at council meetings and performs other duties as prescribed by the charter or imposed by the council. The mayor appoints the members of the independent boards and commissions with council consent. The mayor has no veto.

The council appoints the city manager who serves at its pleasure. The city manager is the chief executive and administrative officer and is selected on the basis of administrative and executive qualifications. The council cannot interfere with the appointment or removal of any administrative services' officers or employees.

Oakland, California, also has the council manager form of government. Seven part-time council

members are elected from their districts, one is elected at-large, as is the mayor. The mayor is the ceremonial head and represents Oakland in intergovernmental relations. The mayor presides at council meetings, has one vote and no veto. The mayor nominates citizens to boards and commissions with council approval.

The city council is the policy making body. The council passes all laws and creates boards and commissions. Policy decisions are carried out by the city manager whom the council appoints. The council is responsible for final approval of the budget.

Advantages

1. Administrative responsibility is centralized in the hands of one official, allowing efficiency and coordination.

2. There is an emphasis on administrative professionalism. Managers use analytical skills to solve business problems and are guided by a code of professional ethics (similar to ethics codes for lawyers provided by bar associations).

3. With powers of government concentrated in the council, voters know whom to hold responsible for public policy making.

4. There is a separation of appropriating and spending functions of government; the council appropriates and the manager spends.

5. The council-manager form provides the opportunity for effective leadership by the mayor and city council by leaving the administrative duties to the professional manager.

Disadvantages

1. Because the manager does not face the public in a general election, the manager does not have to be as responsive to citizens' demands as does an elected mayor.

2. This plan often fails to provide for adequate political leadership.

3. In selecting a manager, the possibility exists which allows partisan or personal considerations to take precedence over professional competence.

4. Sometimes it is difficult to find well-trained and experienced managers.

5. This form may not work for large cities because a large city may need an executive with political as well as administrative abilities. Depart-

ments, bureau offices, and branches may be captured by special interest groups. A mayor who can hire and discharge department heads may be needed.

6. When managers leave their jobs abruptly, it can cause disruption in the flow and efficiency of city business.

7. A city with diverse ethnic or socio-economic groups may need a politically strong mayor to bring the groups together.

MAYOR-COUNCIL

The main concept associated with the mayor-council form of local government is separation of powers. The elected mayor is the administrator; the elected council members are the policy makers.

The mayor usually represents a city-wide constituency, while the council members most often represent individual districts or wards. Citizens, therefore, need vote only for mayor and their district's council member. However, there is sometimes a mix between council members elected from districts and at-large.

Council members may be elected to two- or four-year terms and to full- or part-time positions.

The primary difference between weak-mayor and strong-mayor council forms of local government is in the amount of administrative power vested in the mayor.

Strong mayor

Much of the strong mayor's strength is gained from the authority to appoint and remove department heads. The mayor may hire a professional assistant who is somewhat like a city manager.

A strong mayor usually has strong political powers as well as administrative powers. This is especially true if council members are elected from districts rather than at-large. The mayor has a city-wide constituency, thus a much broader power base than a council person who has a district-wide power base. The mayor frequently has veto power.

Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania, has a mayor-council form of government with a strong mayor. The mayor is elected at-large, serves for four years, and has veto power over council decisions. All executive and law enforcement powers are vested in the mayor.

The council consists of nine members, elected

at-large with staggered four-year terms. Members elect a president from within the body, who presides at all council meetings and appoints all council committees as well as a chair for each committee. The president schedules and presides at public hearings. The council can override a mayoral veto by a two-thirds majority vote.

Albuquerque, New Mexico, also operates under the mayor-council form of government with a strong mayor. Nine part-time council members serve four-year terms and are elected from districts. The mayor also serves a four-year term, but is full-time. All city elections are non-partisan. The mayor has veto power and makes appointments with council approval. The charter requires the mayor to appoint an administrative officer to help deal with the day-to-day operation of the city.

Council members serve on smaller standing committees which provide for close examination of issues. The council's small committees allow for extensive discussion of the issues and give citizens ample opportunity for input. The entire council meets periodically to make final legislative decisions. This form was adopted by the voters of Albuquerque in 1971. Prior to this, the city was run by a five member commission and a city manager. There was a great deal of dissatisfaction with the old form because of constant conflict between the commission and the manager.

Salt Lake City recently changed from a commission form to a mayor-council non-partisan form of government. Seven council members are elected from districts and serve two-year terms. The council is part-time and members set their own salaries. The mayor is elected at-large and has a veto which applies to ordinances, tax levies and appropriations. The mayor appoints the department heads, treasurer, city attorney, public works director and recorder. The council appoints an independent auditor.

Advantages

1. Administrative authority is concentrated in the mayor, who is responsible for all administrative decisions throughout the government.
2. This form retains the separation of powers.
3. A strong mayor provides political leadership.
4. The strong-mayor structure allows latitude

n hiring competent administrators and firing incompetent ones.

Disadvantages

1. A strong mayor may dominate a weak council.
2. People elected to office are not necessarily experienced administrators.
3. Partisan politics could influence administrative decisions.
4. Sometimes council members are part-time and low paid; therefore, they may be unable to spend the necessary time at the job.

Weak mayor

A weak mayor does not have the authority to appoint or remove department heads. The council retains the power to do this. The council also has complete authority over preparation and passage of the city budget.

In some cases, the mayor is not directly elected by the people, but by the council members from within their ranks. The weak mayor may have power to preside over the council, but may vote only to break a tie.

Minneapolis, Minnesota, has a mayor-council form of city government with a weak mayor. The mayor is elected city-wide and serves a four-year term. There are 13 full-time council members elected from wards. Council members sit on several standing committees where the work of managing the city is done, thus council members develop and implement policy and, through committees, administer and manage the city.

The mayor does not sit on the council but does have veto power. The mayor also represents the city on official and ceremonial occasions and has the responsibility for developing the annual operating budget and annual five-year capital budgets. The mayor may also recommend legislation and establish task forces.

In 1984, the Minneapolis city council formed an executive committee over which the mayor presides. This committee took over many of the duties formerly performed by the mayor, such as nominating the city coordinator, who is responsible to both the mayor and the council. The executive committee also nominates the civil service commissioners, the police and

fire chiefs, city engineer, health commissioner, city attorney, and assessor for council approval.

The executive committee consists of the mayor, city council president and up to three additional members of the city council chosen by the council. Not all members can be from the same party unless the mayor and entire council are. All executive committee nominations are subject to full council approval and the mayor's veto.

Although it existed informally for a few years, the six-year-old executive committee is still a new entity within the government structure of Minneapolis. It was established as a vehicle to improve coordination by requiring the mayor and council members to work together in selecting and overseeing top city administrators. It was also seen as a way to encourage more consistent policies and less duplication of functions, making city government simpler and more accountable. There still seem to be questions as to whether it has done this. According to the LWV of Minneapolis study, "The Executive Committee has been considered a 'super' committee and has sparked resentment from those who are not members." Charter amendments to eliminate the executive committee or drastically restructure it were considered in the fall 1990 elections.

Advantages

1. It may be a more democratic system because there are so many independently elected officials directly responsible to the electorate.
2. It provides numerous checks and balances against potential misuse of administrative power.
3. Large numbers of elected officials provide numerous access points to the government for the less influential and less organized members of the community.

Disadvantages

1. No one official is responsible for city administration. This may lead to a lack of coordination and direction.
2. The administration of government functions may be vested more in the hands of amateurs than professionals, which may reduce the efficiency of government and the quality of city services.
3. There is no leadership in the preparation of the budget.

A Selection of Opinions

Chris Thomas, who served as attorney for the City of Portland from 1977-1984, told the League that one of the strengths of the commission form is its responsiveness, and that when a manager comes between the people and the council, the council is insulated from the people. In addition, he said all five council members must be brought along to reach consensus, if at all possible.

On the other hand, he said one of the weaknesses of the commission form is that elected council members are not managers or seldom trained in management, yet each is running a multi-million dollar business. He added that the commissioners are advocates for the budget of their particular bureau. Mr. Thomas commented that commissioners tend to spend little time on items of substance because they are too caught up with minutiae and too busy with constituents. Therefore long-range planning suffers.

The city has had an informal process for long-range planning, but most feel it is ineffective. Most of the people the committee interviewed stated that a major weakness of Portland's government is a lack of a process for long-range strategic planning.

Stephen Bauer, director of Portland's Office of Finance and Administration, commented to the League that our form of commission government makes city-wide elected officials responsible for city-wide issues. Council members must serve as judges in land use cases, administer bureaus, and set policy. Commissioners are more concerned with their own bureaus and often think they are elected because of their reputation in managing their bureaus. But, he added, this system is accessible to the people.

Margaret Strachan, former Portland city commissioner, believes one of the strengths of the commission form is the ability of commissioners to implement the policies which they endorse and favor. They are better able to do this because the commissioners have direct administrative responsibility for the bureaus they are assigned, and recently mayors have assigned bureaus according to the commissioners' areas of strength and interest. Thus the mayor can hold them accountable.

Chris Tobkin, administrative assistant to Portland Mayor Bud Clark, believes that the mayor's ability to reassign bureaus keeps commissioners from building their own bureaus into kingdoms.

Barbara Clark, Portland city auditor, told the League that in the commission form of government, split decisions used to lead to sabotage efforts by the losers against the winners. Knowing the whole council could lose credibility, the current commissioners have made a deliberate effort to build teamwork. Consensus building, however, in Ms. Clark's opinion does slow down the decision process. She checked the past 1,000 decisions of city council, and found only 21 non-consensus votes.

Sandy Peck, executive director of the League of Women Voters of Salt Lake City, said that prior to 1980 Salt Lake City had a commission form of government similar to Portland's. The five commissioners were elected at-large and one of the five was elected to the position of mayor. The mayor presided over commission meetings but had no veto. Most of the commissioners were from one area of the city while Salt Lake City's ethnic population lives in another area and thus were excluded from direct representation. The impetus for change occurred mainly as a result of public concern over closed meetings of the commission and lack of public access to government.

According to Geralann Coldwell, former president of the League of Women Voters of Metropolitan Tulsa, there were several unsuccessful attempts to change the commission form prior to 1989. She believes a lawsuit brought by the NAACP was instrumental in bringing about the change as well as the fact that all of the then city commissioners were visibly in favor of the change and worked for its passage. Tulsans voted in a strong mayor-council form in 1989.

Don Balmer, political science professor at Lewis and Clark College, said that while there is no fixed principle regarding commissioners running from districts, it may be time now to try such a system. Meeting community needs and enlisting community involvement could be the next step after the establishment of strong neighborhood associations.

Statistics of Comparably-Sized Cities

	Albuquer- que	Cincinnati	Minnea- polis	Oakland	Pittsburgh	Portland	Salt Lake City	Tulsa
Population ¹	366,750	369,750	356,840	356,960	387,490	387,870	158,440	373,750
Number of Households ¹	124,032	157,677	161,858	141,657	166,067	158,847	67,576	145,414
Persons per Household ¹	2.65	2.35	2.19	2.34	2.44	2.25	2.35	2.43
% Female Headed Households ¹	11.2%	15.4%	10.9%	16.2%	15.5%	10.0%	9.0%	10.2%
% Population Completing 12 or more Years of Education ¹	79.1%	57.9%	74.8%	71.5%	61.1%	75.8%	76.7%	77.3%
% Population Completing 16 or more Years of Education ¹	24.9%	17.6%	23.7%	21.8%	14.6%	22.1%	25.5%	21.7%
City Govt. Employment Rate/10,000 Pop., 1985 ^{1a}	177.1	167.3	151.2	117.3	158.8	123.9 (1984)	145.0	not available
Form of Govt as of 1986 ¹	Mayor Council	Council Manager	Mayor Council	Council Manager	Mayor Council	Commis- sion	Mayor Council ^b	Mayor Council ^c
General Revenue Millions of \$ ¹	\$341.8	\$328.2	\$517.5	\$372.5	\$300.6	\$256.6	\$145.5	\$335.3
Taxes per Capita 1986 ¹	\$233	\$406	\$330	\$943	\$485	\$306	\$402	\$371
Typical Household Income ²	\$48,643	\$46,738	\$54,262	\$63,499	\$44,675	\$46,182	\$47,516	\$41,890
State & Local Taxes ^{2d}	\$1,126	\$2,117	\$3,616	\$4,329	\$2,218	\$3,687	\$2,935	\$1,507

¹ U.S. Bureau of the Census, The City and County Data Book, 1988.

^a refers to all persons gainfully employed by and performing services for a government. That includes persons paid from federally funded programs and paid elected officials.

^b In 1980, Salt Lake City changed from the commission form to a strong mayor.

^c Tulsans voted to change from the commission form to a strong mayor/council form on February 14, 1989.

² Boyer and Savageau, Places Rated Almanac. Based on Metropolitan Area. Portland includes Clackamas, Multnomah, Washington and Yamhill Counties.

^d Includes state personal income tax and state sales tax. Incomes are estimated for a two paycheck couple with two children taking typical exemptions and deductions. Sales tax is based on IRS estimates.

	Albuquerque	Cincinnati	Minneapolis	Oakland	Pittsburgh	Portland	Salt Lake City	Tulsa
Housing Median Price Index ^{2e}	90	80	94	218	74	73	73	66
Utilities Electric Rate Index ²	113	112	108	107	127	81	84	90
Property Tax index ²	69	74	82	199	91	144	61	44
College Tuition Index ^{2f}	64	149	141	60	192	88	93	57
Food Cost Index ²	98	103	98	102	95	97	94	100
Health Care Cost Index ²	119	106	122	158	115	119	113	102
Transportation Cost Index ²	114	105	104	115	100	107	105	89
Public Transportation ^{2g}	89 buses 1.42 sm/c	280 buses 1.66 sm/c	925 buses 3.44 sm/c	690 buses 439 rapid rail cars 5.70 sm/c	720 buses 40 rapid rail cars 2 cable incline 2.06 sm/c	517 city buses 3.35 sm/c	320 buses 2.40 sm/c	80 buses 1.20 sm/c
Crimes per 100,000 ³	9,965	7,473	12,097	12,534	8,875	12,753	14,116	9,178
Current Unemployment, Jan. 90 ⁴	4.3	5.1	3.9	4.0	5.8	4.1	4.1	5.9
Fire Protection Rating ⁵	4	2	3	2	4	2	2	3
Moody's Bond Rating ⁶	Aa	Aa	Aaa	no overall rating available	Baa ^{1*}	Aaa	Aaa	Aa

^e Index is based on a U.S. average of 100.

^f Based on basic yearly student charges in public colleges and universities.

^g Public Transportation - number of mass transit vehicles available during rush hour. sm/c = seat miles per capita is the number of transit seats that travel one mile of transit route daily for each person in the metro area's urban core.

³ FBI, Crime in the U.S. Includes murder, non negligent manslaughter, forcible rape, robbery, aggravated assault, burglary, larceny theft, motor vehicle theft, arson.

⁴ US Labor Statistics Bureau, News: State and Metropolitan Area Employment & Unemployment.

⁵ The Fire Protection Rating is done by the Insurance Service Office. It is based on the fire loss per capita in each city, based on a scale of 2 - 10.

⁶ Moody's Investor's Service. Scale high rating Aaa, Aa, A, Baa, Ba, B, Caa, Ca, C. * Those bonds in the Aa A Baa Ba B groups which Moody's believes possess the strongest investment attributes are designated by the symbols Aa¹ A¹ Baa¹, etc.

POSSIBLE CHANGES

Shortly after Portland adopted the commission form of government, criticisms of the new plan emerged. In 1913, the same year Portland adopted the commission form, the National Municipal League was already acknowledging serious problems with it. In 1948, a citizens' committee drafted charter amendments for a council-manager form but failed to obtain enough petition signatures to place the amendment on the ballot. In 1958 proponents placed a measure to adopt the council-manager form of government on the ballot, but it was defeated. The Portland City Club in 1961 issued a report and recommended that Portland adopt a strong mayor-council form, and five years later the voters rejected that plan at the polls.

Each time a new form of government has been placed on the ballot, Portlanders have rejected the change. However, it is possible to stop short of abandoning the present form of government in order to improve it. A few changes might be made that could help solve some of the perceived problems of the present form.

1. Elect commissioners from districts.

The city could be divided into four districts with the mayor running at-large or into five districts with the commissioners electing the mayor from within their ranks. Citizens would give up the opportunity of having all five commissioners represent them because the commissioners might be more likely to be divided along district lines rather than function lines. But minority representation might be better assured.

2. Elect commissioners for specific positions.

If commissioners ran for a specific bureau, it is more likely that someone with expertise in that bureau's function would be elected. Expertise may be heightened, however, at the cost of flexibility. The mayor would lose the power to shuffle bureaus. Running for a specific bureau also might promote empire building.

3. Limit the length of time a commissioner supervises one bureau.

A limitation would prevent any commissioner from establishing a fiefdom. However, a commissioner might not have time to develop an expertise, causing more of a reliance on non-elected personnel.

4. Limit the number of terms the commissioners or mayor serve.

This could create a more citizen-oriented commission. It would allow more people to participate, but it could limit the service of outstanding commissioners.



photo-Richard Brown "Portlandia" by Raymond Kaskey, 1985. Provided for the percent for art program administered by the Metropolitan Arts Commission. Portland, Oregon

In a letter to the League, David N. Ammons, professor at the Carl Vinson Institute of Government at the University of Georgia, suggests that citizens need to do some soul searching before deciding to alter their form of city government. "Many people expect too much from a structural fix for local government. Each form of government has its strong and weak points and its own set of advocates and critics. Unfortunately, enthusiastic proponents for a given form of government often are guilty of overstatement and promise too much—more than a structure can guarantee. It is probably better and far safer to contend that each form emphasizes different values and tends to differ from the others in process and product. But there are exceptions to almost every rule when it comes to form of government tendencies—a city manager is an administrative expert, but that does not mean that he or she is cool, detached, or interested only in the administrative machinery of government (many are compassionate and very responsive to the plight and needs of various segments of society) and mayors are not all naive to the intricacies of municipal management (some mayors are very good managers). But tendencies can be important to consider. If Portland operated under the strong-mayor form of government, the voters probably would elect a mayor on the strength of political appeal and vote-getting capability rather than managerial credentials. If Portland operated under the council-manager plan, your job announcement for the manager's position would attract a national pool of outstanding city managers—many of whom would not be attracted to the post of administrative assistant or chief of staff to a strong mayor.

The primary criticisms of the commission form pertain to the merging of legislative and administrative authority within the same body and same offices. Some critics contend that commissions sometimes become clusters of little fiefdoms. They also contend that without a greater degree of separation between legislative (budgetary) and administrative domains, fertile ground exists for a "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours" approach to governance. Much like the criticisms of other forms of government, these criticisms are generalities that do not apply in every case. Perhaps they do not apply in Portland.

...I would not suggest to you that one form of government is always better than the others for every city. I also would not suggest that the values of efficiency, productivity, and innovation are the only values of importance in local governance. To the extent that those values are given high priority in a particular city, the council-manager form of government may be the most appropriate structure. It is not my desire, however, to promote a particular form of government, or to suggest what values the City of Portland should emphasize. Each of the major forms (mayor-council, council-manager, and commission) has proven to be workable. On the other hand, I would not want my comments to imply that structure makes no difference. Form of government cannot guarantee a particular outcome, but it does set the stage for the emphasis of one set of values or another."

The City Government Study Committee wishes to thank the following for their assistance in preparing this study:

Carl Abbott	Margaret Strachan
Don Balmer	Chris Thomas
Barbara Clark	Chris Tobkin
Joan Smith	

The City Government Study Editorial Committee:
Carolyn Gassaway and Winky Oswald

The League of Women Voters of Portland City Government Study Committee:

Debbie Aiona	Louise Questad, V.P.
Forence Hinchliff	Carolyn Rundorff
Kris Hudson	Barbara Stalions
Leeanne MacColl, Ch.	Betty Von Glahn

Works Cited

Books

Boyer, Richard, and David Savageau, *Places Rated Almanac*. New York: Prentice Hall, 1989.

League of Women Voters of Minneapolis, *Views from the Inside, The Structure and Functioning of Minneapolis Government*. Minneapolis: LWV of Minneapolis, 1989.

League of Women Voters of Oakland, *Oakland - A Guide to Local Government*. Oakland: LWV of Oakland, 1982.

Lorch, Robert S., *State & Local Politics: The Great Entanglement*, 3rd ed. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1989.

McQuillan, Eugene, *The Law of Municipal Corporations*. Chicago: Callaghan and Co., 1928.

Moody's Investor's Service, *Moody's Bond Record, Corporates, Convertibles, Governments, Municipal and Commercial Paper Ratings, Preferred Stock Ratings*. October, 1990.

Office of the City Manager, *Checklist for Well-Managed Cities*. Sunnyvale: City of Sunnyvale, California.

Portland Civic Index Project, *Portland - City at a Crossroads*. Portland: City of Portland, 1990.

Ross, Bernard H., and Murray S. Stedman, Jr., *Urban Politics*, 3rd ed. Itasca: F.E. Peacock Publishers, Inc., 1985.

Government Documents

The Charter of the City of Cincinnati. 1983.

Federal Bureau of Investigation, *Crime in the U.S., Uniform Crime Reports 1989*, released August 5, 1989.

U.S. Bureau of the Census, *The City and County Data Book*. 1988

U.S. Labor Statistics Bureaus, *News: State and Metropolitan Area Employment & Unemployment*.

Letters and Interviews

Unpublished Letters:

Altenburger, Christine, LWV of Pittsburgh and professor University of Pittsburgh. Letter to Betty Von Glahn, 16 June 1990.

Ammons, David N., Carl Vinson Institute of

Government-The University of Georgia, Athens, Georgia. Letter to Betty Von Glahn, 21 May 1990.

Interviews

Abbott, Carl. Committee interview.

Balmer, Don. Telephone interview, 12 October 1990.

Bauer, Stephen. Committee interview, 26 October, 1989.

Clark, Barbara. Meeting with member, 6 September 1990.

Coldwell, Geraldann, League of Women Voters of Metropolitan Tulsa. Telephone interview.

Insurance Service Office, several U.S. cities. Telephone interviews, October, 1990.

Peck, Sandy, League of Women Voters of Salt Lake City. Telephone interview, 1 November 1990.

Robertson, June, League of Women Voters of Albuquerque. Telephone interview, 17 November 1990.

Smith, Joan. Committee interview, 24 July 1990.

Strachan, Margaret. Committee interview, 30 April, 1990.

Thomas, Chris. Committee interview, 9 November, 1989.

Tobkin, Chris. League of Women Voters General Meeting, 8 May 1990.

Published By:
**LEAGUE OF WOMEN VOTERS OF
PORTLAND EDUCATION FUND**

**The Galleria, #410
921 SW Morrison
Portland, Oregon 97205
(503) 228-1675**

Copyright, January 1991

**Printed Courtesy of
Fred Meyer**