A Basis for Equity, Inclusion, and Engagement in City Governance

THE NINTH UPDATE TO THE NATIONAL CIVIC LEAGUE MODEL CITY CHARTER





Mission

The mission of the National Civic League is to advance civic engagement to create equitable, thriving communities.

The National Civic League

A Brief History

- 1984 – Theodore Roosevelt, Louis Brandeis, Frederick Law Olmsted, Mary Mumford, and other leading municipal reformers gathered in Philadelphia to discuss the future of city government.
- 1898 – National Civic League developed the first “Municipal Plan.”
- 1900 – Galveston, Texas was the first community to adopt the “city commission” form of government
- 1910 – The concept of employing a professional manager for city departments was developed by Richard S. Childs. It was first implemented in Sumter, South Carolina.
- 1912 – National Municipal Review
- 1930 – One in every five cities with populations over 10,000 adopted the Model City Charter plan.
- 1949 – All-America City Award
- 1990 – “Civic Renewal Movement”
- 2000 – Change of focus: environment, racial equity, immigrant integration, transportation, and fiscal sustainability

Model City Charter

Recent Events

- Challenges to local governments:
  - Public health
  - Racial equity
  - Policing
  - Distribution of power
  - Responsibility for decision making
- Loss of trust in public institutions, experts, and policy professionals
- Conflicting priorities and political agendas
- Perception of indecision and paralysis

Model City Charter

Revision Process

- Three deliberative groups
  - Model City Charter Task Force
  - Model City Charter Revision Steering Committee
  - Model City Charter Revision Working Groups
    - Social Equity
    - Community Members/Public Engagement
    - City Mangers/Departments
    - City Attorneys/Legal Issues
    - Mayors/City Council

Model City Charter

Social Equity Working Group

- Lens of equity, *social equity*
- The word equity appears 140 times in the Ninth Edition
    - Introduction
    - Charter preambles
    - Appointment of city managers
    - Powers and duties of the city manager
    - Departments, Offices, and Agencies
    - Personnel Systems
    - Land Use, Planning, and Development
    - Budgets
    - Appendix: The Context for Social Equity and Local Governance
- Equity Office

Model City Charter

Public Engagement Working Group

- New article – Article VII

Cities fail to realize the full benefits of engagement when they conduct participation activities on a piecemeal, occasional, or differing department-by-department basis. ***Public engagement*** *will be more* ***effective***, ***equitable***, *and* ***efficient*** *if the city treats it as part of the* ***normal governance process*** *and civic infrastructure of the* ***community as a whole***.

Model City Charter

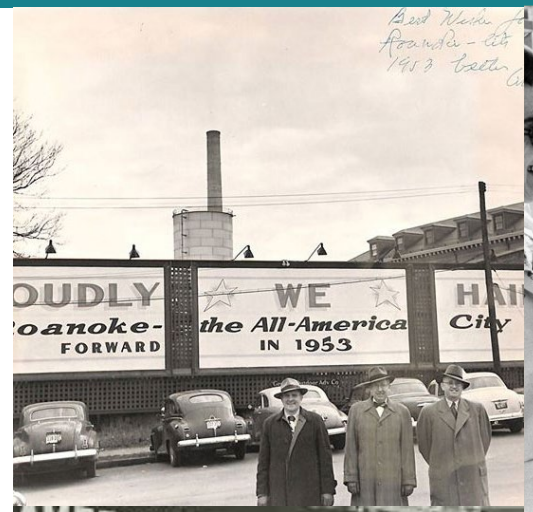
Other equity focused changes

- Publicly elected mayor
- Election of city council members by district
- Ranked-choice voting

Summary of Key Changes

- ✓ **Equity:** The Model incorporates the need for social equity throughout the document, providing a guide for cities to use in their own revisions, and includes an appendix with further discussion on the need for equity measures and how cities might address it.

- ✓ **Public Engagement:** The new edition stresses the importance of community engagement in local affairs, with an article describing principles for meaningful participation/engagement and how these principles can be reflected both in a city's charter and in other operational structures.









Summary of Key Changes

Continued

- ✓ **Elections:** The new edition encourages the direct election of mayors and discusses options for council elections for cities of different sizes and demographics. The Model also recommends local elections be in November of odd years, with discussion to allow for alternatives.

- ✓ **City Managers:** The introduction adds new commentary on the role of city managers as innovators and non-political facilitators of partnerships among city government, nonprofit groups, and community/resident groups, and underscores the accountability of the professional manager to the council and public.



Summary of Key Changes

Continued

- ✓ City Attorneys: The Model seeks to clarify the role of the city attorney as the sole legal officer for the city as an organization and not to the council, manager, or agencies of the government as separate clients.





Thank You

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