

WICKED LOCAL BROOKLINE Includes content from the Brookline TAB

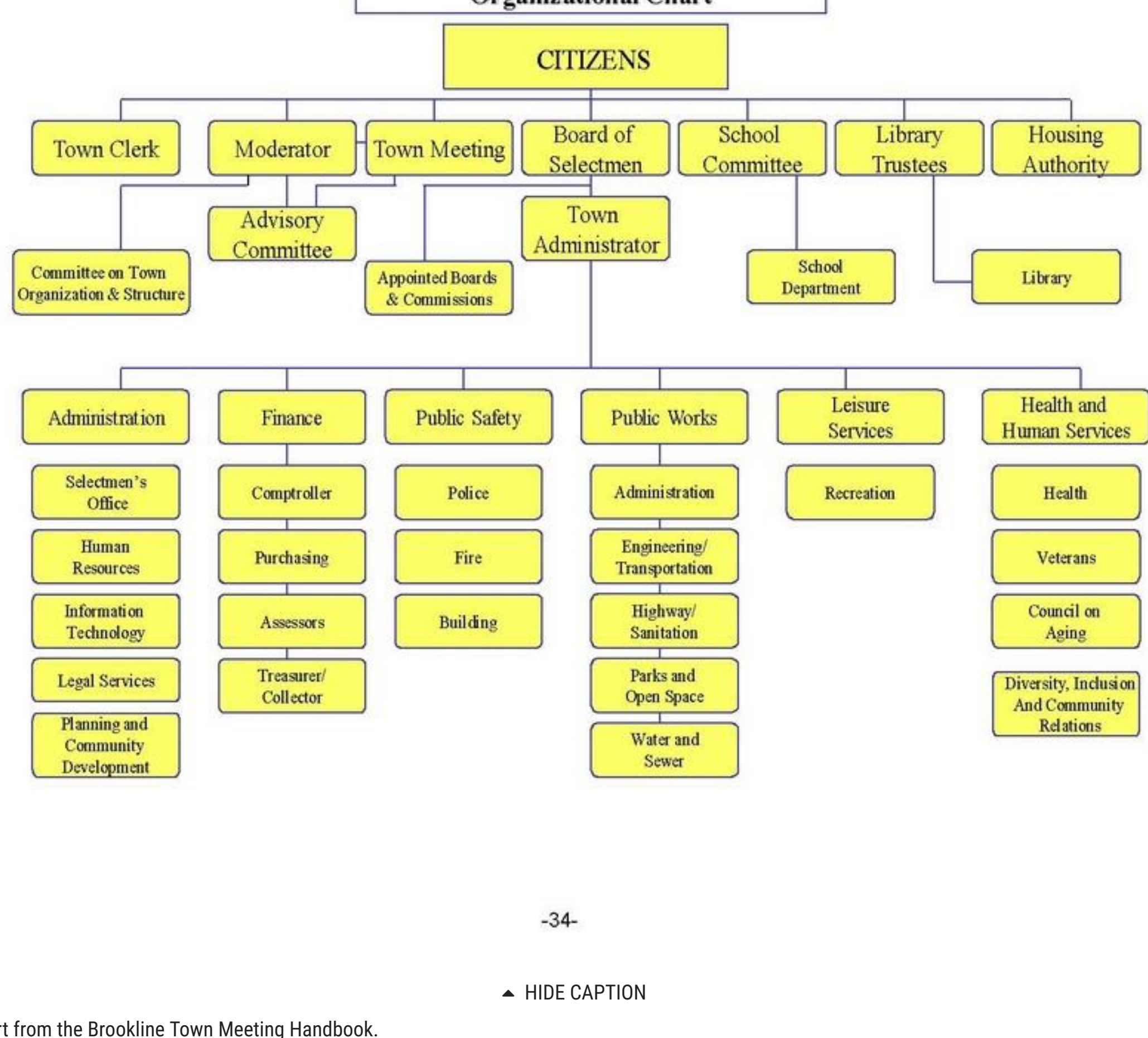
Expanding Brookline's outdoor dining... Baker overhauling virus risk spotlight... Bird shops organic: Brookline Police... Your salutes to veterans Brookline's LaCount makes history as The... As Bro do body

The #1 Cloud ERP

Complete Web-Based Solution for SMB - Eliminate IT Concerns & Costs Now.

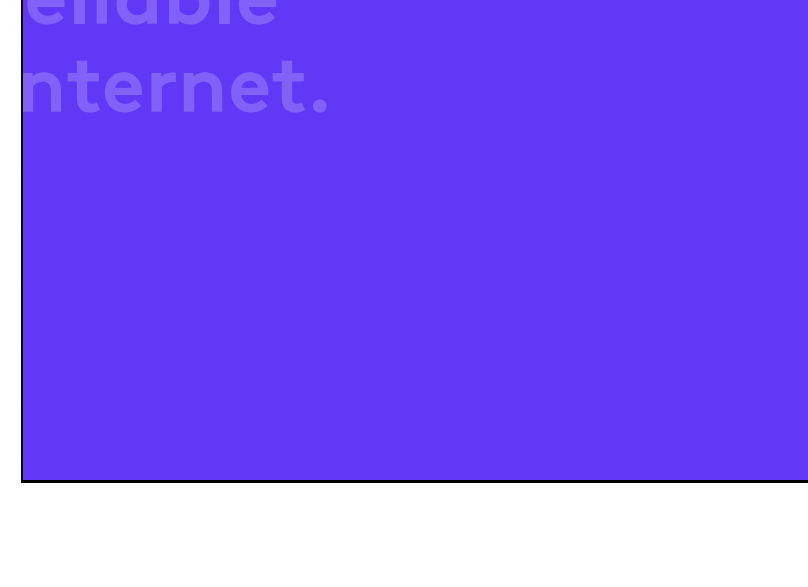
Oracle NetSuite [Open](#)

Brookline better as a town or a city?



The town organizational chart from the Brookline Town Meeting Handbook.

By Jenna Fisher
 jfisher@wickedlocal.com
 Posted Jul 6, 2016 at 6:57 PM
 Updated Jul 7, 2016 at 12:09 PM



Every so often, someone in Brookline raises the question about becoming a city.

After Framingham, Brookline is the largest town in the state with a representative Town Meeting form of government. And as Framingham recently began taking serious steps to become a city, the question has a handful of residents asking, more or less, "What about Brookline?"

"There was never a formal study done. Though there has been lot of discussion," said Town Clerk Pat Ward.

"It's come up from time to time, but it's never gone anywhere," agreed Stanley Spiegel, a Town Meeting member from Precinct 2 who served on the town's financial board for three decades.

While some wonder if having a mayor might speed decision making, others say the current form of government, reliant on volunteers and community involvement, works.

For the past century, Brookline has had representative town government. Residents select 240 Town Meeting members across 16 precincts to make up the voting body at two Town Meetings each year. The five-member Selectmen act as the executive branch and a Town Administrator takes care of the day-to-day running of Town Hall.

In the past six years, there has been no serious discussion on the change to a city, said Town Administrator Melvin Kleckner.

Along with the fact the town administrator and Selectmen work together and the government depends upon community volunteers, Kleckner said another positive to Brookline's current form of government is it ensures residents decide what issues take priority.

"When Town Meeting comes around, whether it's annual in spring or special Town Meeting in the fall, if there's a big issue going on it's going to come up at that Town Meeting with a mayor council form, my sense is that things can be pushed off, where as at Town Meeting you know everything is going to come up so you never can get too far away from the big issues," Kleckner said.

When has becoming a city come up before?

Craig Bolan, Town Meeting member from Precinct 8, said he remembers when the topic of adopting a city form of government came up.

"There was a brief period of discussion in the mid to late '70s but it died on the vine," he said.

Bolan said, as the town continued to grow and more and more committees formed, the main question was whether Brookline was getting too complicated to run as a town.

"The upshot was 'no,'" he said. "If you wanted to do that you could organize a charter commission and nobody was willing to do that."

Then in the late 1980s and early 1990s, the topic of rent control split the town. When the effort to eliminate rent control failed, a frustrated group looked into changing the form of government as a way to effect the change they were looking for.

Fred Levitan of Precinct 18 was part of that group.

"My memory is that there were advantages to town government that couldn't be replicated in a city government.... And the representative government seems to work. Now there are problems with it. Obviously. It slows things down. If we had a mayor, he or she would have sited a ninth school two years ago," he said.

There are pros and cons to both, he said.

The effort to put into changing the way things are done was a deterrent said Ward of his recollection of the time.

"If they could snap their fingers and say yes we'll have a mayoral form of government right now, I'd say yes, we'd probably get about 35 percent," he said. "But when it came down to it, people weren't so dissatisfied with it."

Other options?

Going to a mayoral model isn't the only option. There's also a council manager form such as Worcester, Cambridge, and Watertown use. Essentially this is a city manager appointed by council, but holds more executive authority than a council.

If Brookline voters decided they want to change the town's government, they could go about it in different ways. One is to form a formal charter commission, then the town would have to get together and elect a commission, which develops proposal for town.

A less formal way tailored a bit more to city or town, would be simply going to a special act.

"So for example the selectmen could create a committee who works toward a special act as opposed to a charter commission. That's how a lot of towns go about it," said Kleckner.

But Marty Rosenthal, co-chair of PAX and a former selectmen said he prefers the status quo.

"Certainly an autocracy without democracy can be more efficient. There are strong mayors and weak mayors. Cambridge has a weak mayor. It's basically one of the city counselors...Then you have places like Boston or Newton with stronger mayors and in theory they could be more efficient, but the reason they could be more efficient is that they don't have to deal with a messy thing called the citizens," he said.

What will happen in Brookline?

With Brookline's longstanding tradition of Town Meeting government Kleckner doesn't see Brookline changing from a town to a city any time soon.

"My personal opinion is that's it's unlikely," he said.

Bolan agrees.

He said from his time being on various committees and observing them he thinks the level of civic engagement is strong.

Still he said, that's not to say it couldn't happen in the future.

"In several years to come, it might get to the point where Brookline gets stuck in the mud, but we're not there right now," he said. "There's no harm done in examining the issue."

After all, he said he's counted 14 towns in the state that have adopted a city form of government, including Watertown.

"Brookline has to keep its act together," he said, "Framingham got so bad it couldn't keep a quorum at Town Meeting. But we don't have problem there...it's a dicey game to keep a town going. And Brookline's managed to do it for 300 years."

If it's a question of ensuring administrators and officials are held accountable, said Ward.

"The reality is how more accountable can you be? You're right there in the public view. Every thing is done in the public view. Even small decisions made or not made are held to higher standards and scrutiny."

What it comes down to, said Bolon has to do with the folks who participate in town government.

"I think if you talk to folks who have involved themselves in town government you won't find many skeptics," said Bolon.

Forms of government

A municipal charter is the legal document defining the organization, powers, functions, and essential procedures of the city government. The charter also details the form of municipal government, of which there are historically five forms: council-manager, mayor-council, commission, town meeting and representative town meeting.

Council-Manager

Characteristics:

City council oversees the general administration, makes policy, sets budget

Council appoints a professional city manager to carry out day-to-day administrative operations

Often the mayor is chosen from among the council on a rotating basis

This is the most common form of government. According to surveys by the International City/County Management Association (ICMA), this is the second most common form of government has grown from 48 percent in 1996 to 55 percent usage in 2006. It is most popular in cities with populations over 10,000, mainly in the Southeast and Pacific coast areas. Examples include Phoenix, Arizona; Topeka, Kansas; San Antonio, Texas, and Rockville, Maryland.

Mayor-Council

Characteristics:

Mayor is elected separately from the council, is often full-time and paid, with significant administrative and budgetary authority

Depending on the charter, the mayor could have weak or strong powers

Council is elected and maintains legislative powers

Some cities appoint a professional manager who maintains limited administrative authority

Occuring in 34 percent of cities surveyed by International City/County Management Association (ICMA), this is the second most common form of government. It is found mostly (but not exclusively) in older, larger cities, or in very small cities, and is most popular in the Mid-Atlantic and Midwest. Cities with variations in the mayor-council form of government are New York, New York; Houston, Texas; Salt Lake City, Utah, and Minneapolis, Minnesota.

Commission

Characteristics:

Voters elect individual commissioners to a small governing board

Each commissioner is responsible for one specific aspect, such as fire, police, public works, health, finance

One commissioner is designated as chairman or mayor, who presides over meetings

The commission has both legislative and executive functions

The commission form of city government is the oldest form of government in the U.S., but exists today in less than 1 percent of cities. It typically occurs in cities with populations below 100,000, such as Sunrise, Florida and Fairview, Tennessee.

Town Meeting

Characteristics:

All voters meet to decide basic policy and elect officials to carry out those policies

Although the Town Meeting form of government is generally viewed as the purest form of democracy, because it allows all eligible voters a voice in local policy decisions, it is practiced in just 5 percent of municipalities.

Town meeting government is found in Marblehead, Massachusetts.

Representative Town Meeting

Characteristics:

Voters select a large number of residents to represent them at Town Meetings, where only they can vote

Each Town Meeting must be announced with a warrant providing the date, time and location of the meeting and specifies the items to be discussed

The selectmen are responsible for implementing policy

This form of government is found in fewer than 1% of cities, almost exclusively in small, New England municipalities, such as Bowdoin, Maine and Lexington, Massachusetts.

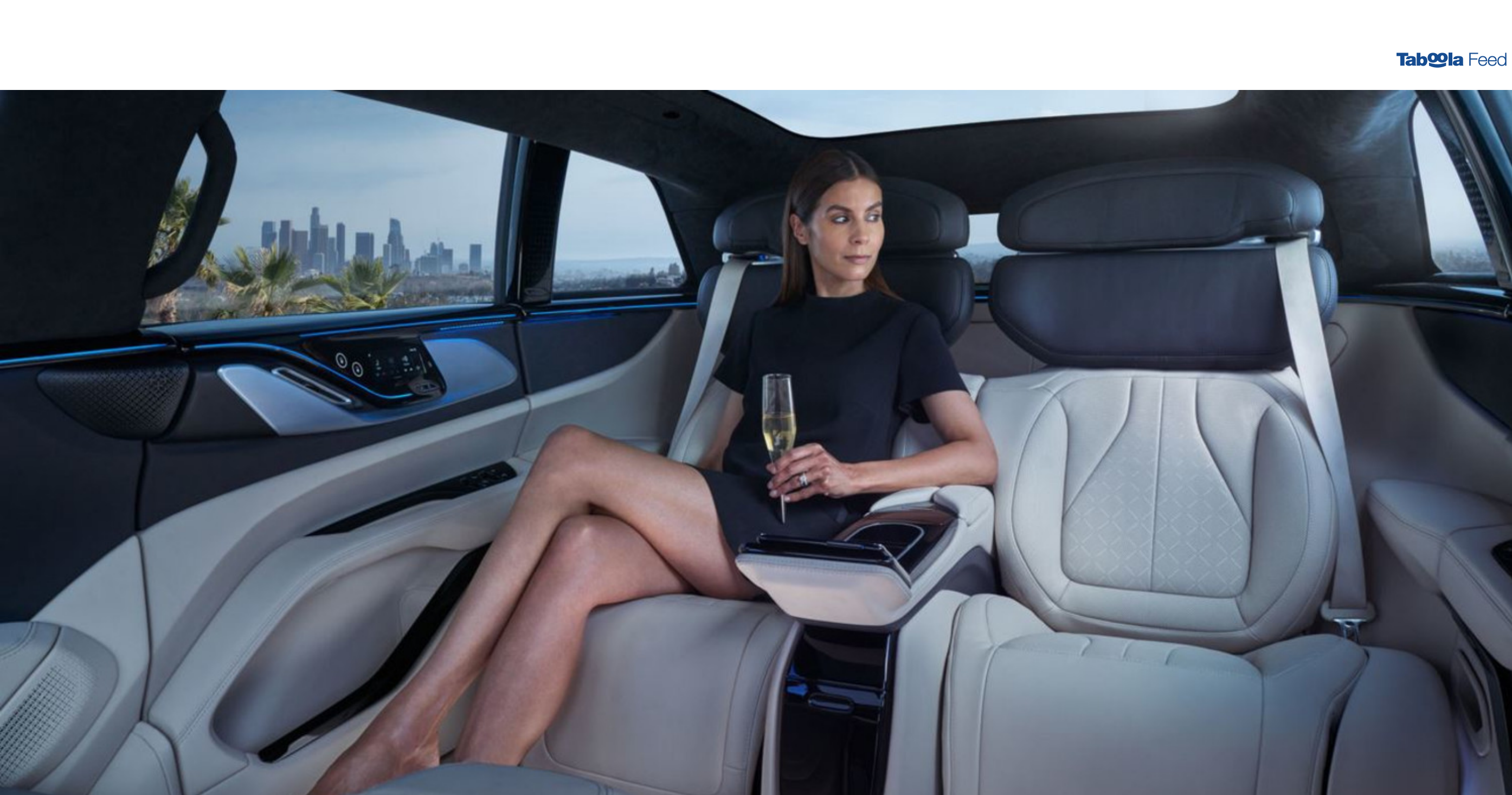
Current Trends

Recent examinations of government structure indicate these forms of government are less distinct that they once were. This is due, in part, to the common practice of incorporating structural features from other forms into one's current form. This mixing is also attributed to local responses to socioeconomic, demographic, and political changes. The most common mixing occurs across the two most prevalent forms, mayor-council and the council-manager. Among all cities proposing a change to their structure of government, the most common proposal was to add the position of chief administration officer/city manager. This professionalization of government administration also had the highest percentage of voter approval.

From the National League of Cities, nlc.org. The league is an advocacy group representing 19,000 cities, towns and villages and encompassing 49 state municipal leagues.

Hello reader, our article commenting that you would normally see here is temporarily shut down. We still want to hear from you, so we invite you to go to our Facebook page or submit a letter to the editor.

Taboola Feed



These Cars Are So Loaded It's Hard to Believe They're So Cheap

Luxury Cars | Search Ads | Sponsored

Sign up for weekly e-mails [SITE SERVICES](#)
 Home

Enter Email Address

[Sign Up Now](#)