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A monthly review of Wisconsin government, taxes and public finance

The Wisconsin Taxpayer



City Administrative Options

IN BRIEF

There is a trend in Wisconsin to place the overall administration of city government under an appointed full-time administrator. This study discusses administrative options available to cities, and provides information on use, salaries and benefits. Findings include:

- Since 1976, the number of cities with a part-time mayor and a full-time administrator has climbed from 17 to 78, while the number with a full-time mayor or manager has changed little.
- Wisconsin has 180 cities with the mayor-council form of government. Of them, 28 have full-time and 152 have part-time mayors. The latter includes the 78 cities that also have an administrator.
- As of January 1, 2004, the average full-time salary for city managers (\$90,903) exceeded those for administrators (\$70,516) and mayors (\$63,364).
- Health insurance was the benefit most frequently offered administrative officials.

Also in this issue:

Wisconsin Notes: Referendum on
County Officers' Terms

WISTAX Focus: State Superintendent
Election

Common Council: A City's Legislature

Wisconsin Notes

■ **Referendum on County Officers' Terms.** A proposed constitutional amendment to lengthen certain county officers' terms by two years will be submitted to the voters at the Tuesday, April 5, spring election. The wording on the ballot will be:

"4-year terms of office for certain county officers. Shall section 4 of article VI and section 12 of article VII of the constitution be amended to provide that district attorneys, coroners, elected surveyors, registers of deeds, treasurers, county clerks, and clerks of circuit court be elected to 4-year terms?"

Proponents contend that lengthening the terms will enable officeholders to concentrate more on performing their duties and less on running for office. Since elections would be every four years instead of every two, campaign costs would be greatly reduced, they say. In addition, for a newly elected official, four years would allow more time to become acquainted with the authority and duties of the office.

Opponents counter that a four-year term will make the officeholders less accountable to the voters. They suggest that more frequent campaigning keeps officials more in touch with citizen concerns. Those opposing extension also maintain that two years is sufficient for a first-time officeholder to learn the responsibilities of a new job.

A vote "yes" would favor the four-year term. A vote "no" would continue the current two-year term arrangement.

WISTAX Focus

■ **April 5 State Superintendent Election.** In "State superintendent foes offer views" (*Focus* #4-05), WISTAX reported on a February 17 WisPolitics.com forum at which state superintendent candidates, Elizabeth Burmaster (incumbent, Madison) and Gregg Underheim (challenger, Oshkosh), answered questions on topics such as school funding, class size, teacher compensation and training, and special education. Both candidates cited previous teaching experience.

In their remarks, Underheim stated that class size should be determined by local school districts, while Burmaster endorsed a 15-to-1 pupil-teacher ratio in needy K-3 schools. Underheim supports the QEO, which limits teacher compensation growth, while Burmaster called it "a roadblock to reform." Both candidates stressed the importance of special education: Underheim said schools need to avoid overidentification and Burmaster emphasized the importance of parental involvement.

To view detailed summaries, visit www.wistax.org/facts.

Cover Photo: J. H. Cabanis was mayor of Platteville in 1900. The city now has a manager.

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phone: 608.241.9789 fax: 608.241.5807
e-mail: wistax@wistax.org
website: www.wistax.org

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The Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance, founded in 1932, is the state's oldest and most respected private government-research organization. Through its publications, civic lectures and school talks, WISTAX aims to improve Wisconsin government through citizen education. Nonprofit, nonpartisan and independently funded, WISTAX is not affiliated with any group—national, state or local—and receives no government support.

www.wistax.org

City Administrative Options

Wisconsin has over 1,850 municipalities, which include 190 cities. People living in cities account for almost 60% of the state's population.

The two forms of city government in Wisconsin are mayor-council (used in 180 cities as of January 1, 2004) and council-manager (10 cities). Within the mayor-council classification are:

- cities with a full-time mayor (28);
- cities with a part-time mayor (74); and
- cities with a part-time mayor and full-time administrator (78).

(See "Special Notes" on page 10 for additional information on city classification.)

As shown in the graph below, more cities with full-time administration (currently 116) are operating with an administrator. The number rose from just 17 in 1976 to 78 in 2004.

By contrast, the number of cities with a full-time mayor has grown only slightly, from 23 to 28 cities. The number of council-managers decreased by one, from 11 to 10, when Menomonie (Dunn county) changed to the mayor-council form in 1986.

MUNICIPAL CHARTERS

Except for Milwaukee, Wisconsin cities do not have individual municipal charters. Instead, the state has a general charter law that provides the framework for city organization and administration. In addition, the state constitution and implementing state law grant "home rule" to cities. This means that, where there is no overriding state interest, cities can modify general charter provisions to meet specific local needs.

The general charter law provides for a mayor-council form of government. It also designates municipal administrative officials and specifies their duties.

Charter Ordinance

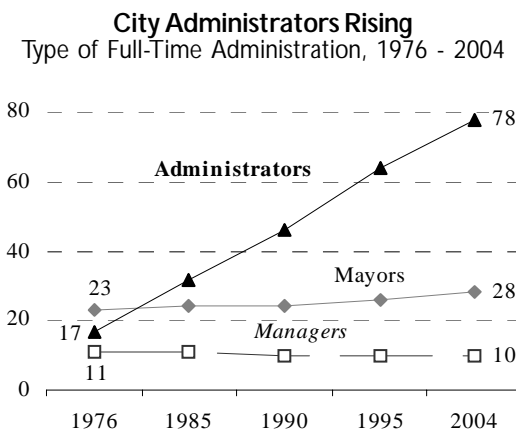
A city that does not want to be governed by a provision in the general charter law may enact a charter ordinance indicating which provisions will apply. For example, the ordinance may provide that a certain official be appointed rather than elected or that two offices be combined.

A charter ordinance is also used to change from mayor-council to another type of organization. The two statutory alternatives are the council-manager form and the commission form. Under the latter, which has not been used in Wisconsin since 1957, city government is under the direction of a council (commission) whose members include the mayor. The council appoints other city officers, such as clerk and treasurer, and may designate one of its members to head a department of general affairs.

A charter ordinance may be enacted by either the local governing body or the vot-

The trend in cities is toward a full-time appointed administrator.

Except for Milwaukee, a general charter law provides the framework for city administration.



The mayor-council form is used in 180 of the state's 190 cities.

City administration in Wisconsin can generally be categorized as strong council/weak mayor.

ers. Voters may initiate a charter ordinance by petitioning the council to pass a proposed ordinance or submit it to referendum. This recently occurred when Janesville voters successfully petitioned for a referendum seeking to change from a council-manager to a mayor-council form. The resulting 2004 referendum was defeated 74% to 26%.

MAYOR-COUNCIL FORM

Mayor-council is the traditional type of city government and is used by 95% of Wisconsin's 190 cities. Under this form, corporate authority is vested in a common council, composed of a mayor elected at large and aldermen who are generally elected by districts (see "Common Council" on back cover). The council is considered the policy-making or legislative part of government, while the mayor is the chief executive officer.

These roles are not exclusive, however. For example, the council through its committees may become involved in oversight of department operations. Similarly, the mayor presides at council meetings, votes in case of a tie and, except in certain instances, can veto council action.

"Weak" vs. "Strong" System

In general, the mayor-council type of city government organization is "weak" or "strong," depending mainly upon the authority given the mayor. Under a strong system, there are few or no other elected administrative officials and the mayor selects the major department heads, supervises administration of services and presents an executive budget to the council. Milwaukee probably has the strongest system in the state.

In a weak system, administrative responsibility may be shared among the mayor, other elected officers, separately appointed

officials, and various boards and commissions. According to some observers, city administration in Wisconsin can be categorized as strong council/weak mayor.

Full- and Part-Time Mayors

In 28, or about 16%, of Wisconsin's mayor-council cities, the mayor is full time. Over half, or 15, of the full-time mayors are in cities with populations of 30,000 or more. Milwaukee (593,920) is the largest municipality with a full-time mayor. The smallest is Marinette (11,638).

Since 1976, there has been a net increase of five in the number of full-time mayors. Beaver Dam, Greenfield, Muskego, Stoughton and Watertown established the position as a full-time office. Onalaska went from a full-time administrator to a full-time mayor, while Ashland reverted to a part-time mayor when it added an administrator.

Almost 88% of the 74 mayor-council municipalities with a part-time mayor have fewer than 5,000 people. The smallest is Bayfield (616). By contrast, only four—Chippewa Falls, Monroe, Merrill and Pewaukee—are over 10,000 in population.

COUNCIL-MANAGER FORM

Any city other than Milwaukee may adopt the manager form of government. This is done by charter ordinance. Major provisions of this type are specified in state law.

Separation of Powers

Under the manager plan, there is clear legislative intent to separate the legislative and executive powers of the municipal government. Policy-making authority is vested in the elected city council, and executive and administrative powers are provided to a professionally trained manager. The person holding the position is also referred to as the city manager.

Although not specifically provided by law, governing bodies in manager communities generally are small (5 or 7 members) and typically are elected at large. There usually is no mayor. (In Oshkosh, the president of the common council has the title “mayor.”)

Selection and Tenure

Statutorily, the manager is to be appointed “purely on merit,” based on “training, experience, executive and administrative ability,” and general fitness for the office.

One reason for limited use of a city manager is the perception that the position is “too strong.”

The manager serves at the pleasure of the city council and, upon 60 days’ notice, may be removed at any time his or her conduct becomes unsatisfactory. The 60-day notice does not apply to willful neglect of duty or misconduct in office. The manager in all cases has an opportunity to address the grounds for removal.

Statutory Powers

The manager’s statutory authority is broad and comprehensive. The manager is the chief executive officer and head of the municipal administration. He or she exercises all executive and general administrative authority conferred upon the governing body and upon other units and officers before the plan’s adoption.

The manager may create or discontinue minor administrative offices. He or she may appoint or remove department heads and other employees, except for any position otherwise covered by a civil service system. The manager also prepares the annual budget and monthly financial reports.

Use

In Wisconsin, 10, or only 5%, of the 190 cities use the council-manager approach. A major reason for the limited number of manager adoptions is the perception that the position is “too strong.” The statutory powers are substantial, encompassing all full executive and administrative authority, as well as the power of appointment, which is basically a political role.

Although state law does allow for allocation of powers different from the general statutory distribution, this has not encouraged manager adoptions. Since, 1995, the last time the Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance (WISTAX) reported on municipal administration, there have been no additions. Both Whitewater and Janesville defeated 2004 referenda to change to a mayor-council form of government.

CITY ADMINISTRATORS

In Wisconsin, the position of administrator is a locally developed office. The statutes do not provide for the position. Instead, cities have used their “home rule” authority to establish it, while continuing to operate with the traditional part-time mayor-council form of government.

Under a typical arrangement, the administrator is responsible for day-to-day operations, implementing ordinances and carrying out other governing body directives that require administrative action. The delegation of administrative affairs to a full-time office leaves the council free to concentrate on policy matters.

The most common title for the position is “administrator.” Some communities use more specific designations, for example, “administrator-clerk/treasurer.”

Ordinance Provisions

Because the administrator position is so individualized, it varies greatly among mu-

The manager form separates legislative and executive powers of city government.

In Wisconsin, the position of administrator is created locally.

Full-Time General Executive/Administrative Positions and Salaries
 Cities above 10,000 Population, 2004

<u>City</u>	<u>Pop.</u>	<u>Mayor</u>	<u>Mgr.</u>	<u>Admin.</u>	<u>City</u>	<u>Pop.</u>	<u>Mayor</u>	<u>Mgr.</u>	<u>Admin.</u>
Milwaukee	593,920	\$132,129	\$--	\$--	Fitchburg	22,030	\$--	\$--	\$93,163
Madison	217,935	96,258	--	--	South Milw.	21,360	--	--	59,000
Green Bay	103,653	70,949	--	--	Marshfield	19,012	--	--	81,948
Kenosha	92,808	71,844	--	104,220	Wis. Rapids	18,410	49,500	--	--
Racine	80,806	64,000	--	110,000	Cudahy	18,315	52,340	--	--
Appleton	71,895	77,626	--	--	Menasha	16,779	60,900	--	--
Waukesha	66,816	66,800	--	97,687	Middleton	16,446	--	--	81,059
Oshkosh	65,095	--	92,000	--	Onalaska	15,782	50,000	--	--
Eau Claire	63,897	--	107,590	--	Beaver Dam	15,366	50,000	--	--
Janesville	61,310	--	128,000	--	Menomonie	15,247	--	--	74,268
West Allis	60,607	56,000	--	100,000	Whitewater	13,996	--	84,000	--
La Crosse	51,507	68,500	--	--	Kaukauna	13,926	58,962	--	--
Sheboygan	50,672	62,593	--	--	Oconomowoc	13,194	--	--	91,758
Wauwatosa	46,511	--	--	101,971	Chip. Falls ^a	13,155	--	--	--
Fond du Lac	42,865	--	100,000	--	River Falls	13,067	--	--	86,699
Brookfield	39,607	88,055	--	--	Glendale	13,024	--	--	92,000
Wausau	38,912	68,543	--	--	Stoughton	12,654	31,500	--	--
New Berlin	38,896	78,941	--	--	Two Rivers	12,599	--	81,848	--
Greenfield	36,059	63,378	--	--	Pewaukee ^a	12,425	--	--	--
Beloit	36,058	--	105,000	--	Hartford	12,068	--	--	75,842
Manitowoc	34,612	64,230	--	--	Fort Atkinson	11,943	--	75,587	--
Franklin	31,804	--	--	73,868	Marinette	11,638	48,869	--	--
Oak Creek	31,029	--	--	79,900	Cedarburg	11,331	--	--	87,712
West Bend	29,204	--	--	86,805	Baraboo	11,188	--	--	76,400
Superior	27,221	63,000	--	--	Monroe ^a	10,973	--	--	--
Neenah	25,193	68,000	--	--	Port Wash.	10,683	--	--	85,915
Stevens Point	25,094	58,514	--	--	Waupun	10,670	--	--	73,235
Mequon	23,416	--	--	91,369	Hudson	10,561	--	--	80,300
Sun Prairie	23,226	--	--	101,212	Burlington	10,183	--	--	87,400
Watertown	22,732	56,924	--	--	Merrill ^a	10,144	--	--	--
Muskego	22,203	64,600	--	--	Platteville	10,109	--	64,000	--
De Pere	22,038	--	--	83,272					

^a Has none of the 3 positions. Notes: 1) The only city under 10,000 population that has a city manager is Lake Mills (4,971 and \$71,000). 2) See the table on page 7 for cities under 10,000 population that have full-time administrators. 3) Also see notes on page 10.

municipalities. Following are some features of the administrator form often outlined in the ordinance establishing the position. If the administrator also serves as a statutory officer, such as clerk, a charter ordinance is considered necessary.

Appointment and Tenure. The administrator is appointed by the mayor, with approval of the common council, or by the

council acting alone. Regardless, the mayor is routinely involved in the recruitment process. In some instances, more than a majority vote is necessary. Requiring selection on the basis of qualifications is typical.

The major options for tenure are: indefinite term with removal only for cause; and removal at pleasure. Other provisions may be included in a contractual agreement.

Full-Time Administrators in Cities Under 10,000 Population
Salaries, 2004

City	Pop.	Salary	City	Pop.	Salary	City	Pop.	Salary
Adams	1,843	\$52,468	Hillsboro	1,299	\$44,500	Prescott	3,873	\$60,000
Algoma	3,322	66,620	Jefferson	7,458	68,000	Reedsburg	8,573	68,800
Altoona	6,719	69,000	Kewaunee	2,892	57,498	Rhineland	8,041	80,651
Amery	2,902	59,000	Kiel	3,538	58,400	Rice Lake	8,490	74,360
Antigo	8,586	71,089	Ladysmith	3,760	60,286	Ripon	7,619	68,150
Ashland	8,577	75,000	Lake Geneva	7,276	77,500	St. Croix Falls	2,102	62,000
Berlin	5,326	59,114	Lancaster	4,042	56,000	St. Francis	8,728	75,792
Boscobel	3,403	46,426	Mauston	4,133	65,000	Shawano	8,425	68,000
Brillion	2,969	51,500	Milton	5,419	62,000	Shell Lake	1,338	49,750
Clintonville	4,675	58,689	Mondovi	2,688	55,350	Sparta	8,994	68,000
Cornell	1,447	46,010	Monona	7,965	74,460	Sturgeon Bay	9,696	86,400
Delafield	6,720	89,856	Mosinee	4,162	59,425	Tomah	8,648	64,339
Delavan	8,158	68,884	New Lisbon	1,429	48,000	Verona	8,888	75,000
Eagle River	1,481	58,000	New London	7,232	64,322	Viroqua	4,362	58,000
Edgerton	5,017	66,000	New Rich.	7,244	56,400	Washburn	2,284	63,654
Elkhorn	8,191	78,700	Niagara	1,858	60,833	Waupaca	5,821	71,511
Elroy	1,558	50,648	Oconto Falls	2,883	64,000	Weyauwega	1,896	49,259
Evansville	4,409	65,000	Omro	3,312	51,459	Whitehall	1,666	55,224
Fox Lake	1,477	50,000	Pr. du Chien	6,053	61,000			

Jurisdiction. Many cities with an administrator make that officer directly responsible for all municipal services and departments. This is the broadest authority. In some cities, certain services are excluded from the administrator's jurisdiction. The police department is the most common exception.

Duties. Duties of an administrator are spelled out in the implementing ordinance, in separate job descriptions or both. Some general duties typically assigned to an administrator are:

- serving as the city's chief administrative officer under the general direction and policy of the mayor and council;
- implementing legislative actions;
- carrying out directives of the governing body; and
- exercising responsibility for directing, supervising and coordinating the day-to-day activities of municipal departments and services.

Other duties include: assisting in developing agendas for council meetings; preparing supporting documents for meetings; reporting on operations and making recommendations for improvements; preparing an annual budget; and serving as the municipality's personnel officer.

Use

Of the 190 cities, 78 reported having a part-time mayor and a full-time administrator. Cities above 10,000 that have an administrator are included in the table on page 6, while smaller cities with an administrator are listed in the table above.

The largest city with an administrator is Wauwatosa (46,511), while the smallest is Hillsboro (1,299) in Vernon county. The greatest concentration of administrators is in communities between 2,500 and 10,000 population. That group, which accounts for 38% of the cities studied, includes 43 administrators, or 55% of the 78 total.

The duties of an administrator are specified by ordinance and/or job description.

Additions Since 1995

Although the number of council-manager cities is static, use of administrators continues to rise. As of January 2004, there were 78 compared to 64 as of August 1995. This is an increase of 22%.

Those that reported establishing an administrator position between 1995 and 2004 include Elroy, Evansville, Fox Lake, Milton, Reedsburg, Rhinelander, Shawano, Washburn, Waupaca, Waupun and Whitehall. In 2002, Viroqua added the position of administrator, but it has been vacant at least 18 months. Portage and Mayville, among others, eliminated the position.

Since January 1, 2004, the date of this WISTAX survey, three cities added a full-time administrator: Columbus (population 4,704); Princeton (1,476); and Richland Center (5,151).

DISTRIBUTION BY POPULATION

Use of full- and part-time administration varies by city size.

Cities over 10,000 Population

The extent of full-time administration of city government, as represented by a full-

time administrator, manager or mayor, is shown in the table on page 6. The table lists, in population order, cities above 10,000 and indicates the type of administration used, along with the salary of that official.

Of the 63 cities above 10,000, all but four had such a full-time position. Pewaukee had a part-time mayor and a half-time administrator, while Chippewa Falls, Monroe and Merrill had part-time mayors.

By type of position, full-time mayor was dominant in cities 25,000 and larger. For smaller cities, administrators were more common. Among cities between 10,000 and 15,000, there were 10 administrators, compared with three full-time mayors.

For all 59 cities above 10,000 population with full-time administration, there was almost an even split between elected mayors (28) and appointed officers (31, including 22 administrators and 9 managers).

All Cities

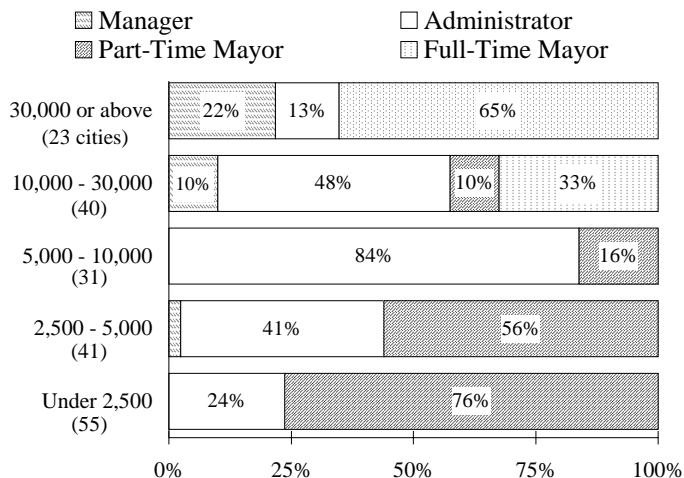
The graph (see left) shows form of government by city population group. Administrator is the only type that appears in all five groups. Part-time mayor, which is used in all of the population categories except the largest, was most prevalent in the under-2,500 group. No city below 10,000 had a full-time mayor and only one city below 10,000 had a full-time manager.

5,000-10,000 Population. The dominant form of government in cities between 5,000 and 10,000 population was full-time administrator. Among these 31 cities, 26, or 84%, had this position. Five had a part-time mayor.

2,500-5,000 Population. Of the 41 cities in this group, 56% had a part-time mayor and 41% had an administrator. The group includes Lake Mills, the only city under 10,000 population with a manager.

Of the 63 cities with more than 10,000 people, all but four have a full-time mayor, administrator or manager.

Distribution of Form of Government Varies by Population, All Cities, 2004



Under 2,500 Population. Over three-fourths of the smallest cities had a part-time mayor, while 24% had a full-time administrator.

SALARIES AND BENEFITS

Salaries varied by form of city government and population. The number of cities offering benefits to full-time officeholders greatly exceeded the number offering them to part-time officials.

Salaries

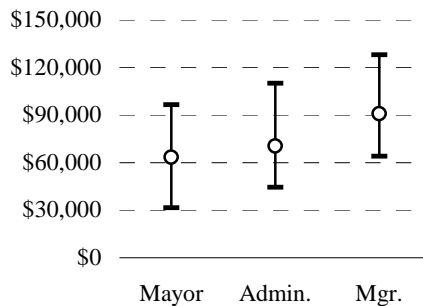
By Type of Position. Average salaries for managers exceeded those for mayors and administrators (see graph at right). The minimums and maximums showed a similar pattern. In 2004, the average salary for the 10 managers was \$90,903, while the range was from \$64,000 in Platteville to \$128,000 in Janesville. The second highest was Eau Claire's \$107,590.

As shown in the tables on pages 6 and 7, among full-time administrators, salaries ranged from \$44,500 in Hillsboro (Vernon county) to \$110,000 in Racine. Kenosha was second highest with \$104,220. The average salary for the 82 full-time administrators was \$70,516. (See "Special Notes" on page 10.)

Excluding Milwaukee, the state's only first-class city, the 27-city salary average for full-time mayors was \$63,364. Stoughton (\$31,500) was the lowest and Madison (\$96,258) the highest. Brookfield's \$88,055 ranked second. Milwaukee's mayor received an annual salary of \$132,129.

Comparing compensation paid to part-time mayors is difficult for various reasons. There is no uniform time commitment for part-time officials. In addition, some cities pay a flat salary, while others pay a salary plus an amount per diem or per meeting. A few pay only a per meeting fee or a per diem. Among other variables, the number

Full-Time Officials*, Salaries - 2004
Min. and Max. (-), Average (o)



* Excludes Milwaukee (\$132,129), the only first-class city in the state.

of meetings the mayor attends during the year can impact pay.

Of the 74 cities with a part-time mayor-council, five—all under 2,500 population—reported paying no salary. Of the remaining 69, salaries ranged from \$26,000 in Cranston to less than \$3,000 in 14 cities.

By Population Group. As shown in the top table on page 10, the average salary for each form of full-time administrative position increased with population. For example, the average salary for full-time administrators in cities under 2,500 population was \$53,104. At the 5,000-to-10,000 level, it rose to \$70,859. Administrators in cities of 30,000 or above averaged \$95,378.

Of the population groups listed for mayors and managers, the trend was similar. (No city under 10,000 population had a full-time mayor and only one city under 10,000, Lake Mills, had a manager.)

Average salaries for part-time mayors rose steadily from \$3,935 in cities under 2,500 to \$11,763 in cities of 10,000 to 30,000.

Benefits

Every city having a full-time administrative position offered that person at least one of the following: health, dental

Average salaries for managers exceed those for full-time mayors and administrators.

Of the 74 cities with a part-time mayor-council, 69 pay their mayors.

Average Salaries Increases with Population
Full-Time and Part-Time Officials*, by Population Group, 2004

Population	Full-Time						Part-Time	
	Mayor		Admin.		Mgr.		Mayor	
	No.	Salary	No.	Salary	No.	Salary	No.	Salary
Under 2,500	-	\$ -	13	\$ 53,104	-	\$ -	42	3,935
2,500 - 5,000	-	-	17	58,391	1	71,000	23	6,118
5,000 - 10,000	-	-	26	70,859	-	-	5	7,006
10,000 - 30,000	13	54,855	19	83,650	4	76,359	4	11,763
30,000 or above	14	71,266	7	95,378	5	106,518	-	-
Total	27	63,364	82	70,516	10	90,903	74	5,244

*Excludes the city of Milwaukee (\$132,129).

and/or life insurance; or retirement benefits. The WISTAX survey did not ask who paid what portion.

For full-time officials, benefits will be similar to those received by other full-time city employees. As the table below shows, only a few of the part-time officials were offered benefits.

Full Time. All the cities with full-time administrative officers offered health insurance. One (Muskego) did not offer retirement benefits. The third most-offered benefit was life insurance.

By form of government, the type of benefits offered was fairly uniform. One exception was dental insurance. It was offered by only half the cities with a manager, but by 22, or 78.6%, of those with a mayor.

Life insurance was offered by all the cities with a manager, 25 (or 89%) of those with a full-time mayor and 77 (or

94%) of the 82 cities with a full-time administrator.

Except for Fond du Lac and Lake Mills, eight of the 10 managers received some type of mileage or car allowance. Only half the cities with a full-time mayor and 38% with an administrator offered such benefit.

A few cities reported offering income continuation or disability insurance.

Part Time. Most cities with only part-time mayors offered no insurances or other benefits. Car allowance, which was the most frequently offered, was provided in only 11 of the 74 cities. □

SPECIAL NOTES AND SOURCES:

Notes: The cities of Kenosha, Racine, Waukesha and West Allis reported having a *full-time* mayor and a *full-time* administrator as of January 1, 2004. For classification purposes, these cities are included in the full-time mayor group. However, for purposes of calculating salary ranges and averages and for comparing benefits, the data for these four mayors are included in the mayor-council form and the data for the four administrators are included in the administrator classification. Consequently, the number of cities with a part-time-mayor and a full-time administrator was 78; for statistical purposes, the number of full-time administrators was 82.

Sources: League of Wisconsin Municipalities; Wisconsin Department of Administration (population); and WISTAX questionnaires distributed to Wisconsin cities and follow-up phone calls.

Health insurance was the benefit most offered administrative officials.

Health Insurance Most Offered
Benefits by Form of Government, 2004

	Percentage of Cities Offering:				
	Health Ins.	Dental Ins.	Life Ins.	Retire-ment	Mile./Car
FT Mayor	100.0	78.6	89.3	96.4	50.0
Admin.	100.0	61.0	93.9	100.0	37.8
Manager	100.0	50.0	100.0	100.0	80.0
PT Mayor	4.1	5.4	2.7	1.4	14.9

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Cities Tend To Favor Smaller Councils
 Number of Members by Population Group, 2004

11 where it is four. In 92% of the cities, staggered terms are used.

COUNCIL SIZE

While terms of office are fairly consistent throughout the state, council sizes vary. There is a preference for councils of six to nine members (see table opposite). Of the 96 cities under 5,000 population, only three exceeded nine members. Of the remaining 94 cities, 27 exceeded nine.

Bayfield, the smallest city, had a four-member council, while Madison, the second-largest city, had 20 members.

The average council size increased as population rose. In cities under 2,500, councils averaged slightly over 6 members, while cities of 30,000 or above had almost 12 per council.

Method of selection aside, average population per council member showed a similar pattern. In cities under 2,500, the average was 269 persons, while in cities of 30,000 or above, it was 6,841 (5,310 excluding Milwaukee and Madison).

SALARIES AND BENEFITS

Almost 80%, or 151 of the 190 cities, paid council members a salary. Some provided both a salary and a per diem. With a few exceptions, the remainder provided a per diem and/or payment for each council meeting.

As of January 1, 2004, Milwaukee council members were the highest paid at \$65,666 annually. Unlike other council members, they are considered full-time officials. Each has an office in city hall and a full-time legislative assistant.

Of other cities paying a salary, the annual average in those operating under a: full-time mayor-council, was \$5,196; mayor-

No. of Members	Population Groups					Total
	Under 2,500	2,500 - 5,000	5,000 - 10,000	10,000 - 30,000	30,000 or Above	
4 - 5	12	3	-	2	1	18
6 - 7	31	18	14	12	7	82
8 - 9	12	17	12	19	-	60
10 - 11	-	3	3	5	3	14
12 - 14	-	-	2	2	3	7
15 - 20	-	-	-	-	9	9
Total	55	41	31	40	23	190
Avg.:						
Size	6.1	7.2	7.7	8.1	11.7	-
Pop./Rep.	269	511	1,015	2,054	6,841	-

council-administrator, \$3,031; and council-manager, \$2,656. Council members in the 46 part-time mayor-council cities that paid salaries received an average of \$2,240.

Overall, excluding Milwaukee, annual salaries ranged from \$240 in Cornell (in Chippewa county) to \$8,943 in Green Bay. Brookfield's \$8,805 was second highest.

Payments for regular or special council meetings, and/or for committee meetings were made by 70 cities. Only 29 paid all three types. Payments generally range from \$10 to \$80 per meeting.

At least four cities also paid committee chairs an additional amount per month or per meeting. A few provided reimbursement for certain expenses up to a set amount. Some cities also paid their council president a higher amount than that received by other council members.

Only 20 cities (11%) offered council members some type of fringe benefit. Health insurance, by itself or in combination with dental and/or life insurance, was the most frequently offered (11 cities, 6%). □

Council members in almost 80% of the cities receive a salary.

DATA SOURCES:

League of Wisconsin Municipalities; and WISTAX questionnaires and phone calls.

Common Council: A City's Legislature

The “legislature” of each city in Wisconsin is the common council. Its members, also called councilmen or alderpersons, are elected on a nonpartisan basis at the spring election. By state law, the council has control of “city property, finances, highways, navigable waters and the public service.”

Most council members are elected by district and serve two-year terms

In general, the council may approve and amend the city’s annual budget, grant city licenses, levy property and other authorized taxes, act on claims against the city, enter contracts, and otherwise act for the good order of the city and welfare of the public.

Councils are required to meet at least monthly. Each may fix its meeting day and set more frequent regular meetings.

In cities with a manager, the council generally elects one of its members to preside over its meetings. The exceptions are Eau Claire and Oshkosh, where the council president is elected at large.

In other cities, the mayor presides over council meetings. Although listed by statute as a member of the council, the mayor may vote only in case of a tie and cannot be counted in determining a quorum. With

limited exception, the mayor may veto acts of the council. Vetoes, may be overridden by a two-thirds vote of the council. Each council selects one of its members to preside over council meetings in the mayor’s absence.

ELECTION

As of January 2004, council members in 13 of the state’s 190 cities were elected solely at large, while in 19 cities, an at-large/by-district combination was used. Voters in the remainder elected one member from each aldermanic district (71 cities), two from each district (84) or three from each (Neenah, Stoughton and Tomahawk).

Of the 10 council-manager cities (see *Taxpayer* “Feature” article), six selected their members at large, and four used a combination of at large and by district. By contrast, the most common system in cities with administrators (65 of the 78) or full-time mayors (27 of 28) was by district.

TERMS

Members serve two-year terms in all but 17 cities where the term is three years and

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Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance

401 North Lawn Avenue • Madison, WI 53704-5033
608.241.9789 • www.wistax.org

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