

Dysfunctional Government

Many believe that the quality of government merely reflects the excellence of the individuals holding office. All you need to do is to elect “good people”, and government will serve the public effectively.

The Founding Fathers knew that it was not that simple; the natural inclination of government is to acquire more and more power until its sole purpose is to serve itself. That’s why they went to such lengths to design a government with built in checks and balances whose **structure would tend to prevent the problems that had arisen throughout history.**

A key part of their design was the concept of a **balance of power** between three co-equal branches of government. Abuse of power by one branch would be offset by one or both of the other two.

What would the Founders think of the City-Manager form of government as practiced in Galveston, Texas?

Is the **structure** of local government designed to **create a balance of power** that can maintain an efficient government, or does it **allow the uncontrolled growth of an unelected bureaucracy** that absorbs more and more resources as it becomes less and less efficient?

Population growth represents the sum total of all the individual decisions on whether to live in a particular location, or not. From **1884 to 1900**, Galveston used an **Aldermanic** form of government and the **population grew 60%**. Between **1901 and 1960**, this city employed the Commission form of government and the **population increased 78%**. However, from **1960 to 2010**, the City used the City-Manager form of government and **population declined 29%**.

Is the City still recovering from Hurricane Carla, or has this form of government been a failure in this city?

Did people leave the City, or decide not to become new residents, simply because they didn't like the form of government? Of course not! They left this city, or failed to immigrate, because of the results that it produced; public housing, blight, failing infrastructure, poor schools, and a declining economy.

What are the major problems with the current form of government?

- The Chief Executive Officer is appointed not elected. Congress does not appoint the President, the Legislature does not appoint the Governor, and Commissioners do not appoint the County Judge; so why should a City Council appoint a City Manager?

- No one is clearly responsible for the vision and leadership of the City.

Is it City Council or the City Manager?

- Balance of Power. The City Manager and the permanent bureaucracy accumulate power while the City Council loses power as it changes every two years. The City Manager has a large staff; City Council has very limited staff. The bureaucracy is full time and well-paid; the City Council is part time and unpaid.

- No orderly transition of power. If the City elected its CEO, the new CEO would have been chosen on Election Day 2010; with certainty and finality. Contrast that to the process to select a new City Manager which will drag on for months.

What needs to be done to fix local government?

- Elect the Chief Executive Officer.

The Mayor should be the CEO of a Strong-Mayor form of government who can be voted out if the people are unhappy with the results. The Mayor/CEO should be subject to term limits.

- **Make City Council a full-time paid position.**

This is **not a sleepy little village** that can be run by part-time volunteers. It is a small city with all the problems and issues of a big city.

- **Absorb the Agencies.**

This form of government would have the resources and ability to eventually absorb the functions currently delegated to the City's agencies (GHA, Park Board, and Wharves Board). They are run by unelected directors; their functions need to be accountable to the voters. As problems at the Agencies grow, the voters have no way to make corrections.

Imagine a federal government with a President, appointed by a part-time unpaid Congress, who is not subject to term limits; a Congress with very limited staff, dependent on information from the executive branch, and that is the equivalent of Galveston city government!