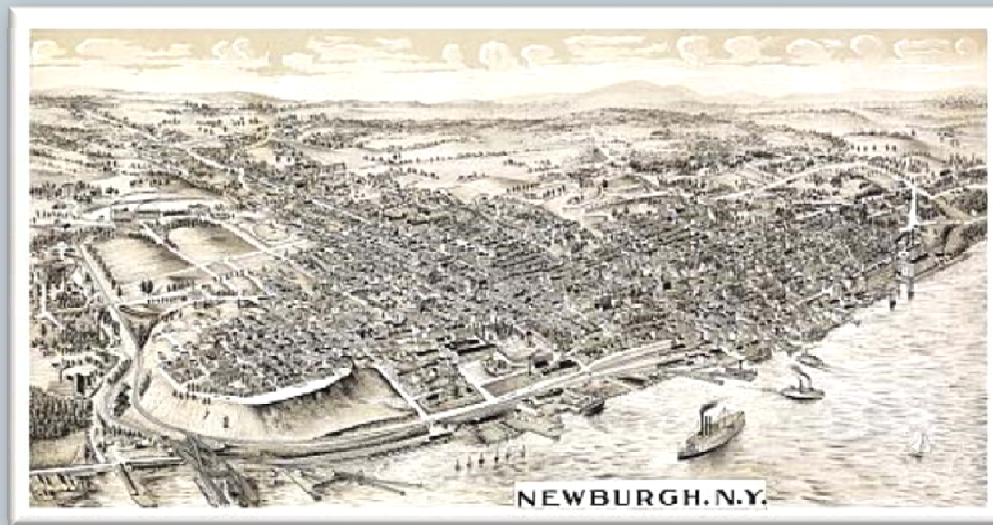


Alternative Local Governmental Structures



PRESENTATION TO THE NEWBURGH CITY CHARTER COMMISSION
GERALD BENJAMIN, DIRECTOR, CRREO, SUNY NEW PALTZ



All General Purpose Local Governments in New York State Have Boards in Which Governing Power Resides

2

- In counties - Boards of Supervisors or legislatures
- In towns – Town Boards
- In villages – Boards of Trustees
- In cities – City Councils

Most Commonly, All Governing Power is Concentrated in the Board

3

- This is a legislative system
- “Legislative” and “Executive” powers are located in the same institution
- This is ***not*** like the separation of powers system that we are used to in state and national government (more about this later)

The City Council

4



The “Weak Mayor” System

5

One Board Member is Designated to Facilitate the Board's Work – Usually in Cities He or She is Called the Mayor

6

Council

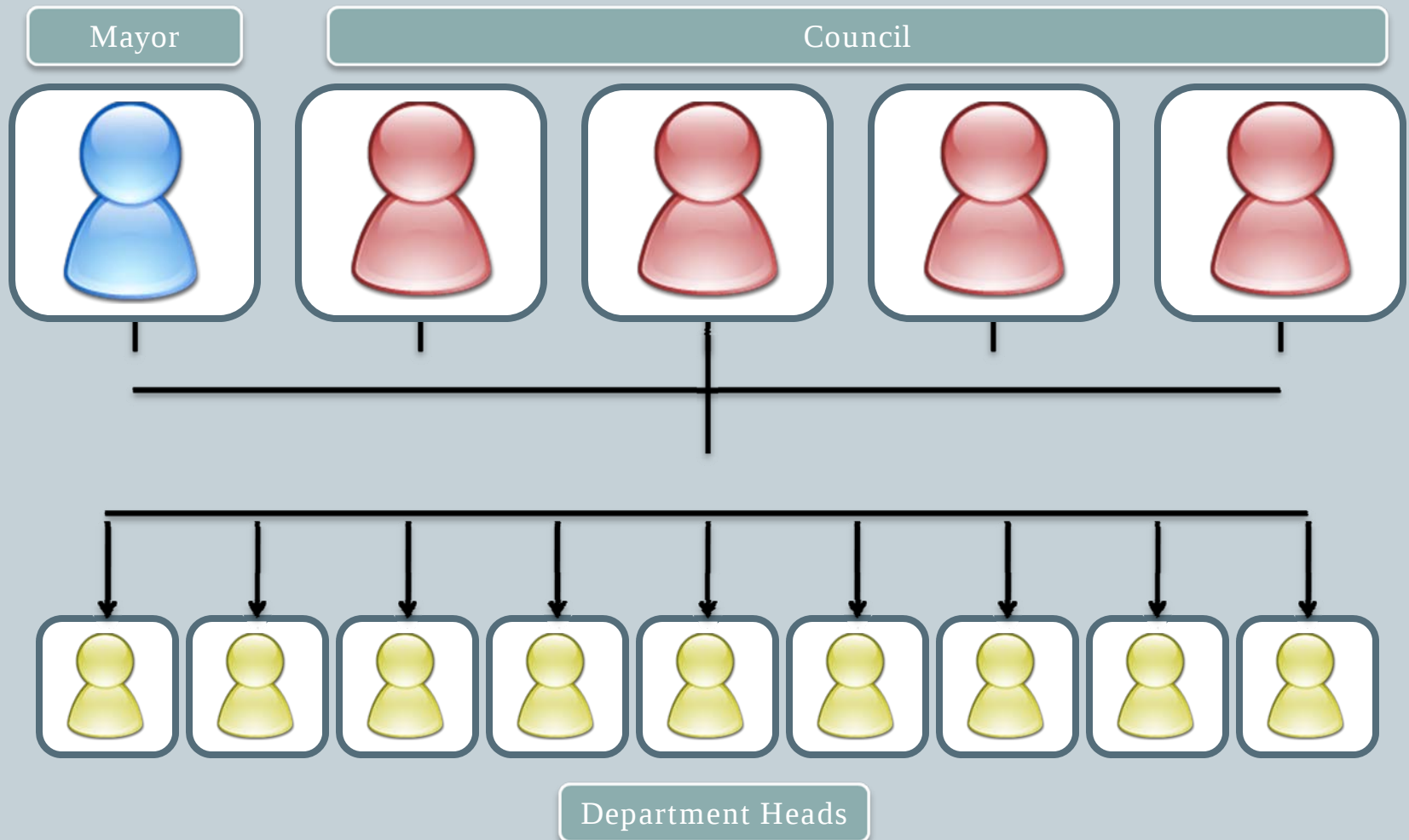
- Usually members work part-time
- Retains most governing authority, for example:
 - Makes policy by local law and resolution
 - Hire department heads
 - Adopt budget and makes most budget changes
 - Oversees administration

Mayor

- Usually works part-time
- Presides over meetings
- Represents the jurisdiction
 - At ceremonial occasions
 - In meetings with outside officials and groups
- Performs specified duties to facilitate the Board's work (e.g. initially prepares a budget)
- Has one vote, as do all other Board members

The Weak Mayor System

7



There are Several Ways to Pick This Presiding Officer, or Mayor

8

- Election at-large from the entire city (the practice in Newburgh now)
- Election in a district, with designation by a vote of the entire board
- Rotation of responsibility (and title) among members of the board, elected at-large or in districts

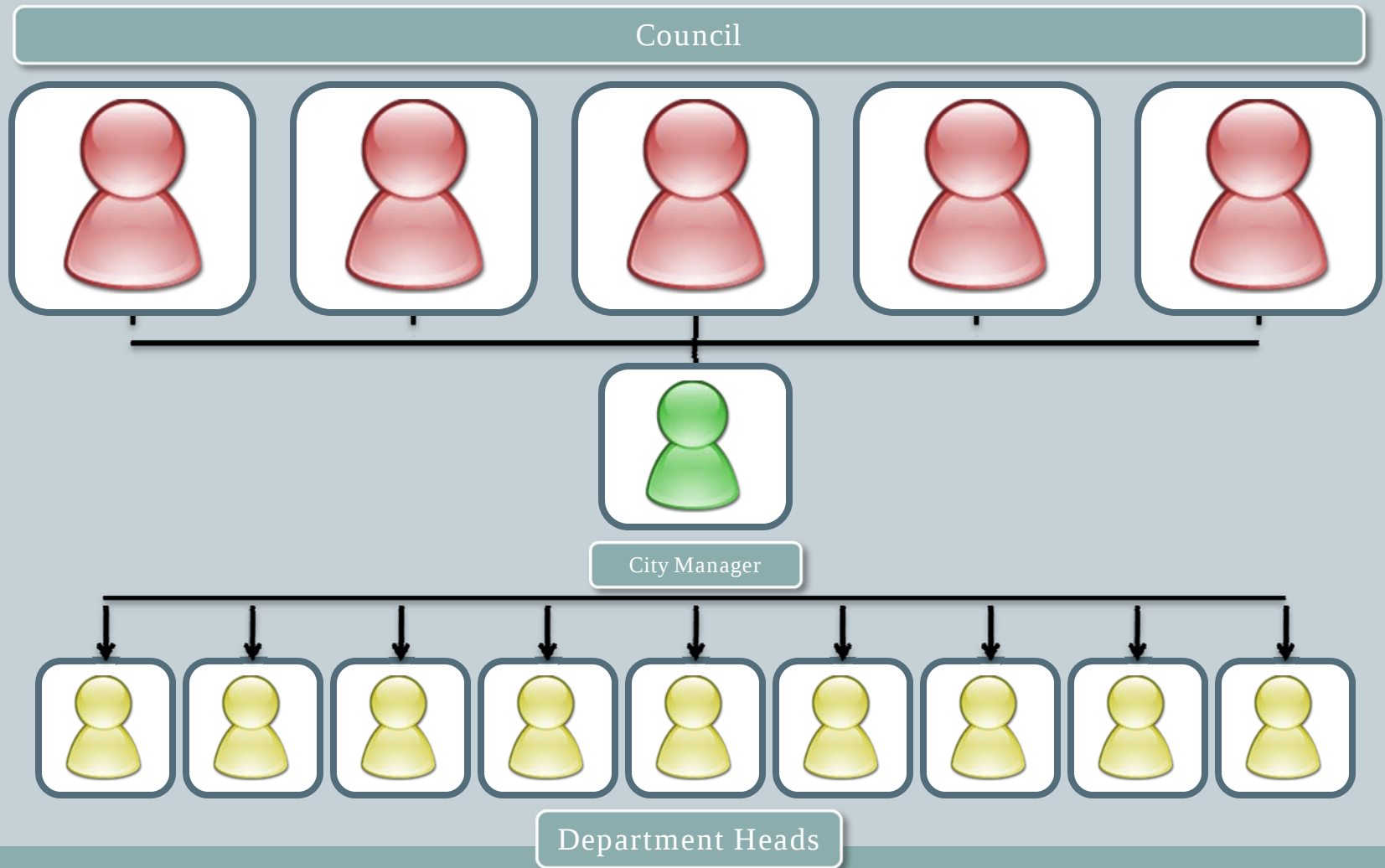
The Council Manager System (Currently Used in Newburgh)

9

- The Council Retains all Legislative Powers and ultimate governing authority, including:
 - Passing local laws
 - Adopting a budget
 - Authorizing borrowing
 - Overseeing performance of government
- The Council Hires a professional to act as the City's chief Executive
- The executive, responsible to the Council, operates the government
- The executive is not a Council member

The Council Manager System

10



The Council-Manager Plan is a Partial Separation of Powers System developed on the Corporate model

11

- Council is “Board of Directors”
 - Makes Policy
 - Oversees Performance
 - Responsible to “Stockholders” (voters)
- Executive is “CEO” who:
 - Appoints department heads
 - Prepares budget
 - Directs day-to-day operations
 - Recommends policy
 - Is accountable to the board for government’s performance

The “Strong Mayor” System

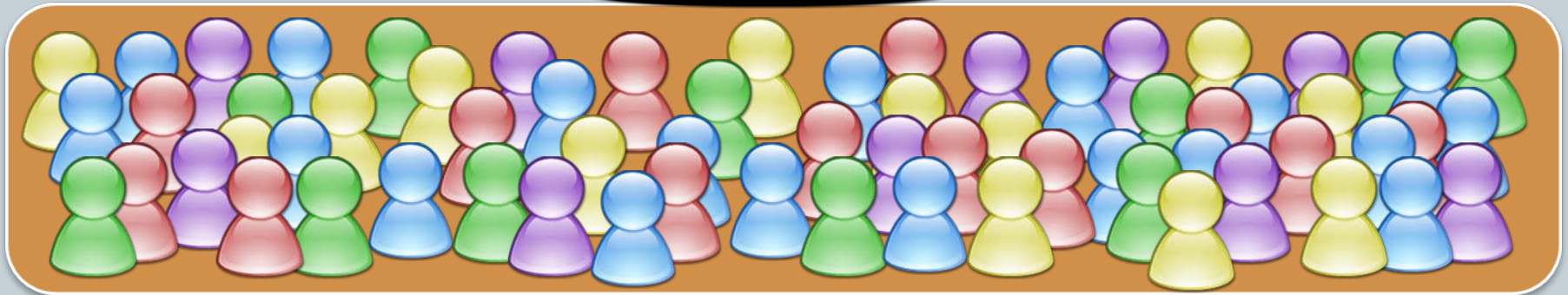
12

- Modeled on national and state government
- A full separation of powers system
- Voters elect an executive, the mayor, and vest him or her with “executive” powers
- Voters elect a Council, and vest it with legislative powers
- Executive has no vote in the legislature

The Strong Mayor System

13

Voters



Mayor



Council



Department Heads

The Commission System

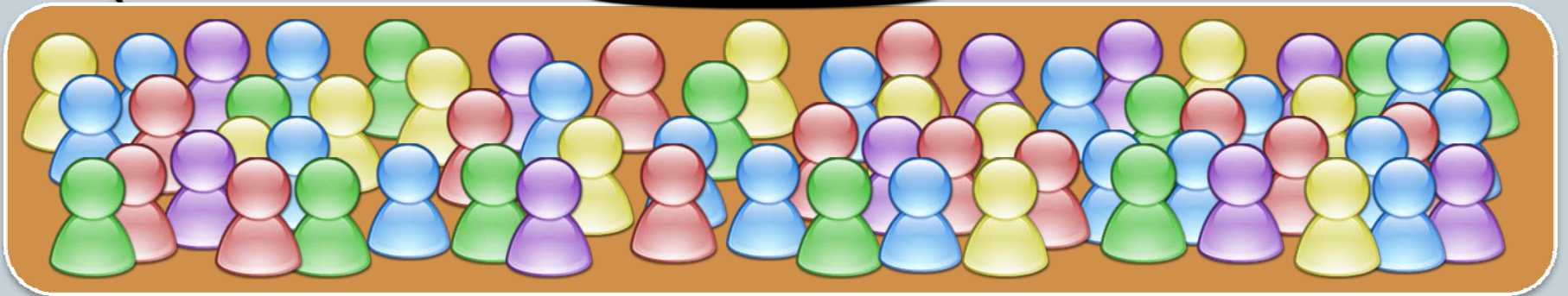
14

- Voters, voting at-large, elect heads of major departments
- Department heads work full-time
- These department heads, sitting together, constitute the City Council
- Mostly abandoned where tried, and now rarely in use (in New York State, formerly used in Beacon, currently used in Saratoga Springs)

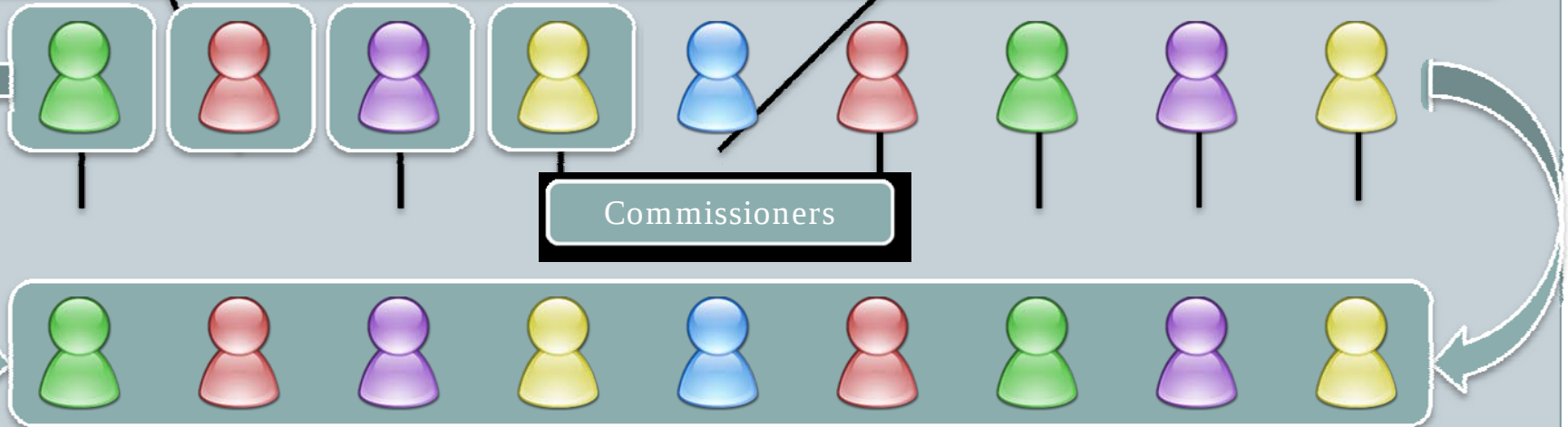
The Commission System

15

Voters



Commissioners

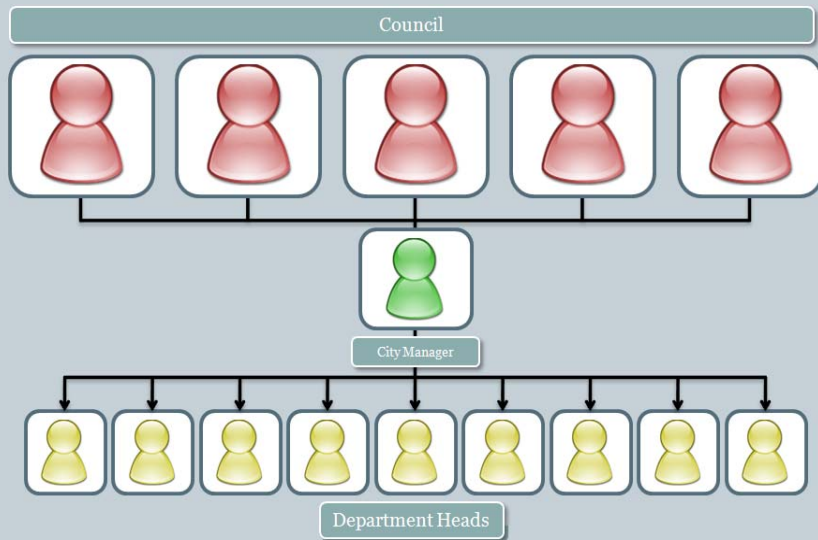


Council

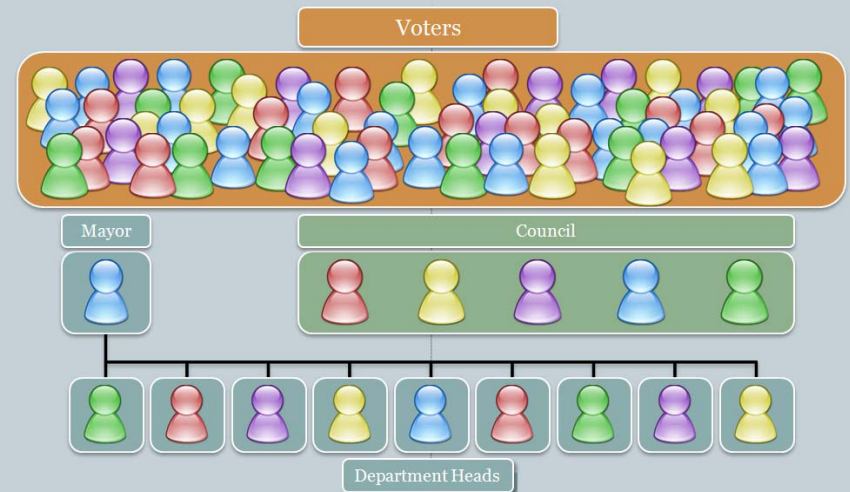
The Practical Alternatives for Newburgh are the Council Manager and Strong Mayor Systems

16

Council / Manager



Strong Mayor



Strengths and Weaknesses of Council-Manager System

17

Strengths

- Trained, experienced professional management of the city government – “Neutral Competence”
- Chief executive not the voice of single local party or interest
- Charged with pursuing the well being of the entire community
- Well situated to draw upon “best practices” from across the state and nation
- Avoids concentrating political power in one person

Weaknesses

- Not deeply rooted in community, and committed to it
- Career is not locally focused. Likely to “move on” as career develops
- No “democratic legitimacy” for policies arising from election
- Not as visibly identifiable to all in the jurisdiction
- Continuation subject to vagaries of Council politics

Strengths and Weaknesses of Strong Mayor System

18

Strengths

- Must be deeply rooted in community to be elected
- Program validated and legitimized by election
- Can call upon an already developed strong base of local support
- Visible and accountable to citizens directly

Weaknesses

- May not be competent to manage a large, complex organization
- Power too concentrated in a single person
- Increases prospect of inter-institutional conflict
- May be less responsive to groups outside his or her political base
- Personal political ambition may conflict with best interests of community

Questions?

19

