



While Austin residents and business leaders are rightly concerned with things like traffic and rising housing costs, the City of Austin has much to be proud of in how it has managed its recent growth. Even though the city's population and economic growth rates have been some of the fastest in the U.S., its rate of unaffordable housing has stayed low compared to other metro areas, and it's emerged as a COVID-era destination for disaffected workers from both coasts.

There are many factors that have contributed to Austin's successes, but its form of government is certainly one. Like other "opportunity cities" such as Raleigh, Phoenix, Las Vegas and Charlotte, Austin uses a council-manager form of government. Similar to the governing structures of large corporations, the city manager in this form acts as the CEO, responsible for executing the daily tasks to fulfill the vision of the Mayor and City Council (whose function is to set policy, similar to a corporate board of directors). Just as you would never place the management of a large corporation in the hands of a newcomer, preferring instead to seat someone who has taken on increasing roles of managerial responsibility, so do professional city managers usually start off in entry-level city management and work their way up, gathering useful experience and perspective along the way.

More than half of the approximately 39,000 local governments in the U.S. use the council-manager form of government, and for Texas home-rule cities that figure rises to roughly 85%. The research points to council-manager cities as generally more efficient than cities led by strong mayors, with more innovation and a more even distribution of the benefits of public policy. Cities with strong mayors, such as New York, Chicago and San Francisco, have seen their growth slow or decline in the past decade or so, and moreso in the COVID-19 era, even as they struggle with issues of affordability and access to opportunity. At the same time, large cities that use the council-manager form such as San Jose and Sacramento have considered switching to a strong mayor, only to have voters or officials decide to stick with council-manager.

Running a city the size of Austin does require many of the same managerial skills as running a large corporation. Consider that the city employs roughly the same number of people locally as H-E-B or Dell Technologies, Inc., and the city's budget exceeds \$4.2 billion, encompassing everything from the airport to zoning, with streets, police, fire, courts and economic development thrown in.

Placing responsibility for these vital functions in the hands of a non-partisan professional manager, rather than a politician looking to the next election, is at the heart of the council-manager form of government. While opponents of the council-manager form argue that there is no accountability in it, a majority of City Council can vote to fire the city manager at any time. That's greater accountability than having to wait until the next election to vote a mayor out of office. Preserving the council-manager form also preserves the power of City Council members who are elected to represent Austin's neighborhoods and could see their voice diminished under a strong mayor.

Austin has many other factors contributing to its success, such as a business culture that promotes entrepreneurship and a quality of life that attracts people from all over the world. But the council-manager form of government is best equipped to capitalize on these attributes and keep Austin moving in the right direction. We want to see Austin continue to thrive, and to ensure that happens, we want to see the city preserve the form of government that led us here.

I respectfully submit this letter on behalf of the Local Government Hispanic Network, an affiliate of the International City/County Management Association.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'RHG', with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Raymond H. Gonzales, President
Local Government Hispanic Network