



For MAYOR *of* HENDERSONVILLE
November 3, 2009

Common Sense is defined as beliefs or propositions that most people would consider prudent and of sound judgement!

TIME FOR A STRONG -MAYOR REFERENDUM?

The **council-manager system** is generally the system of choice for townships with smaller populations. Hendersonville adopted this form of municipal government. Council-manager municipalities contract with a general manager or city manager to oversee the city and implement strategies outlined by the city council. City managers remain in place through administration changes.

Should Hendersonville examine what it might be like to return to a strong-mayor government? There has been a strong trend for cities to move back to a traditional form of **strong-mayor government**. And not only with larger population cities, as most noted for having strong-mayor municipalities. Downtown business and community leaders argue that council manager systems, with city council members representing varying interests, and a mayor with little power other than a single council vote, **leaves no one responsible for the interests of the city as a whole**. Local critics have dubbed the system such as the one we have in Hendersonville a “weak mayor or weak council” form of government. **“We’re like a football team with no coach,”** complained a Texas city news columnist recently.

Currently, only half of all American municipalities with populations over 2,500 use the **city manager system**, which does represent an increase compared with 20 years ago. Yet, the last 5 years has seen a huge trend for cities to take a serious look at the value of their current council manager system - utilizing the last 40 years or more to review the progress or lack thereof of the system. Not having a strong mayor means more infighting, slow progress, budget shortfalls, quality control considerations, and even issues of collusion. “You have to pay attention to momentum, which is clearly moving in the other direction” said a recent California reporter. “Several large cities like San Diego and Dallas are deciding to **trade in their weak city council or strong manager governments for ones with strong mayors**. If they succeed, they will join a rather extensive list of large places that have gone that way in the past decade: Oakland, Cincinnati, Hartford, St. Petersburg, Richmond, Sioux Falls and Spokane, to name the most prominent ones.” The list of major cities that have moved the other way — to a city manager system — **is quite a bit shorter**.

The list of smaller townships moving towards the strong-mayor system is growing. Perhaps in the future, Hendersonville might examine the benefits of a voter referendum for a **strong-mayor municipality**. The ability to get things done quicker, have a single person charged with important city decisions, and have a greater ease of implementation, can certainly benefit the whole of the city. **The ongoing downtown traffic signal debacle** might have been avoided in Hendersonville had there been a **strong-mayor system** in place. Conflicts within the council along with city manager policies for implementation, have kept the project ongoing for nearly three years, costing much money to taxpayers, as well as heartache and confusion to locals and tourists. More important has been the significant downtime to downtown merchants in the worst recession since the great depression. **And it ain’t over yet!**

Know your city manager's authority!

Sec. 5.1. Appointment of city manager.

The city council may appoint a city manager for an indefinite term and may fix his compensation. The manager shall be appointed solely on the basis of his executive and administrative qualification. He need not be a resident of the city or state at the time of his appointment, but shall become a resident of the city as soon after his appointment as possible. He shall not be deemed an officer of the city within the meaning of Article XIV, Section 7, or Article VI, Section 7, of the Constitution of North Carolina.

Sec. 5.2. Powers and duties of manager.

The manager shall be the chief administrator of the city. He shall be responsible to the council for administration of all municipal affairs placed in his charge by them, and shall have the following powers and duties.

- (a) He shall appoint and, when he deems it necessary for the good of the service, suspend or remove all municipal employees in accordance with such general personnel rules, regulations, policies, or ordinances as the council may adopt, except the city attorney and the city clerk.**
- (b) He shall direct and supervise the administration of all departments, offices, and agencies of the city, subject to the general direction and control of the council, except as otherwise provided by law.**
- © He shall attend all meetings of the council and recommend for adoption such measures as he shall deem expedient.**
- (d) He shall see that all laws of the state and the ordinances, resolutions, and regulations of the council are faithfully executed within the city.**
- (e) He shall prepare and submit the annual budget and capital program to the council.**
- (f) He shall submit to the council and make available to the public a complete report on the finances and administrative activities of the city as of the end of the fiscal year.**
- (g) He shall make such other reports as the council may require concerning the operations of city departments, offices, and agencies subject to his direction and control.**
- (h) He shall perform such other duties as may be required or authorized by the council, and generally promulgate the policies of the city as established by the city council.**

Citizens and their voting power are the oversight for the mayor and city council. The city council should act as oversight for the performance of city managers. But, does it happen?