

Running City Hall

Municipal Administration
in America

Second Edition

DAVID L. MARTIN

THE UNIVERSITY OF ALABAMA PRESS

Tuscaloosa and London

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Running City Hall

Municipal Administration in America

SECOND EDITION

David L. Martin

"Succinct, straightforward. . . . Readers will gain insights into the vast urban infrastructure that provides the kinds of services that enable large numbers of people to live in confined space in relative comfort and safety."—*Choice*

This concise text examines the political realities in municipal management. *Running City Hall* studies the history and growth of American cities, their legal status, relationships with other governments, city politics, and financing. From the impact of AIDS to performance zoning, the second edition covers such vital topics as electoral systems, administration, municipal unionism, public safety, social services, planning. Balanced and thorough, this readable and timely work will be welcomed by practitioners, students, and everyone who seeks to understand the American city.

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1: The City in American History

The city is a political organization for local self-government. The word "municipal" is derived from a Latin word designating certain towns which were given special privileges by the Roman Empire. Today a municipality is an incorporated entity with its own separate government, as opposed to unincorporated communities or settlements under a larger political jurisdiction such as a county or state. Some incorporated municipalities may be classified as cities, towns, or villages, depending on the size, but all have their own government.

Colonial Cities

In the United States, many municipalities existed before statehood or even the nation. In fact, the first American political organization for self-government, the Mayflower Compact, was made by the Pilgrims before they got off the ship:

Having undertaken for the glory of God . . . and the honor of our King and Country, a voyage to plant the first colony in the northern parts of Virginia, we do . . . solemnly and mutually in the presence of God and of one another, . . . combine ourselves together into a civil body politic, for our better ordering and preservation, and . . . to enact and frame such just and equal laws, ordinances, acts, . . . and offices from time to time, as shall be thought most . . . convenient for the general good of the colony; unto which we promise all due submission and obedience. In witness whereof we have undersigned our names, Cape Cod, 11th of November, in the reign of our sovereign King James, the year of Our Lord 1620.

Incorporation of a modern city has much the same purpose of "better ordering," and this concept of a civic association for self-government

is in distinct contrast to Spanish colonies directly ruled by the mother country (despite the slogan of St. Augustine, founded in 1565: "America's oldest city").

Five natural harbors determined the location of the principal colonial cities: New York (1609); Boston (1630); Newport (1639); Charleston (1670); Philadelphia (1682). The New England towns grew outward from the common to encompass the surrounding farmland. In contrast, Charleston was a planned community with a regular grid pattern and grew inward from the fifty-odd plantations surrounding it. These two growth patterns—outward expansion and growing together by surrounding settlements—can be seen in today's increasing urbanization.

The corporate, or governmental, existence of the colonial city was based upon a charter granted by the royal governor or by the proprietor of the colony. Municipal authority was concentrated in a council made up of the mayor, aldermen, and councilmen. Possessing both executive and judicial powers, the city's legislative body was bicameral, only the councilmen being directly elected, with the aldermen chosen by the councilmen or perpetuating themselves by deciding their own successors.¹ The mayor, usually appointed for a year, from among the aldermen by the aldermen or by the colonial governor, presided over the council but had little executive power. To vote, citizens had to be men who owned property and met racial and even religious qualifications, which reduced the municipal electorate to a relatively small percentage of the inhabitants.

Because of the city's limited functions (social welfare was a responsibility of the church), revenues were sufficient. The property tax furnished income, as did fees from municipal docks, ferries, and other enterprises. New York used the special assessment (whereby property owners pay for adjacent improvements) for the first time in the late seventeenth century. Citizens were expected to volunteer their services and equipment, which included a fire bucket in each house. Colonial balls and other benefit drives were held to raise money for public purposes, such as buying a fire engine. In short, many of the main municipal revenue sources of today were established in colonial times.

The Revolution and Jacksonian Democracy

If colonial government does not sound democratic and equalitarian, remember that the American Revolution started in the cities. During the Revolution, obviously a charter granted in the name of the Crown had no standing; it was replaced by the legislative bodies of the states or by revolutionary councils. Where the city had formerly been the creature of the executive will in the central government, it now became

a creature of the legislative will. Some important municipal offices were filled by the new state legislatures. We will explore the relationship of cities to states in the next chapter.

The structure of municipal government was not drastically affected by the Revolution; the mayor was still often indirectly elected. City hall tended to be dominated by a rather select circle of merchants and professional people. In a predominantly agrarian society, many shared Thomas Jefferson's view that "the mobs of great cities add just so much to the support of pure government, as do sores do to the strength of the human body."² It was not until the late 1820s, in Jacksonian Democracy, that the rights of every man were extended to local government. Property restrictions for officeholding and the exercise of the franchise were removed, and most mayors became popularly elected. Virtually all municipal offices were made elective, usually with the only qualifications being the number of votes, since according to the Jacksonian creed any average citizen was competent to perform any public office. This belief has had an important influence upon modern municipal management; the will of the people was expressed at frequent elections, with many elective administrators each independent of one another and a diffusion of executive authority in separately elected boards and commissions. Structurally, this weak-mayor system, examined further in chapter 5, dominated municipal government for a century and is still frequently found in cities today.

Machines and Bosses

Following the Civil War, cities rapidly expanded, swelled by migrants from rural areas and immigrants and by the new network of railroads. Into this atomized power vacuum stepped the political boss, with power centrally wielded in his hands: Boss Tweed in New York City, King McManes in Philadelphia, and Col. Ed Butler in St. Louis are well-known examples. Distinguishing characteristics of boss rule, which flourished until World War II, were several.

First, the boss, often building upon ethnic affiliations, organized tight party control, including nominations, to win offices at each election (see box). Second, the classic boss usually did not hold public office, being accountable only to his followers in "the machine" and hence invulnerable to external political attack. In exchange for votes, to fill all the offices of Jacksonian Democracy, the boss delivered the goods in the form of social welfare and public improvements. He used patronage (city jobs) to control votes, and he held out the promise of lucrative city contracts to build support among businessmen. The result, in its best form, was unprecedented building of needed public works and,

In this excerpt Boss George Washington Plunkitt describes organizing a party machine in

How to Become a Statesman

There's thousands of young men in this city who will go to the polls for the first time next November. Among them will be many who have watched the careers of successful men in politics, and who are longin' to make names and fortunes for themselves at the same game. It is to these youths that I want to give advice. First, let me say that I am in a position to give what the courts call expert testimony on the subject. I don't think you can easily find a better example than I am of success in politics. After forty years' experience at the game I am—well, I'm George Washington Plunkitt. Everybody knows what figure I cut in the greatest organization on earth, and if you hear people say that I've laid away a million or so since I was a butcher's boy in Washington Market, don't come to me for an indignant denial. I'm pretty comfortable, thank you.

Now, havin' qualified as an expert, as the lawyers say, I am goin' to give advice free to the young men who are goin' to cast their first votes, and who are lookin' forward to political glory and lots of cash. Some young men think they can learn how to be successful in politics from books, and they cram their heads with all sorts of college rot. They couldn't make a bigger mistake. Now, understand me, I ain't sayin' nothin' against colleges. I guess they'll have to exist as long as there's bookworms, and I suppose they do some good in a certain way, but they don't count in politics. In fact, a young man who has gone through the college course is handicapped at the outset. He may succeed in politics, but the chances are 100 to 1 against him.

Another mistake: some young men think that the best way to prepare for the political game is to practice speakin' and becomin' orators. That's all wrong. We've got some orators in Tammany Hall, but they're chiefly ornamental. . . . The men who rule have practiced keepin' their tongues still, not exercisin' them. So you want to drop the orator idea unless you mean to go into politics just to perform the skyrocket act.

Now, I've told you what not to do; I guess I can explain best what to do to succeed in politics by tellin' you what I did. After goin' through the apprenticeship of the business while I was a boy by workin' around the district headquarters and hustlin' about the polls on election day, I set out when I cast my first vote to win fame and money in New York City politics. Did I offer my services to the district leader as a stump-speaker? Not much. The woods are always full of speakers. Did I get up a book on municipal government and show it to the leader? I wasn't such a fool. What I did was to get some marketable goods before goin' to the leaders. What do I mean by marketable goods? Let me tell you: I had a cousin, a young man who didn't take any particular interest in politics. I went to him and said: "Tommy, I'm goin' to be a politician, and I want to get a followin'; can I count on you?" He said: "Sure, George." That's how I started in business. I got a marketable commodity—one vote. Then I went to the district leader and told him I could command two votes on

election day, Tommy's and my own. He smiled on me and told me to go ahead. If I had offered him a speech or a bookful of learnin', he would have said, "Oh, forget it!"

That was beginnin' business in a small way, wasn't it? But that is the only way to become a real lastin' statesman. I soon branched out. Two young men in the flat next to mine were school friends, I went to them, just as I went to Tommy, and they agreed to stand by me. Then I had a followin' of three voters and I began to get chesty. Whenever I dropped into district headquarters, everybody shook hands with me, and the leader one day honored me by lightin' a match for my cigar. And so it went on like a snowball rollin' down a hill. I worked the flathouse that I lived in from the basement to the top floor, and I got about a dozen young men to follow me. Then I tackled the next house and so on down the block and around the corner. Before long I had sixty men back of me, and formed the George Washington Plunkitt Association.

What did the district leader say then when I called at headquarters? I didn't have to call at headquarters. He came after me and said: "George, what do you want? If you don't see what you want, ask for it. Wouldn't you like to have a job or two in the departments for your friends?" I said: "I'll think it over; I haven't yet decided what the George Washington Plunkitt Association will do in the next campaign." You ought to have seen how I was courted and petted then by the leaders of the rival organizations. I had marketable goods and there was bids for them from all sides, and I was a risin' man in politics. As time went on, and my association grew, I thought I would like to go to the Assembly. I just had to hint at what I wanted, and three different organizations offered me the nomination. Afterwards, I went to the Board of Aldermen, then to the State Senate, then became leader of the district, and so on up and up till I became a statesman.

That is the way and the only way to make a lastin' success in politics. If you are goin' to cast your first vote next November and want to go into politics, do as I did. Get a followin', if it's only one man, and then go to the district leader and say: "I want to join the organization. I've got one man who'll follow me through thick and thin." The leader won't laugh at your one-man followin'. He'll shake your hand warmly, offer to propose you for membership in his club, take you down to the corner for a drink and ask you to call again. But go to him and say: "I took first prize at college in Aristotle; I can recite all Shakespeare forwards and backwards; there ain't nothin' in science that ain't as familiar to me as blockades on the elevated roads and I'm the real thing in the way of silver-tongued orators." What will he answer? He'll probably say: "I guess you are not to blame for your misfortunes, but we have no use for you here."

From Plunkitt of Tammany Hall: A Series of Very Plain Talks on Very Practical Politics, delivered by ex-senator George Washington Plunkitt, the Tammany Philosopher, from his rostrum—the New York County Court House boot-black stand, recorded by William L. Riordan (New York: McClure, Phillips, 1905), pp. 13–18.

at its most corrupt, city halls resembling palaces, with price tags to match. After all, the boss had to get his payoff from construction costs.

The Age of the Reformers

When British ambassador Lord Bryce wrote *The American Commonwealth* in 1888, he concluded that "municipal government is the one conspicuous failure of American democracy." Journalists such as Lincoln Steffens (*The Shame of the Cities*, 1904), were muckrakers who revealed the extent of municipal corruption: graft, bribery, waste, and electoral manipulation. Starting in the 1880s, some politicians were elected as reformers: Buffalo mayor Grover Cleveland went all the way to the White House.

What did the reformers want? Typical is the 1894 platform of the National Municipal League. Many of these planks remain reform issues today:

- Simplified municipal organization to reintegrate the administrative fragmentation resulting from Jacksonian Democracy. This "short ballot" movement wanted to reduce the number of elective offices to important posts readily identifiable to the voters and hence to break the electoral grip of the political machines.

- A strengthened office of the mayor, to be achieved by increasing his management powers as the city's chief executive. Under a strong-mayor plan, he would be held accountable for city administration.

- Municipal ownership of utilities would not only give citizens cheaper service in the "age of the robber barons" but would also reduce favoritism in granting exclusive and profitable franchises to private operators favored by the machine. The issues involved in present day municipal ownership are presented in chapter 10.

- Free public services, such as parks, streetlights, libraries, and fire protection, were goals for reform also designed to win electoral support from the urban masses.

- Professionalism of public employment and development of a career merit system were desired not only to improve municipal services but to attack the patronage base of the machines.

- Municipal home rule, or the right of a city to run its own affairs largely free of state legislative interference, was introduced in the Missouri constitution of 1875. Adopted by a number of states, as we shall see in the next chapter, it also weakened the ties by which the city machine delivered the party vote to the state administration in return for favors granted, including tolerance by the state of machine corruption.

- Nonpartisanship and at-large election of council members were designed to break the power base of the political machines. Without party identification by each candidate's name, the machine could not control the nominating process nor have its followers vote a straight party ticket. At-large elections from the city as a whole allowed the reformers to bring their strength to bear and to undercut the political machine's block-by-block geographical organization, described by George Washington Plunkitt.

- The devices of popular democracy allowed outraged citizens to participate directly in civic affairs. The initiative enables a certain number of citizens to petition that a proposed law or an amendment to the city charter be placed directly upon the ballot to be decided by the voters, thus bypassing the municipal governing body. The referendum allows voters to review legislation proposed by the city government to decide whether it should go into effect. The recall permits elective officials to be voted out of office prior to the expiration of their terms.

- City planning was not merely a "city beautiful" movement by reformers but a desire for orderly civil growth and elimination of health hazards and corrupt private land speculation.

- Efficiency, economy, and responsibility in government, or the "business approach," was the battle cry of the reformers, who were mainly concerned businessmen and taxpayers appalled by civic waste.

Most of the old-time bosses disappeared by the time of World War II. Despite the reformers' organizational remodeling, however, Frank ("I am the Law") Hague, on the Jersey City Commission, and Tom Pendergast in Kansas City, Missouri, which had a city manager form of government, were proof that a machine can flourish regardless of the organization structure. Chicago mayor Richard J. Daley, who died in office in 1976, was cited as the "last boss" because of his control of the Cook County Democratic organization. In addition to controlling the party, Mayor Daley held public office, and his son Richard M. Daley's election as mayor in 1989 underscores the celebrated observation "Chicago ain't ready for reform yet." Pictures taken by a civic reform group demonstrated that the patronage payroll was huge. Five service department workers were needed to replace a single streetlight: an electrician on a ladder removed the globe; a second electrician unscrewed and replaced the bulb; a third worker held the ladder; a fourth stood by to provide any needed tools; and a foreman supervised the other four. Why was Mayor Daley one of the most durable figures on the American political scene? A newspaper poll revealed that while only half the voters believed what Daley said, 84 percent believed that he could get things done, and 77 percent thought he was doing a good job; the election results returned him to office.³

"Service to the people" was Boss Plunkitt's watchword, and if he made money for himself on the side, why, that was a privilege of office. Only the technology has changed, as computerized graft has been uncovered in recent years. Employees in a Long Island town paid 1 percent of their salaries to the local Republican party to keep their jobs, and the former Democratic mayor of Syracuse received payoffs from city contractors with personal computers to record "contributions."⁴

Cities Today

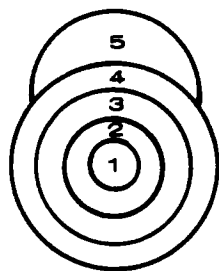
The number of municipalities has grown slowly, compared with special districts which provide service functions such as water, sanitation, fire protection, transit, and public housing. The number of cities varies greatly by state, depending upon incorporation laws (see table 1.1): Illinois has more than 1,200 municipalities, but Hawaii and the District of Columbia have 1 city each. An important fact is that most municipalities are very small: nearly half the municipalities in the United States have a population of 1,000 or less. This may mean a high degree of informality in American city government.

Such wide variations in the numbers and sizes of cities present twin problems of growth and government. The built-up urban area can be clearly seen from the air and a number of growth patterns on land use have been identified (see figure 1.1). Parkin and Burgess's concentric circles view, based on the growth of Chicago, has the central business district at the core, surrounded by rings of different land use. Hoyt's sector theory explains land use by dominant function. Maurice Davies sees urban growth occurring along transportation arteries from the core, resulting in star-shaped patterns. The Harris and Ullman multiple-nuclei thesis sees clusterings of specialized areas, or concentrated diverse use such as regional shopping centers. The patterns drawn are

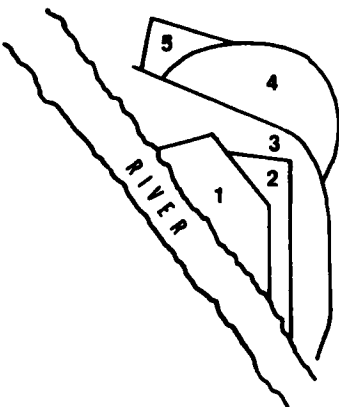
Table 1.1. A Statistical Profile of American Cities

| | Number of Municipalities | | | | | | |
|--------------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------|--------------------|--------------------|------------------|------------------|----------------|
| | 1987 19,200 | 1982 19,076 | 1972 18,517 | 1962 18,000 | | | |
| Population | 1000,000 or more | 50,000 - 99,999 | 25,000 - 49,999 | 10,000 - 24,999 | 5,000 - 9,999 | 1,000 - 4,999 | Under 1,000 |
| Number of cities in 1987 | 183 | 285 | 561 | 1,303 | 1,544 | 5,955 | 9,369 |

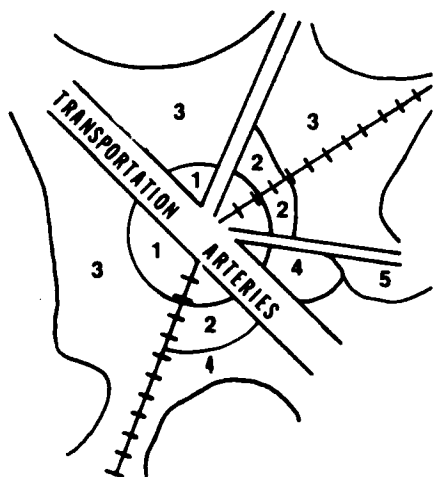
Source: U.S. Bureau of the Census, *Census of Governments, 1987*, vol. 1, *Governmental Organization* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. Government Printing Office, 1988)



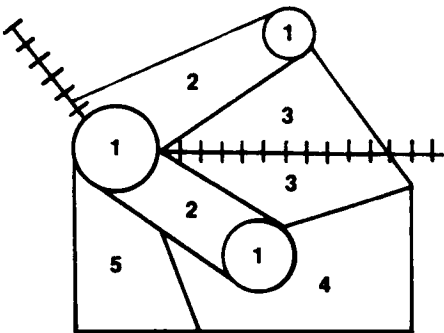
concentric
circles



sector
theory



star-shaped
patterns



multiple nuclei
thesis

| | | |
|--|---------------------------------|--------------------|
| 1=core business district | 2=transitional (often slums) | 3=working class |
| 4=middle class residential housing | | 5=upper class |

Figure 1.1 Patterns of Urban Development

models; the configuration of a particular city will depend on its situation.

The government of urban areas may be fragmented among several governmental jurisdictions: counties, municipalities, and special purpose districts. Depending on its location, a municipality may be a core city, a satellite suburb, or a rural town. The view from city hall will be different in each.

The remaining chapters will examine the political dynamics of municipal administration. Chapter 2 describes the legal foundations upon which municipalities operate, and chapter 3, on metropolitics, examines relationships within the larger community. Chapter 4 explores city politics, and chapter 5, municipal leadership. Chapter 6 on municipal finance, also considers privatization. Work at city hall, public safety, and municipal social services are subjects treated in chapters 7, 8, and 9. Chapter 10 concludes by discussing how public works, transportation, and planning shape the city's future.

Notes

1. The terms "aldermen" or "councilmen" are still legally used to describe the members of a council, which is now a single body.

2. *Notes on Virginia* (1782), reprinted in *The Portable Thomas Jefferson*, ed. Merrill D. Peterson (New York: Viking Press, 1975), p. 217. The quotation is from "Query 19; Manufactures" of the unpaginated original.

3. William E. Farrell, "Daley Is Silent on Seeking Sixth Term as Mayor," *New York Times*, October 7, 1974, p. 22.

4. Mary Breansted, "L. I. Official Accused of Using Computer to List Pay Kickbacks," *New York Times*, December 5, 1974, p. 1; Frank Lynn, "Ex-Syracuse Mayor Pleads Guilty In \$1.2 Million Extortion Scheme," *New York Times*, January 7, 1988, p. 14.

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