

# Options for a County Commission

Draft 4/13/09

**Initial Assumptions:** Commissioners (except possibly the Chair) are part-time.

Alt.	Element	Comments
<b>1A</b>	<b>Elect By Districts.</b> Each commissioner is elected only by the voters within that commissioner's district of residence.	<p><b>Plus:</b> This permits geographical interests to be represented —important on issues that may have different impacts in different geographical areas; such as zoning, watersheds, road corridors, more dense development, extensions of public water supply and sewer lines.</p> <p><b>Minus:</b> "Interests of the whole" (county population) would not be represented.</p> <p><b>Minus:</b> This could allow unethical "vote swapping," to allow commission members to avoid voting in a way that would be unpopular within their districts but still allow matters to be passed that the district voters don't like.</p>
<b>1B</b>	<b>Elect At Large, by Posts:</b> All commissioners are voted on by the entire county. Each runs for a specific "post."	<p><b>Plus:</b> This emphasizes "interests of the whole" (county population) and minimizes the influence of geographical interests.</p> <p><b>Minus:</b> With no geographic diversity, this may allow a single interest (say, land development) or coalition (single-issue group) or geographic area to provide the resources and candidates to elect a majority of the commission.</p>
<b>1C</b>	<b>Elect At Large, District Residency Required:</b> All commissioners are voted on by the entire county, but each commissioner must reside within a particular district.	This is unlikely to be any different, in effect, from <b>1B</b> . The fact that a commissioner resides in a district does not compel him to represent the interests of that district if he is not elected by the voters in that district.

If the Committee recommendation is to provide for commission districts,

- the **Research** and **Structure Subcommittees** jointly will develop recommendations as to the number of districts and as to whether **1A** or **1C** would apply.
- the **Apportionment Subcommittee** will develop recommendations as to appropriate boundaries for those districts.

<b>2A</b>	<b>Chair Elected by Voters:</b> Allow the voters to elect a Commission Chair.	<p><b>Plus:</b> "Interests of the whole" (county population) would be represented.</p> <p><b>Plus:</b> This promotes a strong leader, having been elected by all of the voters. This is especially true if the other commissioners are elected with districts (<b>1A</b> above).</p> <p><i>Other pluses/minuses of this depend on the powers of the Chair (see below).</i></p>
<b>2B</b>	<b>Chair Elected by Board:</b> Allow commissioners to elect the Chair from among themselves.	<p><b>Minus:</b> If all commissioners are elected by districts, no one represents the "interests of the whole."</p> <p><b>Minus:</b> No one has a "voter mandate" to be a strong leader.</p> <p><b>Minus:</b> If these commissioners are elected by districts, there is a possibility of a particular dysfunction. For example, on a five-person board where a member may vote to elect himself to the Chair, three members (a simple majority) could elect one of their number to the Chair and ignore the interests represented by the other two members. Voters whose interests therefore were not represented could not break up this fixed majority, since they could vote only for the representatives of their own districts.</p>
The <b>Research</b> and <b>Structure Subcommittees</b> jointly will develop a recommendation between <b>2A</b> and <b>2B</b> .		
<b>3A</b>	<p><b>Chair is full-time:</b> The Chair not only would preside over Commission meetings but also would be the CEO (Chief Executive Officer), assuming <i>both political/policy AND administrative roles</i> regarding County operations. (Sole Commissioners do this.)</p> <p>This is a "strong" leader position, analogous to the President of the US and governors of the states; although <i>how</i> "strong" it is depends on specific powers granted to the Chair.</p>	<p>This should apply only under <b>2A</b>. (While a Commission, however elected, might hire a County Administrator who would have the powers of a CEO, it would be unusual for a county commission to give such powers to a person elected from among themselves.)</p> <p><b>Plus:</b> Because a Chair as CEO has the authority to shape county government (primarily through the ability to hire and fire department heads and direct them), the Chair has opportunities to demonstrate leadership in executing county policies.</p> <p>(The strength of this leadership depends on the authority granted to the Chair in the county charter or enabling legislation balanced against the restrictions that the majority of the Commission may impose in commission ordinances or resolutions.)</p> <p><b>Minus:</b> This is analogous to a person who is a business CEO by virtue of being the <i>owner</i> or founder of a company, not a CEO <i>hired</i> specifically for his/her management skills, to run a corporation. A person elected because of positions on policy issues advocated in a political campaign may have <i>policy-making</i> skills but is not necessarily the best <i>manager</i> for an operation as large as a county government.</p>
<b>3B</b>	<b>Chair is part-time:</b> The Chair would preside over Commission meetings.	<p>This would apply in the case of either <b>2A</b> or <b>2B</b>.</p> <p>This requires either a County Manager or a County Administrator to supervise county departments (see below).</p>
The <b>Research</b> and <b>Structure Subcommittees</b> jointly will develop a recommendation between <b>3A</b> and <b>3B</b> .		

<p><b>4A</b></p>	<p><b>Overlapping terms:</b> Commissioners elected by districts would be elected initially so that half of them had terms half the length of the others. For example, half would have two-year terms, and the other half would have four-year terms. In subsequent elections, all terms would be for four years.</p>	<p><b>Plus:</b> At least half of the commissioners elected by districts would have at least two years' experience to carry over to a new commission (a commission convened after an election).  <b>Minus:</b> Elections must be held twice as often — more public expense. (This is not a "Plus" since it doesn't mean that voters get to "rate" commissioners twice as often. Only half the commissioners are up for election each time, still only once every four years — and they aren't necessarily the commissioners that have most recently displeased voters.)</p>
<p><b>4B</b></p>	<p><b>Concurrent terms:</b> All commissioners would be elected at the same time for terms of the same length.</p>	<p><b>Plus:</b> This allows a "clean sweep" of a commission that has displeased voters; but this is only likely if a whole commission has committed some unethical or unpopular acts. "Recall" is a better solution in that case, since there is no need to wait for the next election (which may be several years away).  <b>Minus:</b> If none of the former commissioners are returned to office, there won't be any carry-over experience from one commission to the next.</p>
<p>The <b>Research</b> and <b>Structure Subcommittees</b> jointly will develop a recommendation between <b>4A</b> and <b>4B</b>.</p>		

<p><b>5A</b></p>	<p><b>Chair has strong powers:</b> <i>(These are examples: A Chair may have only some of these powers.)</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Chair has a vote on the Commission on all matters.</li> <li>2. If full-time (the CEO), the Chair can hire and fire department heads.</li> <li>3. The Chair may veto legislation passed by the other commissioners.</li> </ol>	<p><b>Plus:</b> The Chair may demonstrate his/her positions on issues to voters. Even with, say, a 3-1 vote on a five-member commission, the Chair may choose to vote for or against the majority — even though it won't make a difference in the outcome — as a statement to voters.</p> <p><b>Minus:</b> While the hiring/firing power of a CEO may result in a cohesive management team, it also may result in a CEO filling management positions with political supporters, regardless of their management abilities.</p>
<p><b>5B</b></p>	<p><b>Chair has limited powers:</b> <i>(Only some of these might apply.)</i></p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. The Chair can vote on the Commission only to break a tie.</li> <li>2. The Chair does not have independent (of the Commission) power over hiring and firing department heads. (If the Chair is part-time, such hiring and firing might be done by the County Manager or County Administrator.)</li> </ol>	
<p>The <b>Research</b> and <b>Structure Subcommittees</b> jointly will develop a recommendation between <b>5A</b> and <b>5B</b>.</p>		

<b>6A</b>	<b>County Manager:</b> A County Manager administers all operations; prepares and recommends an annual budget to the Commission; and hires all department heads through a civil service process. The County Manager is hired by the full Commission.	<i>This position would <b>not</b> apply under a full-time (CEO) Chair.</i> <b>Plus:</b> This person is a professional public sector manager, analogous to the CEO of a corporation.
<b>6B</b>	<b>County Administrator:</b> A County Administrator has less authority than a County Manager. The Administrator is hired by the Chair/CEO, <i>possibly</i> with the concurrence of the Commission.	<i>This position <b>would</b> apply under a full-time (CEO) Chair. It would be similar to a Chief Operating Officer in a corporate setting.</i>
<b>6C</b>	<b>Chair (CEO) also is Administrator:</b> The CEO has management oversight of the department heads, who are the primary managers.	<i>This may be adequate in a relatively small county. It is unlikely to be so in a large or rapid-growing county, where management of operations would take too much of the CEO's time away from his/her political function — developing and promoting policy.</i>
The <b>Research</b> and <b>Structure Subcommittees</b> jointly will develop a recommendation between <b>6A</b> (if the Chair is NOT full-time) and <b>6B or 6C</b> (if the Chair IS full-time).		