

# Alternative Local Governmental Structures



**PRESENTATION TO THE NEWBURGH CITY CHARTER COMMISSION**  
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# All General Purpose Local Governments in New York State Have Boards in Which Governing Power Resides

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- 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

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- 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

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# The “Weak Mayor” System

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

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## Council

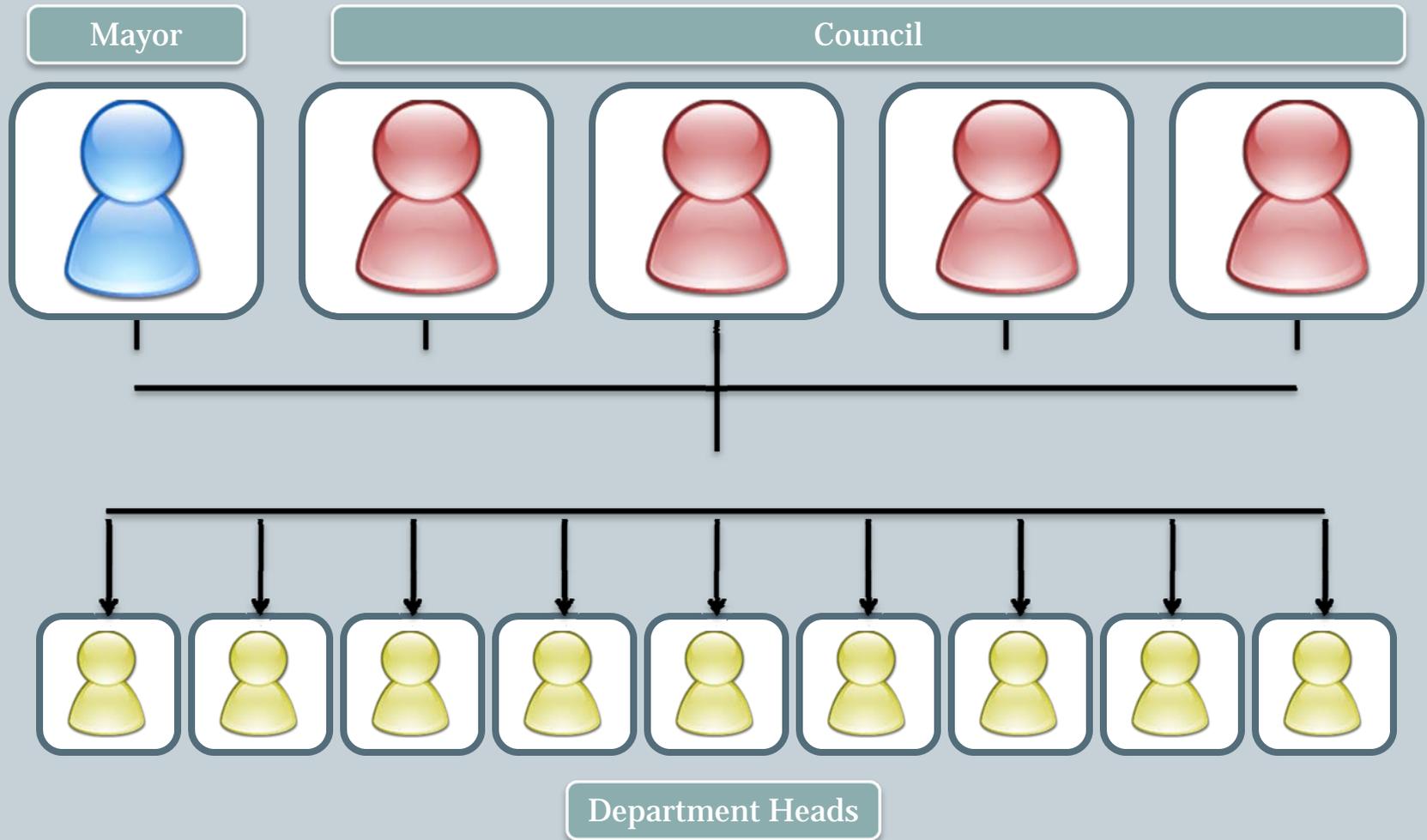
- Usually members work part-time
- Retains most governing authority, for example:
  - Makes policy by local law and resolution
  - Hire department heads
  - Adopt budget and makes most budget changes
  - Oversees administration

## 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

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

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- 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)

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- **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**

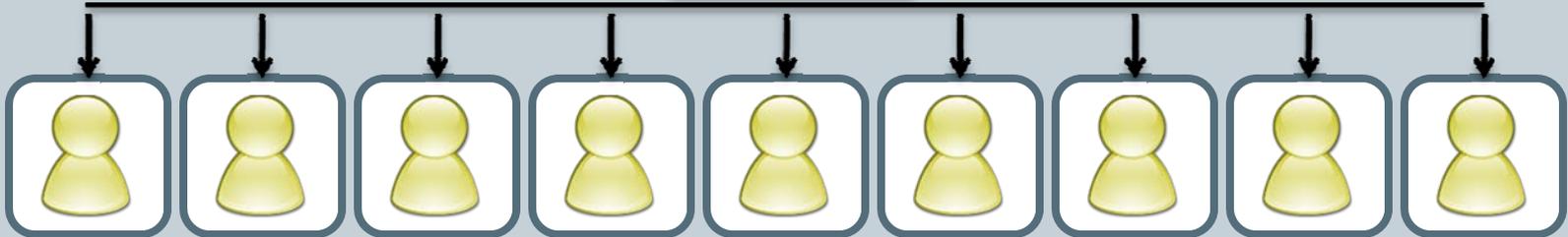
# The Council Manager System

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Council



City Manager



Department Heads

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

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- **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

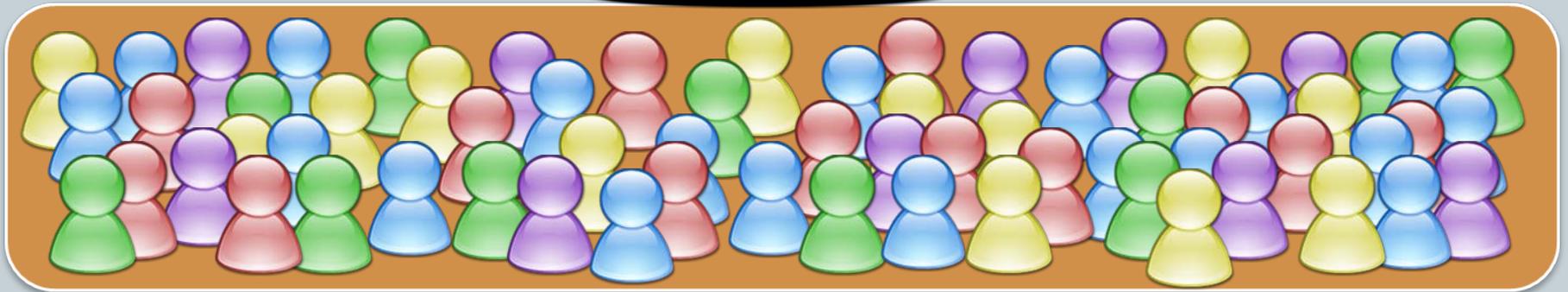
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- Modeled on national and state government
- A full separation of powers system
- Voters elect an executive, the mayor, and vest him or her with “executive” powers
- Voters elect a Council, and vest it with legislative powers
- Executive has no vote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

# The Strong Mayor System

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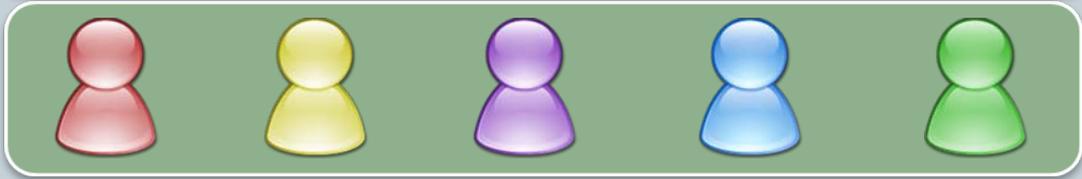
Voters



Mayor



Council



Department Heads



# The Commission System

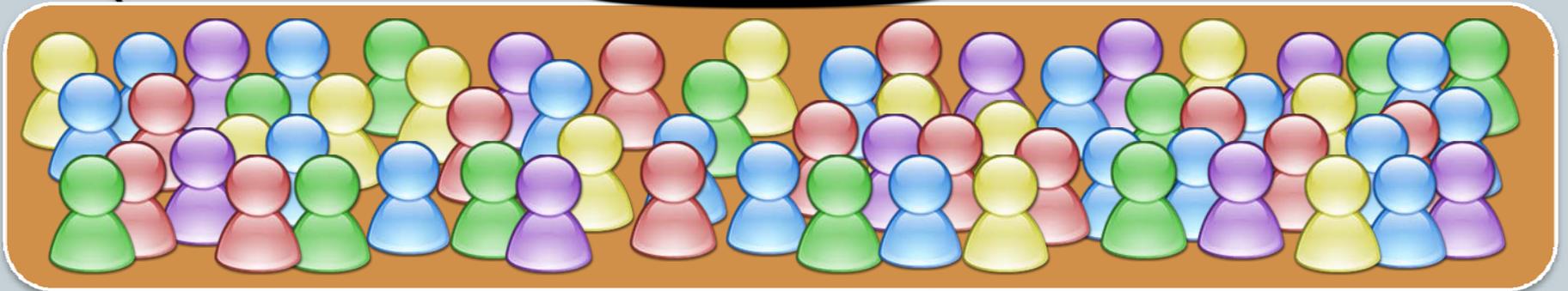
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- Voters, voting at-large, elect heads of major departments
- Department heads work full-time
- These department heads, sitting together, constitute the City Council
- Mostly abandoned where tried, and now rarely in use (in New York State, formerly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

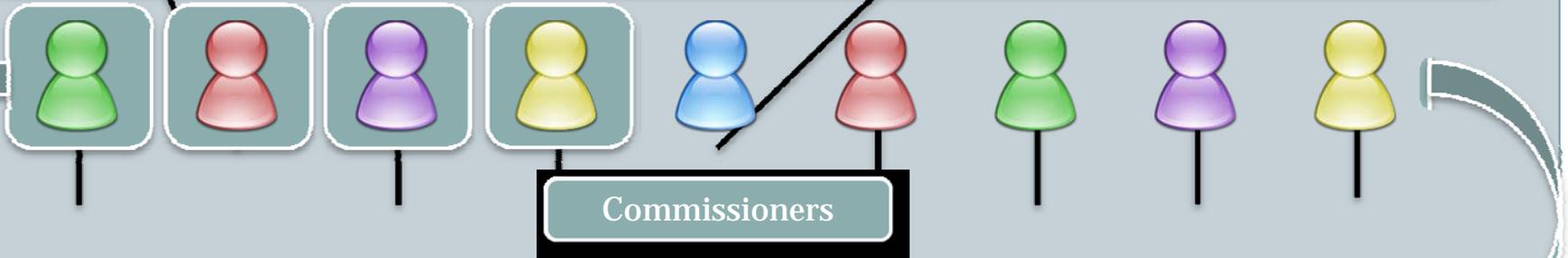
# The Commission System

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Voters



Commissioners



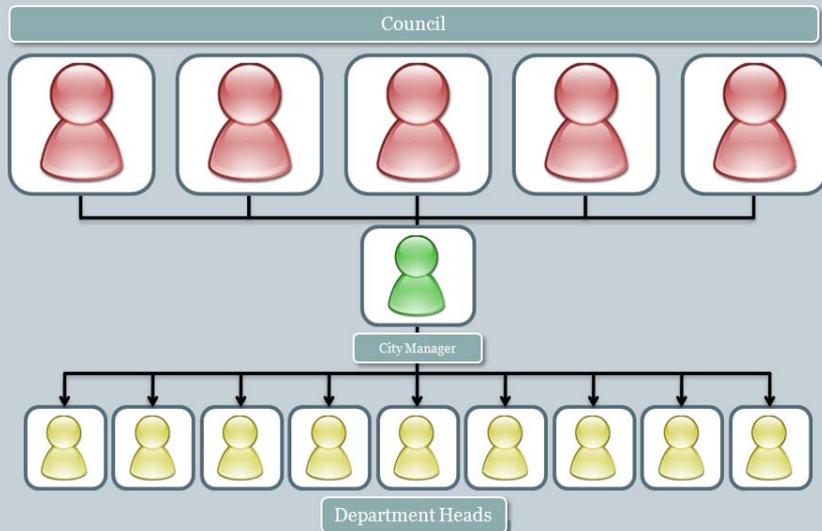
Council



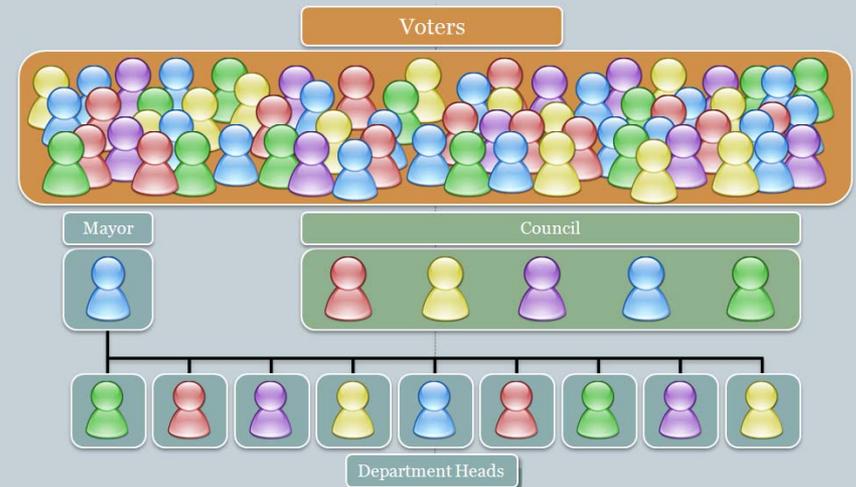
# The Practical Alternatives for Newburgh are the Council Manager and Strong Mayor Systems

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## Council / Manager



## Strong Mayor



# Strengths and Weaknesses of Council-Manager System

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## 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

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## 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?

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