Thinking About Change in City Government
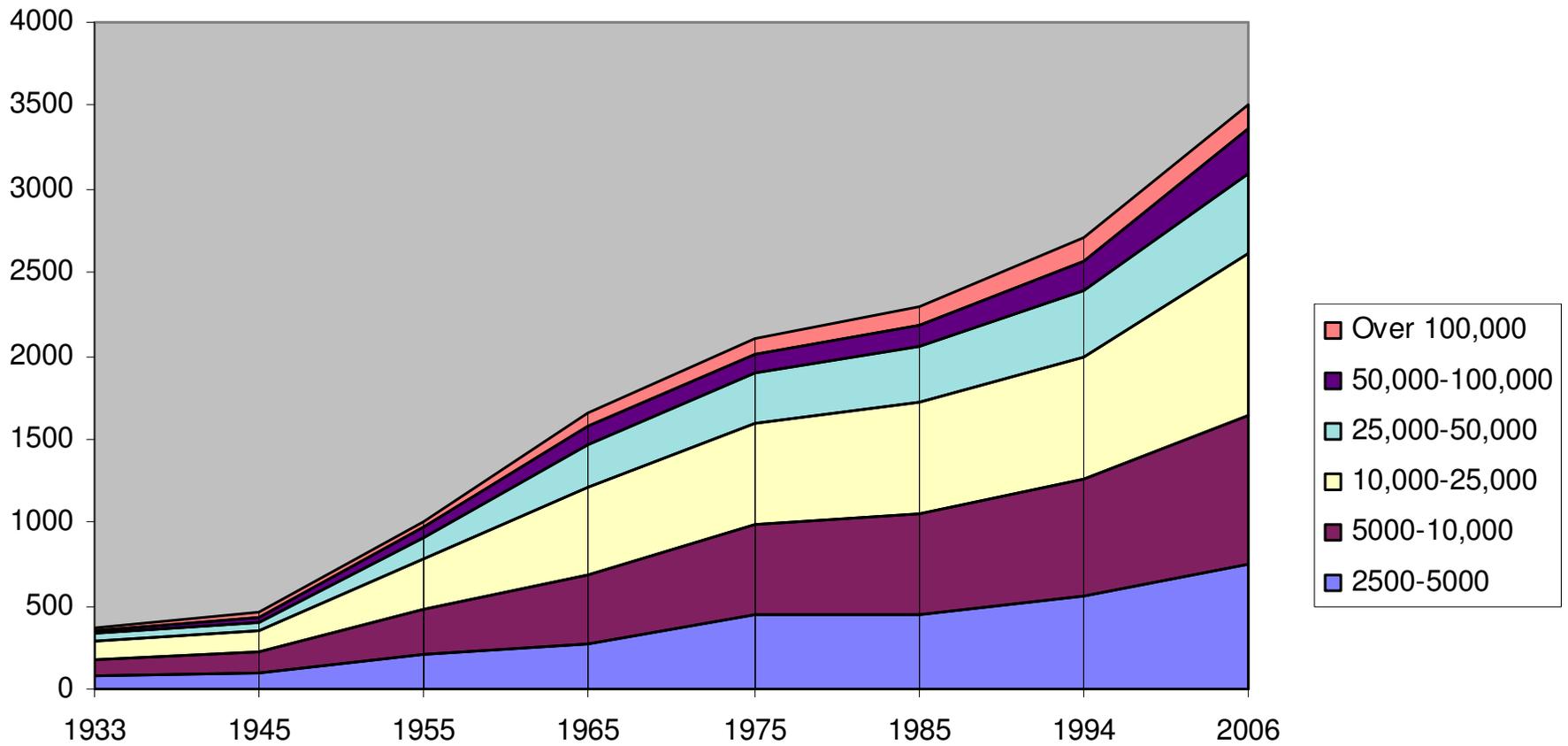
James H. Svara

Professor, School of Public Affairs

Arizona State University

Presentation to Tucson Charter Change Coalition

April 30, 2010

Growth in Number of Council-Manager Governments, 1933-2006

Legend:
- Over 100,000
- 50,000-100,000
- 25,000-50,000
- 10,000-25,000
- 5000-10,000
- 2500-5000

Use of Major Forms

- For cities over **10**,000 in population,
  - 41% use mayor-council form [M-C]
    - 22% without chief administrator
    - 19% with chief administrator
  - 59% use council-manager form [C-M]
    - Most cities elect mayors
    - Many have adopted district elections
- Cities over **100**,000 in population
  - 140 cities use the C-M form
  - 91 cities use M-C form
  - *In 1960, 68 cities used the C-M form*

Changes in form in cities over 100,000 population since 1990

- Change to mayor-council form - 9:
  - Fresno; Hartford, Miami, Oakland, Richmond, St. Petersburg, San Diego, Spokane, Toledo
- Abandonment of C-M form rejected - 9:
  - Corpus Christi; Cincinnati; Dallas; Grand Rapids; Kansas City; Little Rock; Pueblo; Tucson; and Worcester
- Rejected strong mayor-council - 2:
  - Portland (retained commission form), St. Louis (retained weak mayor form)
- Change to council-manager form - 3:
  - Cedar Rapids, El Paso, Wichita
- Sacramento ?

Key factor in push for mayor-council form

Effort by politician to acquire more power

- Dallas, Kansas City, <u>Oakland</u>*, Portland, <u>Richmond</u>, Sacramento?, <u>San Diego</u>, St. Louis

Dissension in council

- Cincinnati

Performance problems in city goverrnment

- <u>Richmond</u>, <u>Spokane</u>, <u>San Diego</u>

Mayor is too weak

- <u>St. Petersburg</u>

*Underlined cities changed form

Key factor in push for council-manager form

Corruption, waste, inefficiency in mayor's office
- – El Paso, Topeka

Arguments supporting Mayor-Council

- Positive claims for the mayor-council form
  - Strong leadership; mayor is "in charge"
  - One person who can be held accountable by voters
  - More policy initiatives
- Criticisms of council-manager form
  - Mayor is figurehead
  - City council is prone to dissension
  - City manager acquires too much influence; is not properly supervised

Arguments supporting Council-Manager

- Positive claims for the council-manager form
  - Shared leadership is valuable
  - Mayor: visionary and facilitative leader
  - Council is a governing board: sets goals and oversees performance
  - City manager brings professionalism to policy advice and day-to-day operations
  - City manager is continuously accountable
  - More long-term perspective, continuity, and innovation

Arguments supporting Council-Manager (2)

- Claims that Criticize the Mayor-Council Form
  - Performance is too dependent on one person
  - Strong mayor weakens council
  - Mayors have excessive power and are more prone to cronyism, favoritism, and corruption
  - Political inference in administration
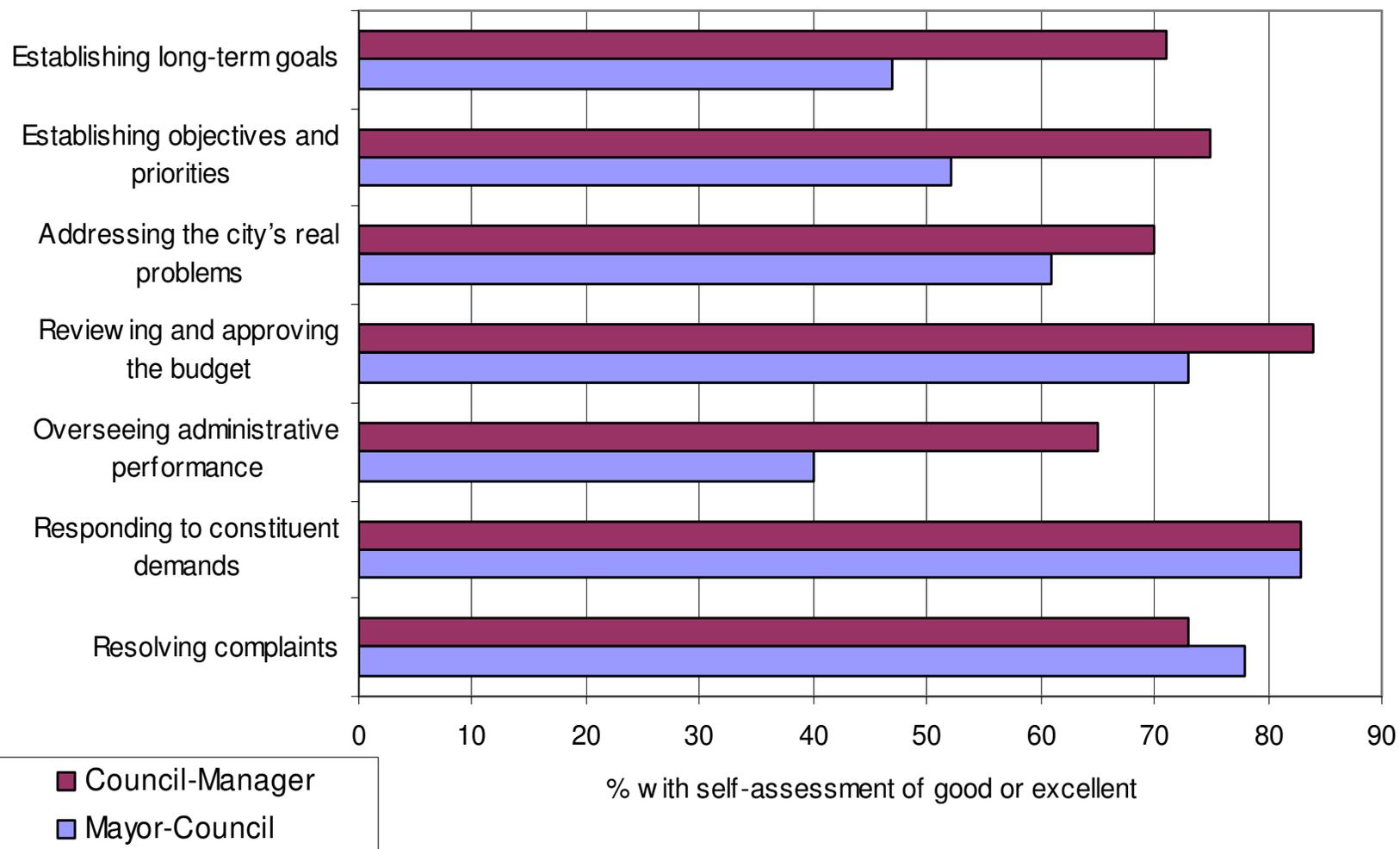 - Waste and inefficiency

Council performance in major functions:

Percent of council members who rate their
council's effectiveness as excellent or good
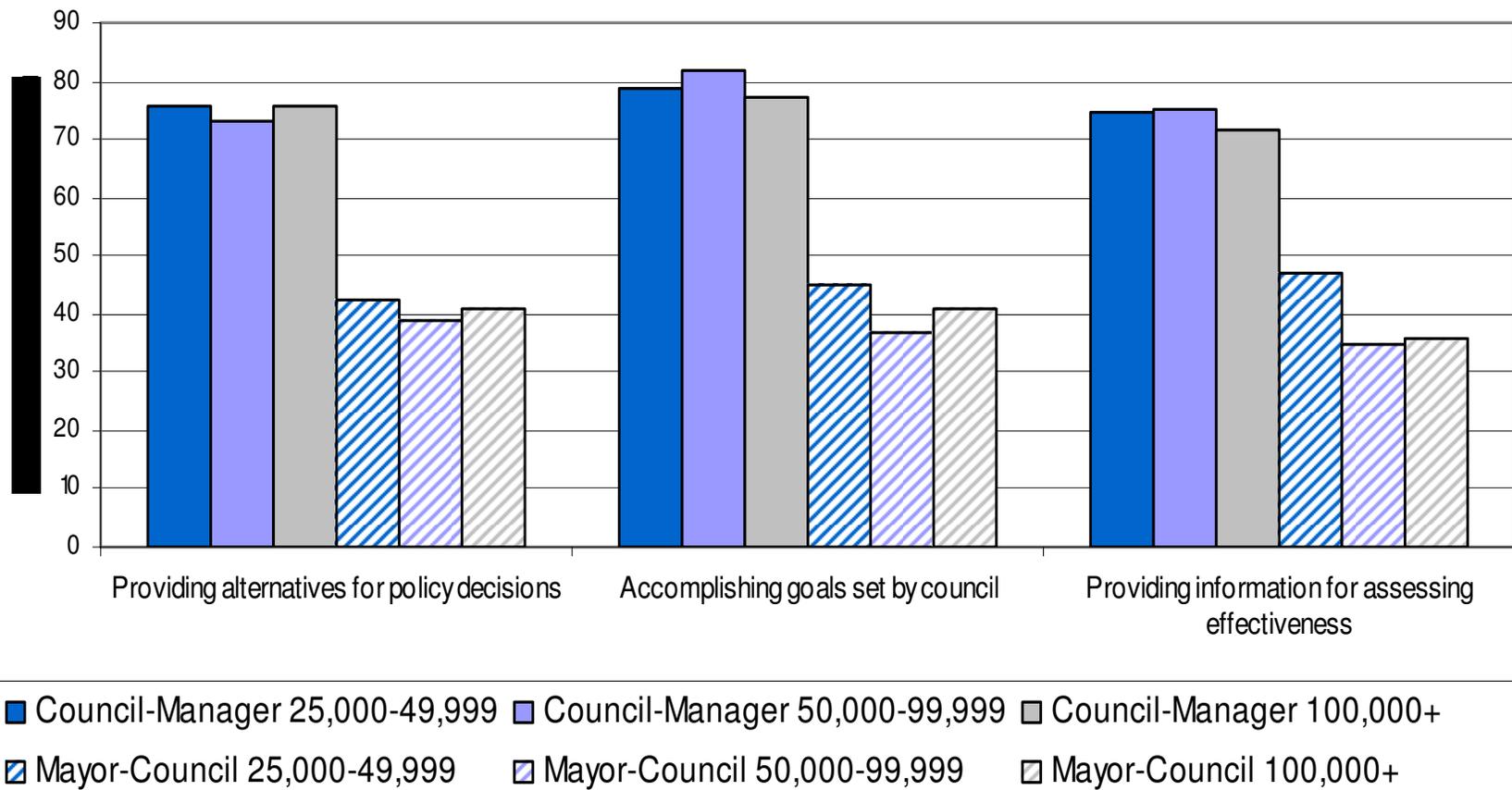
- Establishing long-term goals   62%
- Establishing objectives and priorities   66%
- Addressing the city's real problems   67%
- Reviewing and approving the budget   80%
- Overseeing administrative performance   57%
- Responding to constituent demands   83%
- Resolving complaints   76%

(NLC survey of council members 2001)

Council Effectiveness in Handling Major Functions by Form of Government

Function	Council-Manager	Mayor-Council
Establishing long-term goals	71	47
Establishing objectives and priorities	75	52
Addressing the city's real problems	70	61
Reviewing and approving the budget	84	73
Overseeing administrative performance	65	40
Responding to constituent demands	83	83
Resolving complaints	73	78

% with self-assessment of good or excellent

■ Council-Manager
■ Mayor-Council

Figure 5. Assessing the Performance of Mayor or City Manager by Size and Form

Legend:
- Council-Manager 25,000-49,999
- Council-Manager 50,000-99,999
- Council-Manager 100,000+
- Mayor-Council 25,000-49,999
- Mayor-Council 50,000-99,999
- Mayor-Council 100,000+

Categories:
- Providing alternatives for policy decisions
- Accomplishing goals set by council
- Providing information for assessing effectiveness

Perspectives in San Diego

- Steve Erie, UCSD: the system has failed because of the ongoing power struggle over information between Sanders and the council.
  - "The Mayor's Office has become a Kremlin in terms of an unwillingness to share critical information, particularly budget information with the council."
- Mayor Jerry Sanders, Republican: information disputes are due to friction caused by the mayor's more prominent role as an equal branch on par with the council.
  - "People say you don't get along as well, there's not the same collegial atmosphere," he said. "I don't work for them. They don't work for me. But we both try to do what's right for the city."

Impact of ballot type

- Nonpartisan
- Partisan

Party Identification and Ballot Type in Cities over 100,000 in population (2001)
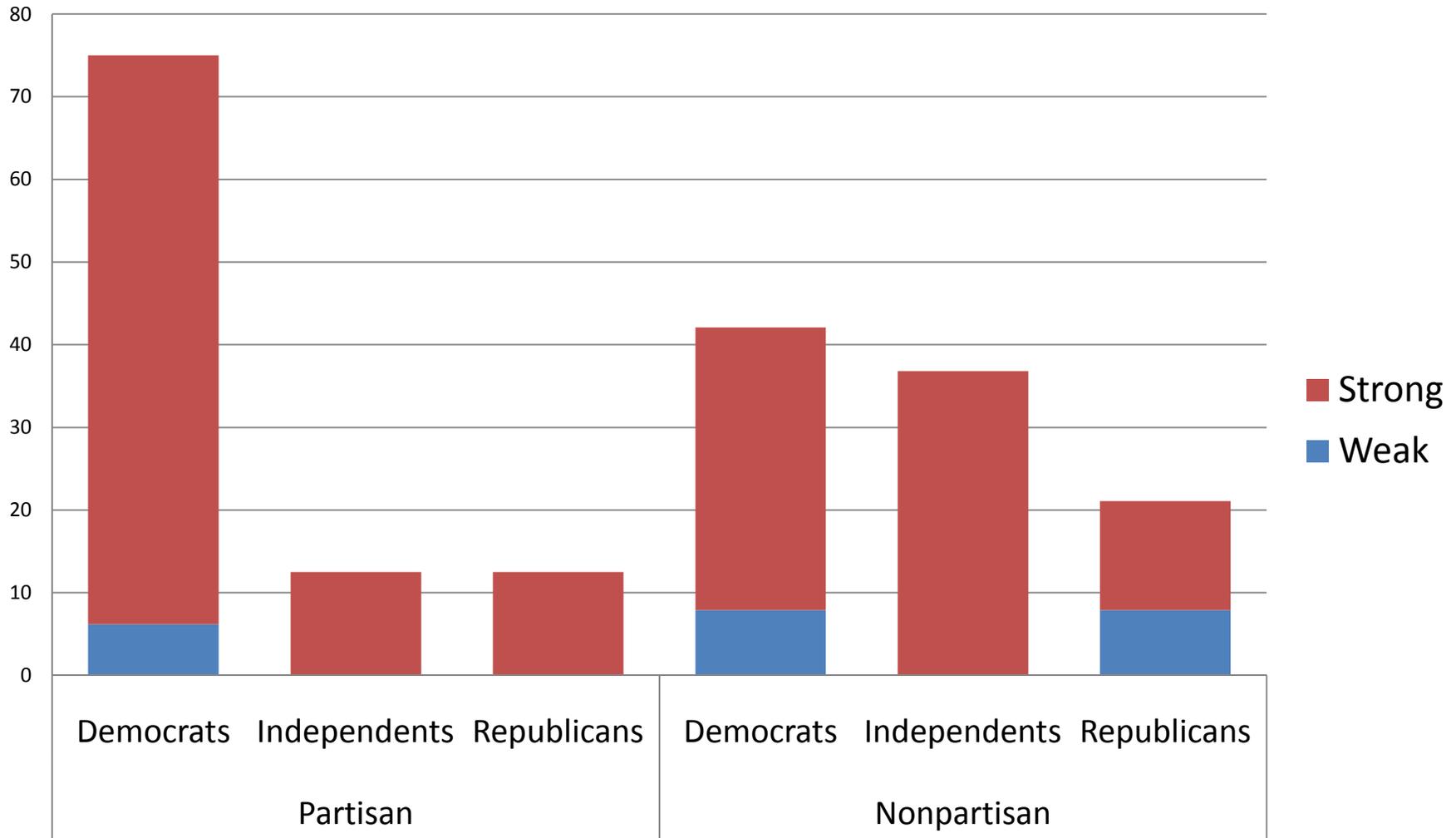
Response to recommendations

- **Revisions to the charter and civil service system to allow the city manager to build a strong team.**
  - City manager should be allowed to be the manager.
- **Make mayor and city council positions full-time jobs**
  - Recognition of the new reality
  - Combine with discussion of the nature governance and representational responsibilities
- **Provide for increasing the number of wards as population increases.**
  - Set number at appropriate level but no esculator
- **Give the mayor parity with city council members**
  - Expect the mayor to be a leader of the council and the community