



# A History of the Council-Manager form of government in Skokie



*Commemorating 50 years in Skokie*

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## A History of the Council-Manager form of government

Born out of the progressive reform movement at the beginning of the 20th century, the Council-Manager system of local government is one of the few original American contributions to political theory. In 1908, Staunton, Virginia, instituted the first position legally defining, by ordinance, the broad authority and responsibility associated with today's professional local government manager. In 1912, Sumter, South Carolina, was the first city to adopt a charter incorporating the basic principles of Council-Manager government. Westmount, Quebec, introduced the form to Canada in 1913.

Since its establishment, the Council-Manager form has become the most popular form of government in the United States in communities with populations of 5,000 or greater. More than 89 million Americans live in communities that operate under the Council-Manager form



of government. For more than 94 years, Council-Manager government has responded to the changing needs of citizens and their communities.

## What is the Council-Manager form of government?

The Council-Manager form of government combines the strong political leadership of elected officials with the strong managerial experience of an appointed local government manager. The form establishes a representative system where all power is concentrated in the elected council and where the council hires a professionally trained manager to oversee the delivery of public services. In Skokie, a Mayor, Village Clerk and six-member Village Board are elected in non-partisan elections. Their terms are for four years.

## Is it a responsive form of government?

In Council-Manager government, council members are the leaders and policy makers elected to represent the community and to concentrate on policy issues that are responsive to citizens' needs. The Manager is appointed by the Mayor and Council to carry out policy and ensure that the entire community is being served.

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## **What are the functions of the elected officials under this form of government?**

The Mayor and Council are the legislative body of the Village. They approve the budget and determine the tax rate. The Mayor and Council also focus on the community's goals, major projects and long-term considerations such as land use development, capital improvement plans, capital financing and strategic planning.

## **What are the functions of the Manager under this form of government?**

The Mayor and Council hire a professional Manager to carry-out the administrative responsibilities and bring to the Village the benefits of training and experience in administering local government projects and programs.

The Manager prepares the annual budget; hires and supervises all Village department and division directors; and carries out the Mayor and Council's policies. The community counts on the Manager to provide complete and objective information and strong leadership. The recent National Citizen Survey results, which identified Skokie in the top percentile nationally in the areas of public trust, quality of services and overall quality of life, are testimony to Skokie's effective management.

## **How much citizen participation is possible under the Council-Manager form of government?**

Unlimited citizen participation is encouraged by whatever means the citizens decide to utilize, including joining citizen groups, serving on advisory boards and commissions, attending council meetings, participating in public hearings, or serving on the council. With political power concentrated in the council instead of in one elected official, more citizens have an opportunity to be elected or appointed to a commission or other volunteer position with significant influence over the future of their community.





This proves true in Skokie where a recent citizen survey ranked Skokie in the 97th national percentile relative to welcoming citizen involvement in government and in the 95th national percentile relative to listening to citizens. Skokie is proud

of its rich history of open and participatory government.

Over 250 residents serve on Village Boards, Commissions and Committees. These volunteers contribute their time to addressing issues that improve the quality of life in Skokie.

## **The Council-Manager form of government in Skokie**

On April 16, 1957, the citizens of Skokie voted to approve a referendum establishing the Council-Manager form of municipal government. A month prior to the 1957 vote, Marshall Fulkerson, Co-chairman of the Skokie Committee for Village Manager Government was asked, “What’s a Village manager going to do for Skokie?” He re-

sponded, “The Village Manager is the trained business executive who carries out the Village Board’s orders in the most efficient and economical ways.” In today’s context the Village Manager functions as the Chief Executive Officer.

## **Commemorating the 50th Anniversary of the Council-Manager form of government in Skokie**

Skokie Mayor George Van Dusen appointed an Anniversary Committee to prepare for the Village’s celebration of the 50th Anniversary of the Council-Manager form of government in Skokie. The committee consists of past and current Village officials, staff and residents, including Appearance Commissioner Ann Clark, Senior Engineering Technician Joe Folise, former Mayor Jacqueline Gorell, Deputy Director of Community Development Wayne Hanson, Assistant Village Manager John Lockerby, Honorable Harvey Schwartz, Director of Marketing and Communications Ann Tennes and Village Clerk Marlene Williams.

The Committee identified the purpose of the 50th Anniversary Celebration as a way to increase awareness of and knowledge about the history and government of the community.

At the February 5, 2007 Village Board meeting, the Board approved the committee’s celebration plans.

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In addition to developing an anniversary logo and hosting an early June, 2007 anniversary celebration reception, the Committee's plans included:

- An *Excellence in Professional Government Management* scholarship awarded annually to a Skokie resident attending Oakton Community College who aspires to a career in local government.
- A video, titled "1957: Vote Modern, Vote Manager", capturing histories of individuals involved in the campaign to change the form of government as well as people who have been involved since the implementation.
- A *NewSkokie* Education Campaign highlighting the Village's professional management team, their credentials and various areas of responsibility.

*Establishing the Council-Manager form of government in Skokie gave the community a strong base from which to grow and prosper over the past 50 years. Skokie residents continue to enjoy excellent municipal services and a community rich in the arts, academics and recreational opportunities. All of these areas have come about through the foresight of a small group of Skokie residents who, in 1957, had a vision of Skokie as a thriving, professionally managed community and worked hard to establish the Council-Manager form of government in Skokie.*



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# *The Village of Skokie*

*Celebrating the Council/Manager  
form of government since 1957*

## **Mayor**

*George Van Dusen*

## **Clerk**

*Marlene Williams*

## **Trustees**

*Michele L. Bromberg*

*Michael A. Gelder*

*Frank G. McCabe*

*Donald P. Perille*

*Randall E. Roberts*

*Edie Sue Sutker*

## **Manager**

*Albert J. Rigoni*

## **Counsel**

*J. Patrick Hanley*

[www.skokie.org](http://www.skokie.org)

*Produced by Village of Skokie, 2007*