

SALC Report on Tucson Governance

Overview

Because the City of Tucson is the core of the metro region, Tucson city government is the primary instrument by which our region realizes its dreams and aspirations. Yet there is wide agreement Tucson has not fulfilled its exceptional potential and that it is not well-positioned for the future.

But why has a city with a number of highly capable top officials and engaged citizens, in a culturally rich and physically beautiful environment, failed to realize its potential and to position itself decisively for a prosperous future?

To answer that question and better understand how Tucson city government could be more effective, the Southern Arizona Leadership Council initiated a several months-long study, during which it interviewed the mayor, all six council members, the city manager, three former city managers, and several council aides. SALC also conducted research about other cities and consulted with nationally recognized experts on local government.

We learned that Tucson unintentionally has created a spider's web of charter provisions, policies and entrenched practices at the very top of city government. Consequently, authority, responsibility and accountability are diffused at the top of Tucson city government, severely limiting the ability of top city officials to fulfill their roles and meet their responsibilities, and making it difficult, if not impossible, for even the most talented of people to succeed.

To rectify this diffusion of authority, responsibility and accountability at the top of Tucson city government, SALC developed draft recommendations with the following goals:

- To encourage and enable the city council members to focus more on overall policy decisions – to operate at the “30,000-

foot-level” of policy, with more attention on critical city issues.

- To let the city manager manage. (Phoenix is a nationally regarded example of how best to structure the roles and responsibilities of a city manager.)
- To create a more effective partnership between the city council and the city’s professional staff.
- To promote business and community support for important governmental issues.

We want to emphasize that while SALC conducted this narrow and focused *preliminary* study, we have always believed that it is essential to any reform effort to build a coalition of an inclusive, diverse group of community partners. We are committed to building this coalition, and it is our intent that this coalition will take the lead and responsibility for modifying the recommendations and deciding how to implement them.

The recommendations focused on changes to the city charter, to city policies and to community practices. While all the proposed changes are important, the proposed charter changes carry an added sense of urgency: The City Council must decide by early July what charter changes, if any, it will refer to the November ballot.

Consequently, this document focuses solely on what SALC considers four key changes to the Tucson city charter. For those wanting to know more about the other recommended changes, the full report can be viewed at www.salc.org

We are optimistic and confident that the engagement of the community, working closely with our city officials, will help to produce more effective and more efficient city leadership, unify our community, and provide our region with a healthy economy and a healthy environment.

Key Suggested City Charter Changes

Type of Change	Recommendation	Reasons for Recommendation
Charter	<p>1. Make tightly focused revisions to the charter and civil service system to allow the city manager to build a strong administrative team.</p>	<p>The city manager is responsible for implementing the council's vision, but the city manager currently lacks the authority to build an administrative team to fulfill that responsibility. For instance, the city manager has no role in the appointment of the city attorney and the city clerk, and while the manager appoints the police and fire chiefs with the consent of the mayor and council, only the city council can fire them. Important, too, other key department heads and their subordinates are protected by the civil service system. These provisions undermine the city manager's ability to build a cohesive administrative capacity that can support council priorities.</p> <p>Possible action:</p> <p>Change the charter and civil service rules to allow the city manager to hire and fire all department heads and to allow department heads to hire and fire their immediate subordinates, such as deputy or assistant directors. The mayor and council can ensure the manager uses this authority appropriately.</p>
Charter	<p>2. Make the City of Tucson mayor and city council positions full-time jobs</p>	<p>With the growth of the city, the demands on top officials have increased sharply. City Council members represent many more residents today in 2010 and deal with vastly more complex issues than the Tucson city charter ever envisioned when it was written in 1929.</p> <p>Consequently, it is unrealistic to continue to treat the jobs of mayor and council members as being part-time. Since the mayor and city council members already feel obligated to spend full-time on their jobs, the city charter needs to acknowledge this change, and their salaries need to be increased to reflect the demands of the jobs. The current annual salaries for the mayor (\$42,000) and the city council members (\$24,000) are a burden to the existing office holders and severely limit the number of people who are willing to run for the offices.</p> <p>Possible action:</p> <p>Index mayor and council salaries to the economy or to the salaries of other office holders whose salaries are set in an objective manner. One option: Index their salaries to the Pima County Board of Supervisors, whose salaries are set by state law.</p>

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Charter	3. Provide for increasing the number of wards as population increases.	<p>When the city charter was adopted in 1929 and divided Tucson into six wards, the city had about 30,000 residents. The city now has more than half a million – an 18-fold increase. Yet the number of wards has never changed. Expanding the number of wards would allow council members to better represent their constituents. Additionally, it is widely believed that efforts to annex areas such as the Foothills and Casas Adobes will not succeed unless these areas have their own representation on the city council.</p> <p>Possible action:</p> <p>Change the city charter to allow for the creation of new wards when the number of residents in the current wards exceeds a certain number.</p>
Charter	4. Give the mayor parity with city council members	<p>Good city government requires a mayor who can lead by virtue of his position as the city’s CEO and who can participate fully in policy decisions. However, the city charter gives the mayor even less authority than an individual council member. For instance, the mayor participates in the appointment of the city manager, city attorney, city clerk, finance director, police chief, fire chief and city magistrates. Yet the charter denies the mayor a vote in the firings of the people in any of these positions. Significant, too, the mayor does not count toward meeting quorum requirements.</p> <p>Possible action:</p> <p>Change the charter to give the mayor an equal vote with council members, and allow the mayor to count toward meeting quorum requirements.</p>