

The following is a summary of a paper authored by John Mercer, Sarasota resident, who submitted it November 14, 2021 as a memorandum to the Charter Review Committee. It is helpful analysis of this timely issue. CityPAC is posting it with his permission. The title of the paper has been changed from the original with permission of the author.

Challenges of the Strong Mayor Form of Government

Sarasota is currently governed by the "council-manager" system of government which was created as a reform in response to corruption and mismanagement. The commission selects a mayor from among the five commissioners and hires a city manager to carry out the commission's directives and run day-to-day operations of the city. The mayoral role is ceremonial and rotates yearly among the five commissioners.

The CRC is leaning toward a recommendation to change our governance structure to an elected mayor with a four-year term. The traditional elected mayor form of government does not have a professional city manager, but a lower-paid administrative assistant to the mayor.

A major advantage of our current form of government is that with a vote on the commission, the mayor is subject to Florida's Sunshine Law. Another important advantage is the ability to attract applicants from a wide talent pool with real experience in municipal management and a track record for running professional organizations. Sarasota's current City Manager is a good example.

Perhaps the biggest concern with an elected mayor is the political incentive for prioritizing short term results and the next election. Regardless of whether Sarasota retains its current form of government or changes to the elected mayor model, our Charter should be amended with language to provide standards of conduct and a process for dealing with misconduct or abuse of power. And if we change to the elected mayor form, we should make it a hybrid form to retain a professional city manager and to subject our mayor to the Florida Sunshine Law.

Once the CRC completes its report of recommendations, those recommendations go the Commission for vote. The recommendations approved by the Commission then go on the ballot in November.