SUMMARY

CHARACTERISTICS OF FORMS OF GOVERNMENT DESCRIBED IN MASSACHUSETTS LAW

CITY FORMS:

Mayor - Council

- Population must be 12,000 or more
- Mayor serves as chief executive
- Council usually contains members elected at-large and members from districts
- Size of council determined locally within state parameters (size of wards/precincts); must be an odd number of members.
- Council in continuous session (not called by warrant as town meeting)
- Term for mayor and council usually 2 years; several communities have 4-year terms for mayor. Winthrop and Barnstable have 4-year term for councilors.
- School committee elected (usually at large, a few by district) Mayor usually serves on school committee

Council-Manager

- Population must be 12,000 or more
- Council appoints manager to serve as chief executive
- Council serves as policy-making body.
- Council may elect one of its own members to serve as "mayor" or "council president." May be variations to this practice. For example, voters elect the "council president" directly in Watertown and Winthrop, and, in Worcester, the candidate receiving the highest vote total among the at-large council candidates serves as mayor. Duties of this position are usually ceremonial, or based on local protocol or tradition.
- Size of council determined locally within state parameters; must be an odd number of members
- Council in continuous session (not called by warrant as town meeting)
- School committee continues to be elected.

NOTES: (1) Mayor and council in mayor - council form MUST be elected. (2) School committee must be elected. (3) Most councils in Massachusetts contain a combination of at-large and district members, although several are composed of all at-large members -- Springfield, Franklin, North Adams, Cambridge, Lowell, Fall River, Haverhill, Taunton, and Medford. (4) Communities above 12,000 population may adopt a "city" form of government, either Mayor-Council or Council-Manager, and continue to refer to the municipality as a town.

TOWN FORMS:

Representative Town Meeting - Board of Selectmen

- Population requirement of 6,000 or more
- Town meeting representatives elected from precincts of the town. Size determined locally; most are in the range of 200-250 voters; 39 communities have representative town meeting.
- Representatives usually serve for a 3-year term, with 1/3 of the members elected yearly
- Board of Selectmen serves as chief executive; must be odd number of members, serving staggered terms.
- Board of Selectmen may appoint town manager/administrator -- the majority of RTM communities have a management position. Position found in all RTM home rule charters.
- Powers and duties of the manager/administrator determined by special act or charter .
- School committee continues to be elected.

Open Town Meeting - Board of Selectmen

- Only form of government available to towns below 6,000 population
- All registered voters may participate in town meeting.
- ***All other features as described above (representative town meeting) Most towns above10,000 population have manager/administrator position.***

NOTES: 1) Selectmen, school committee, and representative town meeting members MUST be elected. 2) There is no state statute defining the powers and duties of town managers or administrators. 3) State law requires representative legislative bodies (either a council or a representative town meeting), be elected. 4) With a home rule or special act charter, the clerk, treasurer, collector, planning board, board of health, board of library trustees, board of assessors, etc. may be either elected or appointed. Town accountant must be appointed.