

## Town Managers

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December 22, 2020 | 2020-R-0332

### Issue

What is a town manager and under what statutory authority may a municipality appoint one? Which Connecticut municipalities have a town manager?

### Summary

A town manager is a municipality's chief executive officer (CEO). In most municipal forms of government, the CEO (e.g., the mayor or first selectman) is elected. But town managers are hired by the municipality's legislative body (generally a town council or board of selectmen). The council-manager form of government is thought to professionalize the CEO position — most towns pay their managers a salary and require he or she have a Master of Public Administration — and minimize the role of partisan politics in the administration of the local government.

The responsibilities of a town manager, sometimes called a city manager or general manager, vary by town and the manner in which the role was created (i.e., by charter or by vote, as explained below). But generally, the town manager executes the legislative entity's policies, prepares a budget and presents it to the board of finance, and oversees the day-to-day management of town business. The town manager usually has the authority to appoint and remove department heads, as well.

According to the [International City/County Management Association](#) (ICMA), the council-manager form is the most popular structure of government in the United States among municipalities with populations of 2,500 or more. Of Connecticut's 169 towns, 33 have a town manager.

## Authority to Appoint a Town Manager as CEO

Municipalities are authorized to establish a town manager as CEO under two statutes: (1) [CGS § 7-193](#) (for towns with a home rule charter) and (2) [CGS § 7-98](#) (for towns with a board of finance). Although all Connecticut municipalities that have a town manager also have a town charter, some were granted the authority to establish this form through special acts of the Connecticut General Assembly prior to the Home Rule Act (Edward C. Sember, *An Introduction to Connecticut State and Local Government*, 95 (2003)). OLR Report [2005-R-0199](#) provides additional information on charter adoption and the Home Rule Act.

### *By Charter*

Under [CGS § 7-193](#), any municipality that adopts a home rule charter, or amends its existing one, must have a CEO. This law also specifies the allowable types of charter-established CEOs, and a town manager is among them (the others are first selectman, elected mayor, and chief administrative officer appointed by the mayor or board of selectmen). Most recently, Clinton (2018), Simsbury (2018), and Cromwell (2013) amended their charters to adopt this form of CEO.

In addition to a CEO, the law allows one of four types of legislative bodies: (1) board of selectmen, town council, or board of directors (or aldermen or burgesses, which generally apply to consolidated towns and cities and boroughs, respectively ([CGS § 1-1\(m\)](#)); (2) town meeting; (3) representative town meeting (RTM); or (4) a combination of RTM or town meeting and one of the other allowable forms. Towns that have a town manager may also have a ceremonial mayor who is also the presiding officer of the legislative body (unlike elected mayors, these mayors do not take on the role of CEO).

Under this law, the town manager has all the statutorily defined powers and duties of the CEO, as well as those prescribed by the town's charter. In a number of towns, charter provisions establish the procedures to appoint or terminate the manager. For example, some require a super-majority of the

### *Legislative Bodies in Charter Towns*

*Although municipalities with home rule charters may amend them to modify certain attributes of their legislative bodies, those bodies are generally as follows:*

- **Boards of Selectmen and Town Councils** are composed of elected members who serve as the municipality's primary legislative body and vote on local policy matters. In towns that also have a town meeting or RTM, certain matters, like the budget, are often approved by those bodies instead.
- **Town Meetings** are properly noticed public meetings to decide on local matters. All eligible voters (generally town residents over the age of 18 and nonresidents who own a certain amount of property in town), may directly vote on municipal issues, such as the budget, at a town meeting.
- **Representative Town Meetings** are a hybrid of a town meeting and town council; members are elected citizens, generally by district, who vote in town meetings and represent the voters at-large.

council to terminate a manager and require a hearing on the termination if the manager requests one.

### ***By Vote at a Town Meeting***

[CGS §§ 7-98](#) et seq., establishes the procedure by which municipalities with a board of finance may establish a town manager as CEO. The municipality must first hold a properly noticed vote at an annual or special town meeting on whether to do so ([CGS § 7-100](#)). If approved, the board of selectmen selects a candidate from a list the board of finance submits to it.

Most of the board of selectmen's powers and duties are then conferred to the town manager, who may hold office for three years or until a successor is appointed ([CGS § 7-99](#)). Municipalities that appoint a town manager under this law may revert to their former town management by a vote at an annual or special town meeting ([CGS § 7-100](#)).

### **Towns with a Town Manager**

As Table 1 shows below, 33 Connecticut municipalities have town managers as their CEOs. Town managers are most common in mid-sized municipalities; the populations of town manager towns range from approximately 9,500 (Hebron) to 63,000 (West Hartford). Most larger municipalities (15 of the 20 largest) have elected mayors as their CEOs and all 20 of those with the smallest populations have first selectmen (Department of Public Health, [2019 Annual Town and County Population for Connecticut](#) and [2019 Connecticut State Register and Manual](#)).

With respect to town manager towns' legislative bodies:

- 29 have a town council, also called a city council or a board of directors (10 additionally have a town meeting and one has a representative town meeting)
- 4 have a board of selectmen (two additionally have a town meeting)

**Table 1: Town Manager Towns and Their Legislative Bodies and Estimated Populations**

Municipality	Charter	Legislative Body	Population
Avon	<a href="#">Yes</a>	town council	18,276
Berlin	<a href="#">Yes</a>	town council	20,436
Bloomfield	<a href="#">Yes</a>	town council, town meeting	21,211
Cheshire	<a href="#">Yes</a>	town council	28,937
Clinton	<a href="#">Yes</a>	town council, town meeting	12,925
Coventry	<a href="#">Yes</a>	town council, town meeting	12,407
Cromwell	<a href="#">Yes</a>	town council	13,839
East Hampton	<a href="#">Yes</a>	town council, town meeting	12,800
Enfield	<a href="#">Yes</a>	town council	43,659
Farmington	<a href="#">Yes</a>	town council, town meeting	25,497
Glastonbury	<a href="#">Yes</a>	town council	34,482
Granby	<a href="#">Yes</a>	board of selectmen	11,507
Groton	<a href="#">Yes</a>	town council, representative town meeting	38,436
Hebron	<a href="#">Yes</a>	board of selectmen, town meeting	9,504
Killingly	<a href="#">Yes</a>	town council, town meeting	17,336
Manchester	<a href="#">Yes</a>	town council (called a board of directors)	57,584
Mansfield	<a href="#">Yes</a>	town council, town meeting	25,487
Meriden	<a href="#">Yes</a>	town council (called a city council)	59,395
Newington	<a href="#">Yes</a>	town council	30,014
North Branford	<a href="#">Yes</a>	town council	14,146
Norwich	<a href="#">Yes</a>	town council (called a city council)	38,768
Plainville	<a href="#">Yes</a>	town council	17,534
Rocky Hill	<a href="#">Yes</a>	town council	20,115
Simsbury	<a href="#">Yes</a>	board of selectmen	25,395
South Windsor	<a href="#">Yes</a>	town council	26,162
Southington	<a href="#">Yes</a>	town council	43,834
Tolland	<a href="#">Yes</a>	town council	14,618
Watertown	<a href="#">Yes</a>	town council, town meeting	21,578
West Hartford	<a href="#">Yes</a>	town council	62,965
Wethersfield	<a href="#">Yes</a>	town council	26,008
Winchester	<a href="#">Yes</a>	board of selectmen, town meeting	10,604
Windham	<a href="#">Yes</a>	town council, town meeting	24,561
Windsor	<a href="#">Yes</a>	town council, town meeting	28,733

Sources: [2019 Connecticut State Register and Manual](#) and Department of Public Health, [2019 Annual Town and County Population for Connecticut](#)