

**CITY COUNCILS IN CONSOLIDATED CITY/COUNTY GOVERNMENTS
(2018 population estimates)**

Nashville TN (692,587): 35 districts, 5 at-large, 40 total; 19,788 citizens per district

- A proposal was made in 2005 to reduce the council to 15 districts and 5 at-large, 20 total; the proposal failed.
- A proposal was made in 2015 to reduce the council to 24 districts and 3 at large, 27 total; the proposal failed in a voter referendum by 37.7% to 62.3%

Denver CO (716,492): 11 districts, 2 at-large, 13 total; 65,136 citizens per district

Indianapolis IN (867,125): 25 districts; 34,685 citizens per district

- In 2013 the Indiana General Assembly removed the 4 at-large seats on the council (from a total of 29), beginning with the election of 2015, as part of a larger overhaul of the city/county government

Louisville KY (770,557): 26 districts; 29,637 citizens per district

San Francisco CA (883,305): 11 districts; 80,300 citizens per district

Lexington KY (323,780): 12 districts, 3 at-large, 15 total; 26,982 citizens per district

Athens GA (125,964): 10 districts, 1 mayor at-large, 11 total; 12,596 citizens per district

Philadelphia PA (1,584,138): 10 district, 7 at-large, 17 total; 158,413 citizens per district

Baton Rouge LA (221,599): 12 districts; 18,467 citizens per district

Honolulu HI (347,397): 9 districts; 38,600 citizens per district

Anchorage AK (291,538): 11 districts; 26,053 citizens per district

New Orleans LA (391,006): 5 districts, 2 at-large, 7 total; 78,201 citizens per district

Kansas City KA (152,958): 8 districts, 2 at-large, 1 mayor at-large, 11 total; 19,120 citizens per district

Chesapeake VA (242,634): 9 at-large (including mayor and vice-mayor)

Virginia Beach VA (450,189): 7 district, 3 at-large, 1 mayor, 11 total; 64,313 citizens per district

Newport News VA (178,626): 6 from 3 districts (2 per district) and 1 mayor, 7 total

Hampton VA (134,313): 6 at-large, 1 mayor, 7 total

Nashville Tennessean

Lower council size, raise term limits

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STORY HIGHLIGHTS

- **Amendment Two would reduce council from 40 to 27 members and give members a third term.**
- **Due to our draconian term limit law, the Metro Council faces unprecedented turnover.**
- **The cycle of the mayor proposes and the Council opposes remains unbroken.**

For the first time in more than 50 years, Nashville voters will have the opportunity Aug. 6 to revisit the circa-1963 political deal that created the third-largest city council in America.

The question of whether or not Nashville needs or wants such a large council is not a new one.

When Davidson County Judge Beverly Briley and Nashville Mayor Ben West first proposed consolidation of the city and county governments in 1958, the plan called for a 21-member council.

To appease the largely white, suburban members of the Davidson County Quarterly Court who helped defeat the 1958 plan, Briley successfully proposed a 40-member council in 1963.

Since then, several mayors, including Beverly Briley himself, have proposed a reduction. Each time, members of the Metro Council who feared change have blocked them.

That was the case when Councilmen Charlie Tygard, Steve Glover and I proposed a reduction in the council size as part of a bargain with the voters to relax the term limit law.

Though our charter amendment had the recommendation of the Mayor's Charter Revision Commission, this council, like others before it, refused to let the public vote on the matter.

We felt so strongly for the need for this change, we decided to circumvent the council and take the question directly to the people.

Over six months, we circulated a petition among voters and in May submitted nearly 15,000 signatures, more than double the number required for inclusion on the August ballot.

The need for this charter amendment has never been greater. Due to our draconian term limit law, the Metro Council faces unprecedented turnover.

A changing philosophy on land use has significantly reduced council's traditional role in zoning.

Technology has made constituent service easier and faster, often eliminating the role of the council member altogether. The council's unwieldy size makes work on long-range policy issues all but impossible.

It is the last of those reasons that brings urgency. There was no clearer demonstration of the absence of sincere and thoughtful policy work in the council than recent efforts regarding transportation.

I think most council members agreed the Amp was not the right project to address traffic and transportation challenges.

However, since the mayor withdrew that project, no council member has suggested an alternative or even initiated an effort to examine which options could be considered. Work on a problem that affects virtually every citizen of this city has come to a halt.

There are council members who would dispute the role of the council in policy matters.

They believe that the new mayor will solve the problem. They forget that several mayors have proposed similar projects with little success.

The cycle of the mayor proposes and the Council opposes remains unbroken.

Transportation issues are at a critical point for Nashville. If we do not address it soon in a comprehensive way in both the executive and legislative branches, nothing less than our economic viability is threatened.

The deference to the mayor on matters of policy like education, transportation and affordable housing is a natural result of the council's size.

For a council member to identify a problem and work toward a solution through education and raising awareness among his or her 39 other colleagues is virtually impossible.

The simple act of scheduling a meeting that accommodates the other commitments of a majority of council members is daunting. Little work is done on the tougher policy challenges that vex the modern American city.

The time for change is now. Vote "yes" on Amendment Two for a more efficient, more effective Metro Council.

Emily Evans represents District 23 on the Nashville-Davidson County Metro Council and is championing Amendment Two in the Aug. 6 municipal election. Her term ends this year.

THE RATIONALE FOR AT-LARGE COUNCIL MEMBERS

- 1) At-large seats counterbalance the natural tendency of district council members to be excessively parochial in their decision making. A council member elected by and naturally dedicated to representing the needs and desires of constituents in a specific geographic area will have a tendency to put the interests of that district above all others, including perhaps the best interests of the city as a whole. Decisions on appropriating funds may tend to be made on the basis of “bringing home the bacon” as a demonstration of effective representation of the district’s needs, regardless of the other more pressing needs elsewhere in the city. There may be a tendency to want to divide available funding in equal shares by district as the fairest mechanism for spreading resources, with *equality* of distribution outweighing *equitable* distribution of appropriations based on varying degrees of need.
- 2) At-large seats provide every citizen with multiple representatives, both their district council person and the at-large members. Every citizen is represented by 6 council members – their district council person and the 5 at-large members. This can be useful if a citizen holds political, fiscal or philosophical views that are diametrically opposed to those of their district council member to the point that they feel their council member cannot fairly represent their interests. That citizen has the opportunity to approach the at-large members to find someone more attuned to their beliefs who can provide representation. (This has happened in Jacksonville)
- 3) The at-large seats (as currently structured with residence area requirements) provide an opportunity for increased minority representation on the city council. Jacksonville has a substantial minority population and the existence of one at-large residence area traditionally centered around a predominantly minority population area increases the chances that minority voters citywide have an opportunity to coalesce behind a preferred candidate and elect a candidate of their choice to the city council. For instance, the at-large system might enable the Hispanic community citywide to someday elect an at-large representative when they otherwise lack a sufficient population concentration in any one district to make election of a Hispanic candidate likely at the district level.
- 4) Without the pressures to devote considerable time and attention to day-to-day problems and service requests in a district (potholes, drainage problems, unkempt properties, zoning controversies, etc.) the at-large council members theoretically have the time and freedom to tackle more “big picture” items and take a broad view of the needs of the whole city. They can study and champion issues that cross district boundaries and work for the good of the entire jurisdiction without feeling like they are short-changing district constituents who would be relying on them to be their single-minded advocate at City Hall.

THE RATIONALE AGAINST AT-LARGE COUNCIL MEMBERS

- 1) The citizens of Jacksonville would be better served if all council members were elected by districts. With a current estimated population of 950,000 (US Census Bureau 2018 estimate for Duval County), each of the 14 district council members represents an average of 67,857 constituents. If the 19 council members were all elected from districts, the average number of constituents represented would be reduced to 50,000, providing a more reasonable workload and therefore the opportunity for more attention and better representation to individual constituents.

- 2) Winning election to an at-large seat representing the entire city requires considerably more effort and resources than is required to run a district-level campaign. More advertising is required to develop name recognition across the city and the sort of door-to-door campaigning that might be sufficient to be competitive in a district race is impractical at a citywide level. Therefore at-large seats may tend to attract candidates with more personal wealth and/or fund-raising ability and more pre-established name recognition, thereby limiting the ability of candidates without those advantages to be competitive in citywide races and ultimately affecting the representativeness of the council of all parts of the community.
- 3) The at-large members do not vote substantially differently from the district members on the vast majority of issues on which votes are taken, so do not seem to provide a noticeably different perspective. Research on closely divided City Council votes over the years indicates that in most instances the at-large members are as evenly divided as the district members, and thus do not provide any broader or less parochial perspective.

AT-LARGE VERSUS DISTRICT COUNCIL MEMBER VOTES ON CLOSELY DIVIDED ISSUES

Ord. 2007-1240 – opposing any consideration of extension of Craig Airport runway
Approved 11-8 Yeas – 8 district, 3 at-large Nays – 6 district, 2 at-large

Ord. 2013-415 – Zoning Code amendment to allow poultry keeping in residential zoning (pilot program)
Approved 9-7 Yeas – 9 district, 0 at-large Nays – 3 district, 4 at-large

Ord. 2013-786 – waive noise ordinance with regard to events at Metropolitan Park
Approved 13-6 Yeas – 10 district, 3 at-large Nays – 4 district, 2 at-large

Res. 2014-177 – declaring the need for expanded use of the civil citation process for 1st time offenders
Approved 10-7 Yeas – 7 district, 3 at-large Nays – 4 district, 2 at-large

Ord. 2015-504 – budget amendment to appropriate \$337,000 from drainage system rehab account to Fire and Rescue Department to restore salaries for previously demoted officers
Approved 11-8 Yeas – 8 district, 3 at-large Nays – 6 district, 2 at-large

Ord. 2016-2 – motion to withdraw a Human Rights Ordinance prohibiting discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation, gender identity or gender expression
Failed 8-11 Yeas – 6 district, 2 at-large Nays – 8 district, 3 at-large

Ord. 2018-142 – motion to disband the Future of JEA Committee
Failed 9-10 Yeas – 7 district, 2 at-large Nays – 7 district, 3 at-large

Res. 2018-171 – supporting a policy of declaring City property and facilities as a “Hit-Free Zone”
Failed 9-9 Yeas – 5 district, 4 at-large Nays – 9 district, 0 at-large

2019-644 – Ordinance Code amendment requiring immediate closure of simulated gambling establishments
Approved 10-9 Yeas – 7 district, 3 at-large Nays – 7 district, 2 at-large

THE RATIONALE FOR TERM LIMITS FOR CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS

- 1) Citizens are better served by their elected officials when there is regular turnover on the City Council. Term limits bring fresh ideas and new perspectives to the council on a regular basis which is good for the public policy process and keeps elected officials from becoming complacent and unresponsive to constituent needs.
- 2) Term limits are necessary because of the tremendous power of incumbency. Incumbents have a huge advantage in name recognition and in financial support from lobbyists and interest groups with whom they have developed relationships. Those advantages make incumbents who choose to run for re-election extremely difficult to defeat and discourages potentially good candidates from even offering themselves for consideration.
- 3) Elective office should be seen as a civic duty to be performed for a few years by persons interested in upholding their responsibility to support a well-functioning civic society, who then return to their personal business, philanthropic, and other interests and let others take the reins for a time. It should not be seen as a long-term career path.
- 4) Term limits provide a mechanism for eventually removing passive, ineffective or troublesome council members who have established a power base that makes them practically unbeatable in the electoral process.
- 5) Term limits may help improve the chances of increasing minority representation on the council as members are termed out of districts that may have seen substantial demographic change since the incumbent was originally elected. That opens the door to new candidates who may be more representative of the current nature of the district.

THE RATIONALE AGAINST TERM LIMITS FOR CITY COUNCIL MEMBERS

- 1) Term limits are unnecessary because the voters already have the power to remove incumbents at the ballot box if they are displeased with their representation or see a better option.
- 2) Term limits violate the right of voters to elect the candidate of their choice after the incumbent's term limit is reached. If a majority of the voters are satisfied with the performance of their council member, they should not be arbitrarily deprived of that member's service.
- 3) Term limits hamper the ability of the legislative body to retain valuable experience and institutional knowledge that only comes with substantial time in office. They diminish the power of the council in relation to permanent city employees who may spend decades working for the government and may not be interested in taking direction from short-time politicians.
- 4) Term limits are unnecessary because the City Council already experiences substantial turnover from term to term. Even before term limits were imposed in the early 1990s, a vast majority of council members did not serve more than one or two terms before leaving office. Since term limits have been in effect, council seats have turned over on a regular basis due to incumbents choosing to run for other offices, choosing to leave elective office, or being defeated at the polls.

CITY COUNCIL TURNOVER BY TERMS

1967-71: 19 elected, 2 resigned, 1 removed by the Governor; 22 served

1971 election turnover – 8 seats

1971-75: 19 elected, 1 died in office; 20 served

1975 turnover – 7 seats

1975-79: 19 elected, 1 died in office, 1 resigned; 21 served

1979 turnover – 10 seats

1979-83: 19 elected, 1 died in office, 3 resigned; 23 served

1983 turnover: 9 seats

1983-87: 19 elected, 4 resigned; 23 served

1987 turnover: 7 seats

1987-91: 19 elected, 1 resigned, 1 temporarily suspended by the Governor but returned; 21 served

1991 turnover: 8 seats

Term limits become effective for council members taking office July 1, 1991

1991-95: 19 elected, 3 resigned; 22 served

1995 turnover: 6 seats

1995-99: 19 elected; 19 served

1999 turnover: 14 seats

1999-2003: 19 elected; 19 served

2003 turnover: 8 seats

2003-2007: 19 elected, 2 resigned; 21 served

2007 turnover: 9 seats

2007-2011: 19 elected, 1 ruled ineligible to serve (residency qualification), 3 resigned, 1 suspended by the Governor; 23 served

2011 turnover: 8 seats

2011-2015: 19 elected, 1 resigned (less than 6 months before next election, not replaced), 19 served

2015 turnover: 11 seats

2015-19: 19 elected, 1 resigned, 2 suspended by the Governor, 22 served

2019 turnover: 8 seats

2019-23: 19 elected

**COUNCIL MEMBERS SERVING MORE THAN 8 CONSECUTIVE YEARS
SINCE THE IMPLEMENTATION OF TERM LIMITS**

Jim Overton – elected in special election November 1992 to replace Tillie Fowler; re-elected in 1995 and 1999; served 10.5 years

Ginger Soud – elected in special election November 1994 to replace Matt Carlucci; re-elected in 1995 and 1999; served 8.5 years

Richard Clark – elected in special election March 2005 to replace Jerry Holland; re-elected in 2007 and 2011; served 10 years

Reggie Brown – elected in special election November 2008 to replace Mia Jones; re-elected in 2011 and 2015, suspended in 2018; served 9.5 years

John Crescimbeni – elected in special election November 2008 to replace Jay Jabour; re-elected in 2011 and 2015; served 10.5 years