



City of Seattle
Office of City Auditor

MEMORANDUM

Date: April 8, 2014

To: Tim Burgess, City Council President

From: David G. Jones, Seattle City Auditor

RE: Research on How Similar Cities Operate Their District Election Systems

Seattle City Council President Burgess asked our office to conduct research on six cities that elect some or all councilmembers by district. The following table shows the cities we were asked to contact and some of their characteristics.

City	State	Population (2010 Census)	Total Councilmembers	District Councilmembers	"At Large" Councilmembers	Population per District	Strong Mayor Form of Govt
Austin	TX	790,390	10	10	0	79,039	NO
Boston	MA	617,594	13	9	4	68,622	YES
Denver	CO	600,158	13	11	2	54,560	YES
Jacksonville	FL	821,784	19	14	5	58,699	YES
Oakland	CA	390,724	8	7	1	55,818	YES
San Francisco	CA	805,235	11	11	0	73,203	YES
Seattle	WA	608,660	9	7	2	86,951	YES

We contacted each city and asked them 16 questions that were developed by the interdepartmental team for district elections. We received written responses from five city council offices and one executive office (Austin City Manager's Office). We also obtained helpful information from the audit offices of two of the cities (i.e., Austin, Oakland).

Below is a narrative summary of the key points we learned about these cities, followed by a table comparing the responses each city provided to the 16 questions.

Narrative Summary of Key Findings from the Six Cities We Contacted

1. **Budgets are not organized by district.** None of the cities we contacted organized their budgets by district.
2. **Demographics are tracked by district for redistricting purposes every 10 years.** Half of the cities track demographics specifically by district.
3. **Councilmembers have one office funded by city funds¹.** In Boston, some councilmembers use campaign funds to maintain a district office in addition to their city-funded downtown office.
4. **Constituent Services.** For the most part each councilmember office handles its own constituent services. All six cities have either a 311 system or some other single point of contact for services. The City Council may want to consider whether it should procure a case management software system that can be used by all council offices.
5. **City council communications with constituents.** All the cities reported multiple communication methods including web pages, e-newsletters, direct mail, public hearings, and town hall meetings.
6. **At-large councilmember duties.** None of the cities have any official differentiation of duties between district and at-large councilmembers.
7. **Council president.** None of the cities require the council president to be from an at-large position.
8. **Voting restrictions.** Each city reported that the only limit on councilmember voting was compliance with the ethics code: councilmembers (and all employees) must not have a personal financial interest in any action taken. See links in table below for more information.
9. **Boards/Commissions representative of districts.** Four of the six cities do not require equal district representation for citizen-led boards or commissions.
10. **No executive functions or executive staff organized by district.** None of the cities reported any executive staff or functions divided by or specific to districts.
11. **Legislative staff directing executive staff.** Oakland and San Francisco explicitly prohibit this. Other cities reported informal influence of councilmembers or legislative staff on executive staff.
12. **Council Committees.** In all six cities, committees are structured by issue area, not geography.
13. **Legislative aides per councilmember.** Number of aides varied from 1 to 3 per councilmember. Most reported equal budgets to be spent at the discretion of the councilmember, which could result in variable staff sizes depending on salary and hours worked.
14. **Council Central Policy staff.** Four of the six cities have some form of central policy staff that works for the city council as a whole. None of the city councils with central policy staff assigns them by district. One of the city councils assigns by subject matter, one by committee, one through a central coordinator, and San Francisco (who contracts for the service for \$2 million a year) uses a formal motion of the board to request analysis. Compared to the current ratio of 17 central staff to 9 councilmembers in Seattle (1.88), the other cities have the following ratios: Boston – .85, Denver – .46, Jacksonville – .21, Austin – 0, Oakland – 0.
- 15-16. **Challenges and ideas for improvement.** Jacksonville commented on this question, saying there is an ongoing challenge of distributing resources equitably, taking need into account, vs. providing each district with equal funding. Austin and Denver mentioned that the redistricting process can be difficult.

¹ One Oakland councilmember has an additional office using an “insignificant” amount of city funds.

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Summary Table

		Austin, TX	Boston, MA	Denver, CO	Jacksonville, FL	Oakland, CA	San Francisco, CA
1.	Budget: Is the proposed and/or adopted city budget (capital and/or operating) organized according to election district?	No.	No.	No.	No. Capital projects are notated by district, but funds are not allocated based on districts.	No.	No.
2.	Demographics: Are there any demographics that are tracked by election district?	No. Some was done as part of creating the districts.	Yes. http://www.cityofboston.gov/images_documents/Redistricting_tcm3-10195.pdf http://www.cityofboston.gov/images_documents/Comparison_data_tcm3-10197.pdf	Yes. By Denver Office of Information Technology http://www.denvergov.org/Portals/695/documents/COUNCIL_TOTS.pdf http://www.denvergov.org/citycouncil/DenverCityCouncil/AboutUs/tabid/436356/Default.aspx http://www.piton.org/census2010/	No, though the Planning and Development Department can roughly approximate districts using GIS and census data.	Yes. http://www2.oaklandnet.com/oakca1/groups/ceda/documents/report/oak041955.pdf http://www2.oaklandnet.com/Government/o/PBN/OurOrganization/PlanningZoning/CityCouncilRedistricting/index.htm http://www.oaklandvotes.org/socio-economic-district-remap-plans-for-oakland-city-council-and-the-oakland-school-board/	No. Councilmembers can request this type of analysis from the Office of Legislative Analysts, though the data does not exactly correspond to supervisorial district boundaries. http://www.sfbos.org/index.aspx?page=1224
3.	District Offices: Do any of the District Councilmembers have an additional office within their district? If so, where are they typically	Not implemented yet.	Some do, some don't. Commercial space Campaign funds, not city funds.	4 district councilmembers have offices in downtown central council office. 7 district councilmembers have offices in their districts.	District offices are prohibited by ordinance.	As a general rule no. One councilmember (councilmember Desley Brooks) has an office in the district costing "so little it is insignificant. It's	No.

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	<p>located (rent commercial space or in city-funded facilities such as recreation or service centers?)</p> <p>How are they funded?</p> <p>Do Councilmembers have regularly scheduled "office hours"?</p> <p>Is the office staffed with someone (e.g., an administrative staffer) during regular business hours to assist drop-ins?</p>		<p>Some do, some don't.</p> <p>City Hall offices have admin staff during regular business hours.</p>	<p>2 At large councilmembers have offices in downtown central council office. Only one office per councilmember.</p> <p>Trying to locate them in city facilities; otherwise it is leased commercial space.</p> <p>Part of each member's annual budget (all city funding) is designated for rent.</p> <p>Some have office hours.</p> <p>Yes. Each member has at least one aide.</p>		<p>out of the generosity of someone in the district. It is not a market rate rent. But the money comes out of the district budget."</p> <p>Varies by councilmember. At least one advertises regular office hours at 4 cafés in the district, once each month at each café. Another has monthly meetings at various locations in the community. Another holds posts regular office hours at their office.</p>	
4.	<p>Constituent Services: Who handles constituent services?</p> <p>Does the City have a single customer service phone number for citizens to call?</p> <p>Does the City Council have its own casework management software?</p>	<p>Handled by individual Council office.</p> <p>City has 311 system.</p> <p>Yes. City has casework management software shared among departments and</p>	<p>Generally the individual councilors' offices have designated staff that handles constituent services. Some offices have a point person for a given area of their district or a designated staff person depending upon</p>	<p>A lot of what the council members' aides do is this. However the work load on that has decreased since we got Denver 3-1-1.</p> <p>Citywide Customer Service: 3-1-1; online, by mobile app, by phone.</p>	<p>Most calls go to administration's citizen help line, then move on to their councilmember when the administrative response is not to their satisfaction.</p> <p>Jacksonville has a</p>	<p>Council aides handle constituent services.</p> <p>Citywide Customer Service: 510-444-CITY; online, by phone, by email, by mobile app. Due to budget cuts the City no longer logs calls.</p>	<p>Each Supervisor's office responds to constituents in its district.</p> <p>3-1-1 Customer Service</p> <p>No.</p> <p>No.</p>

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	Is it shared or integrated with any casework software used by the Executive departments?	executive staff in the City Manager's Office.	<p>topic.</p> <p>Mayor's 24 Hour Constituent Services; online, by phone, mobile app, mobile city services truck, twitter, in person (City Hall).</p> <p>No. Mayor's Office maintains a central tracking system when executive departments are involved.</p> <p>No.</p>	<p>This is handled by the Call Center, under Technology Services.</p> <p>No. They each have their own systems for tracking the constituent cases.</p> <p>No, they each have their own, but they can log into the 3-1-1 data to monitor cases.</p>	<p>centralized call center (904-630-city) that answers citizen calls and refers them to the proper department for tracking and action. Citizens can also use the city website.</p> <p>No. All issues of this type are integrated into one system for tracking purposes. Council Staff has access to log issue into the system for Administrative support to address the problem. Council does not have a separate system.</p> <p>No.</p>	No, council does not have its own case management software.	
5.	Constituent Communications: How are key projects or proposed city laws communicated to citizens in each election district?	Not implemented yet.	The executive departments notify the councilors' offices when proposing development activities in their districts. Also, all Council meetings and hearings are publicly noticed and recorded. Individual council offices	Multiple methods. Most of them have a monthly E-newsletter; some distribute hard copy newsletters. Most of them use all kinds of social media.	Multiple methods: citywide press release, direct mail to residents within 350 feet of a project, town meetings, public hearings, newspaper ads, meetings are on line & streamed, and communications to	Multiple methods. Email distribution, social media, community meetings, electronic newsletters, neighborhood groups, etc.	Each supervisor has a webpage on the Board of Supervisors website.

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			also do press releases if a particular subject matter is of interest to them.		neighborhood associations and community groups.		
6.	At Large Duties: Do the At Large Councilmembers have different duties from the District Councilmembers, such as intergovernmental relations?	Not implemented yet.	No.	No, though the At-large members do tend to be the ones who represent Council on boards/commissions beyond the local level.	No.	No.	N/A; no at-large councilmembers.
7.	Council President: Must the Council President be from an At Large position?	N/A. The Mayor is elected at large and is a member of the City Council. Austin has a City Manager form of government.	No.	No.	No.	No.	N/A; no council president.
8.	Voting for their Districts: Is there an ethics code and/or law that limit District Councilmembers from voting on matters in which they have a financial interest? If so, how does the law deal with matters that affect the elected official and his/her constituents, such as a major new development proposed for the district?	Yes. Applies to all councilmembers. Austin City Code, Chapter 2-7-63 Prohibition on Conflict of Interest. http://www.amlegal.com/nxt/gateway.dll/Texas/austin/thecodeofthecityofaustintexas?f=templates\$fn=default.htm\$3.0\$vid=amlegal:austin_tx\$anc	Yes. Applies to all councilmembers. Massachusetts State Ethics Law, 268A:19 http://www.mass.gov/ethics/laws-and-regulations-conflict-of-interest-law.html	Yes. Applies to all councilmembers. Denver Code of Ethics, Sec. 2-61. Conflict of interest while employed. http://www.denvergov.org/Portals/5/documents/C ode-2012Changes-FINAL.pdf	Yes. Applies to all councilmembers. Rules of the Council, 4.602 http://www.coj.net/city-council/docs/councilrules/rules-of-council.aspx	Yes. There is a conflict of interest policy. Public ethics site: http://www2.oaklandnet.com/Government/o/CityAdministration/d/PublicEthics/o/CityStaffandOfficials/index.htm	Yes. California Political Reform Act; Section 87105: Manner of Disqualification http://www.fppc.ca.gov/index.php?id=51
9.	Boards and Commissions: Are any citizen boards or	Not yet implemented.	No.	No.	Only one: the council on elder affairs	No. As a practical matter, councilmembers are	Yes, there are some but it is not typical.

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	<p>commissions required to have residents from each election district?</p> <p>Are there special citizen-led commissions or councils that advise the city government or Councilmembers on district-based issues or recommendations on how to allocate resources?</p>		There are neighborhood groups that advise the Boston Redevelopment Authority on development and zoning issues in their respective neighborhoods.	Not specific to council districts, although there are several committees/task forces/ etc. established to advise the city government on various issues/activities. There are also Registered Neighborhood Organizations (Ron's), some more active than others, and Council members use those groups as sounding boards about issues.	Otherwise there are no council district-specific advisory bodies.	<p>permitted to appoint members and usually appoint members from their districts.</p> <p>No.</p> <p>http://www2.oaklandnet.com/Government/o/Mayor/OurPartners/BoardsandCommissions/index.htm</p>	No.
10.	<p>Executive Functions: Are any executive department or other functions divided geographically to match the election districts?</p> <p>Do any of the executive departments have staff dedicated to resolving problems according to each of the election districts?</p>	Not yet implemented.	<p>No. The Department of Neighborhood Services facilitates citizen input and participation through service requests, neighborhood meetings organized through neighborhood coordinators.</p> <p>No.</p>	<p>No.</p> <p>No.</p>	<p>No.</p> <p>No.</p>	<p>No.</p> <p>No.</p>	<p>No.</p> <p>Unknown.</p>
11.	<p>Legislative Staff Directing Executive Staff: Is there a process by which Councilmembers and/or</p>	No. Legislative staff, or rather Council staff, cannot direct Executive	Yes. The Administration (Mayor's Office) maintains a central tracking system	No. Nothing official beyond the annual budget process and consultations	No. Informally, councilmembers or their staff may call the mayor's	No. The administration is working on how to create a clearer process for	No. Refer to Good Government Guide, Part I, Section VIII, pages 25ff:

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	their staffs can request executive department employees to work on resolving neighborhood-based problems?	staff to do anything. Council can direct the City Manager to take action, but only by resolution.	when contacted by an individual councilor's office and executive departments are involved. The individual councilor's office will work with the relevant executive department regarding the matter. Also, under the Boston City Charter, Section 17F, the City Council may request specific information from the mayor on a municipal matter within its jurisdiction.	on annual work plans. Members can and do appeal to the Mayor to address certain district issues, and sometimes that will result in actions.	office or administrative department to report a problem, and may convene meetings with administrative personnel and citizens.	councilmembers and administrative staff to work together on district projects. The Oakland Charter, section 812, prohibits councilmembers from giving orders to "any subordinate of the City under the jurisdiction of the City Administrator...nor shall they attempt to coerce or influence the City Administrator or such other officers..."	http://www.sfcityattorney.org/Modules/ShowDocument.aspx?documentid=686 .
12.	Council Committees: Are any City Council Committees structured in a way to reflect the geographic election districts and/or to address issues geographically?	Not implemented yet.	No. The standing committees of the City Council are not structured in a way to reflect the geographic election districts.	No. Committees based on city departments, functions, issues, etc.	No response. Not apparent from web site http://www.coj.net/city-council/docs/committee-rosters.aspx	No. Committees are typically 3-4 councilmembers, all from different districts.	No. Council committees are typically 3-4 councilmembers, and they come from different election districts.
13.	Legislative Staff: In your current budget year, how many paid Legislative Aides does each Councilmember have or what is the personnel budget for each Council office?	3. Each Council office has two council aides that focus on policy issues, and one constituent services liaison. Each office budget is equal.	The number of legislative aides for each councilor's office depends upon the discretion of the individual councilor's office. Each councilor's office receives	1-2. The Council district budgets are equal and it is up to each member how that budget is allocated. Most of the members currently have 2 aides	1. Each councilmember is allowed one staff assistant up to a maximum budget that is the same for every office.	The budget indicates each council office gets funded for 2.12 staff positions. Some have several part time employees, some only full time employees.	3. Each Supervisor has three Legislative Assistants (Aides). N/A.

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	Do the district and at-large members have different numbers of aides or different personnel budget amounts?		\$206,250 dollars per year and the president's office receives \$247,500 dollars per year to pay such salaries according to the rules of the City Council.	although a couple only have 1 fulltime aide.			
14.	<p>Central Policy Staff: Does the City Council have a separate "central" policy staff that works for the Council as a whole?</p> <p>If so, what is their personnel budget and how many paid positions do they have?</p> <p>How is their work allocated?</p> <p>Does each election district have a central staff member assigned to it in order to track issues by district?</p>	No.	<p>Yes. The policy is driven by an individual councilor. Central staff works with that councilor and staff on the matter.</p> <p>The total annual salary for central staff collectively is \$818,002.00. There are 11 employees on Central Staff.</p> <p>The work is allocated by subject matter, committee assignments or according to a project basis.</p> <p>No.</p>	<p>Yes, Legislative Services has 3 Legislative Analysts, a Director, the Council Secretary, and receptionist/secretary/general helpmate.</p> <p>Six paid staff positions.</p> <p>Work allocated mainly by committee assignment. There are 6 standing committees and 2 "Special Issue Committees.</p> <p>No, work is divided among the Analysts by Committee assignment. Generally, the division of labor is that the Legislative Services staff does policy work and the</p>	<p>Yes.</p> <p>http://www.coj.net/city-council/docs/orgchart.aspx</p> <p>http://www.coj.net/city-council/staff---contact-information.aspx</p> <p>This organization chart shows a chief of research and 3 research assistants reporting to the Director/Council Secretary.</p> <p>Centralized budgeting is used for all council expenses which is the responsibility of the Director/Council Secretary.</p>	No.	<p>No. The Board of Supervisors Budget & Legislative Analyst provides independent fiscal & policy analyses, special studies and management audit reports on City departments and programs to the Board of Supervisors.</p> <p>The Board contracts for the services. Contract for FY 13-14: \$2 million.</p> <p>The Budget Analyst's responsibilities are defined as follows: http://www.sfbos.org/index.aspx?page=3703.</p>

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				district aides do constituent services work.	No, each district does not have a central staff member assigned to it to track issues by district.		
15.	<p>Challenges: Are there any challenges that your city experiences as a result of the district structure, such as allocating resources in an equitable manner and/or addressing citywide priorities?</p> <p>If so, have there been discussions or plans for how to address these issues?</p>	Not implemented yet.	<p>The district and at-large structure provides representation for all neighborhoods in the city.</p> <p>The City Council has formed a Special Committee on Charter Reform to examine the current governance structure in the City. Note this committee was not created in response to concerns about council districts.</p>	<p>Not really. It seems to work well. We have two At-Large positions that bring a city-wide view to the debates, and all areas of the city have a direct representative. Very democratic.</p> <p>The hardest issue is when we have to redistrict following each US Census!</p>	The fundamental challenge is competition for limited resources among districts when district conditions and needs vary widely. There is continual debate over the proper way to allocate resources—by equal, fixed amounts per district or according to demonstrable need.	No response.	No response.
16.	<p>Advice for Seattle: For how long has your city had geographic election districts for its city councilmembers?</p> <p>If it converted from at-large to districts within the past decade or so, is there a consensus in the city about</p>	Not implemented yet.	The City of Boston has operated with the nine district councilors and four at-large members since 1982.	Denver has had districts since before mid- 20 th Century. Following the 1970 Census, we added 2 to bring the total number of districts to its current 11. In Denver, there is no discussion about getting	No response.	No response.	In 1977, San Francisco went from at-large to district elections. In 1980, the voters amended the Charter to go back to at-large elections in November 1980. In November 1996, the

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	<p>what it should have done differently when it converted?</p> <p>What recommendations do you have for Seattle?</p>			<p>rid of the districts, but some people would like to do away with one or both of the At-Large positions. I disagree with that – we need the citywide perspective on Council, too.</p>			<p>voters approved a Charter amendment calling for district elections starting in November 2000.</p>