

# BUREAU OF MUNICIPAL RESEARCH

Monthly



Letter

137 WELLINGTON STREET WEST, TORONTO

December, 1946

Men and Women:

In our November Letter we promised to discuss two topics in our December Letter, viz:

The two year term for elected bodies

The taxation of crown companies and publicly owned utilities.

It is to be hoped that the natural preoccupations of the holiday season will not prevent electors from giving careful consideration to these important topics.

## The two year term for members of elected bodies

There are two types of the two year term:

- a. The so-called "straight" two year term which provides that members of the City Council and School Boards are elected at once and retire at once, those retiring being eligible for re-election.
- b. The "staggered" two year term, by which after the first year, half the members are elected each year for a two year term and half retire each year, those retiring being eligible for re-election.

Superficially, there may seem little to choose between these two methods; but in reality there are fundamental differences from the standpoints of popular control, freedom from special interests, assured continuity of membership, continuity of policy and net time which could be given by elected local public bodies to civic problems. As we are informed, the "straight" term only is to be submitted to the electorate, one is bound to wonder why the superior advantages of the "staggered" term over the "straight" were not recognized by Council, or at least, why the voters are not to be given a choice between the two types of two year term.

## The advantages of the "straight" two year over the one year term

Among these are:

- a. The reduced cost, the number of elections being reduced by half.



- b. Reduced liability to pressure, not in the general interest, of special groups for special favours, just prior to election. Such pressure could be exerted effectively only every second year, instead of every year.
- c. Slight increase in assured continuity of membership of Council.
- d. Slight increase in possibility of continuity of policy.
- e. Large increase of "net" time available to members of elected bodies for independent consideration of civic policies. If a new member were to give six months at the first of his or her term to "learning the ropes" and the last six to "mending fences" he or she would still have a year out of each term to devote entirely to independent public service. At present a new member is almost compelled to begin to think of re-election on the day after election and again if re-elected has to continue to think and plan the city's business one year at a time. This preoccupation, greatly intensified after the summer vacation, together with the necessity of "learning the ropes", leaves little unhurried and unworried time for independent public service.

The disadvantages of the "straight" two year term

Some of these are:

- a. The electorate would be brought into touch with civic matters through an election campaign only every other year. This, it would appear, is a serious defect. It might lead to decline in citizen interest and a decline in percentage of voting.

A council elected for a "straight" two year term might not subsequently meet with popular support as a result of changed public opinion and with a "straight" two year term the electors would not have an opportunity of expressing their opinion with Council's policy until the end of the two years.

- b. Not one of the benefits of the "straight" two year term over the one year term, with the exception of reduced cost, could not be obtained in greater measure by the "staggered" two year term. The "good" often prevails over or postpones, perhaps indefinitely, the "best". The electors may be deciding now the policy for twenty-five years.

The advantages of the "staggered" two year term

Among these are:

- a. It reduces the temptation to yield to pressure of special interests just before elections, as half or almost half of the membership of elected bodies do not come up for election for another year.



b. It increases the "assured" continuity of membership in elected bodies.

c. It greatly promotes continuity of policy instead of thinking and planning in one year periods.

d. It increases the "net" time which may be devoted to unhurried civic service. At all times there is much more apt to be a majority in favour of prompt and salutary action than under the present system or even the "straight" two year system.

e. It facilitates the preparation and publication before election of a tentative budget which can be made an issue or basis for debate in civic elections. This could make the electorate a real factor in control of the civic business by those who directly or indirectly bear the cost. Those who do not come up for election will sense the popular feeling.

Disadvantages of the two year "staggered" term

Its success is based on the care voters take in "getting out" candidates and choosing between candidates. The same thing is true of all other systems. The "staggered" term simply supplies a greater opportunity for democratic control.

That the Legislature of the Province in 1946 thought it worthwhile to incorporate both alternatives as permissive legislation in Chapter 60, Section 15, Subsection (1) and (2) is significant.

The new law reads as follows:

"(1) The council of a local municipality may by by-law passed with the assent of the electors extend the term of office of the members of the council to two years, and may with the like assent repeal such by-law.

(2) The by-law passed under subsection 1 may provide that of the members, other than the mayor, reeve and deputy reeve, the one-half, or in the case of an uneven number the majority, receiving the highest number of votes shall remain in office for a two year term and the remainder shall remain in office for a one-year term and thereafter all the members shall be elected for a two-year term."

Toronto has become a metropolitan city. City Planning - indeed Metropolitan Planning - has assumed a new importance for its future. Anyone who has watched the City's efforts - or lack of effort - in the last thirty years to plan its capital expenditures for improvements would admit that it needs a more vigorous and a more continuous policy.

In the opinion of the Bureau a "staggered" two year term for members of City Council would further both these ends.

Your attention is especially drawn to the attached memorandum showing the length of term - whether "staggered" or "straight, if longer than one year - in operation in 79 cities and larger towns in Canada and the Bureau's comment thereon.

The January Letter

In view of the space necessary for the discussion of the two year term, the discussion of the taxation of Crown Companies and Publicly Owned Utilities must be held over for the January, 1947 letter.

Yours very truly

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President

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Managing Director

December 4, 1946



MEMORANDUM

How Seventy-nine Canadian Cities

(With some Towns of over 10,000 population)

Elect Their Councils\*

Province and City	Length of Term	"Straight"	"Staggered"
<u>British Columbia</u>			
New Westminster ✓	2		X
Vancouver ✓	2		X
(Population 323,850)			
Victoria ✓	2		X
(Population 50,000)			
Three Cities	3 cities with 2 yr. terms		3 with "staggered" terms
<u>Alberta</u>			
Calgary ✓	2		X
(Population 97,241)			
Edmonton ✓	2		X
(Population 111,774)			
Lethbridge ✓	2		X
Medicine Hat ✓	2		X
Four Cities	4 cities with 2 yr. terms		4 with "staggered" terms
<u>Saskatchewan</u>			
Moose Jaw ✓	2		X
Regina ✓	2		X
(Population 56,520)			
Saskatoon	2		X
(Population 43,027)			
Prince Albert ✓	2		X
Four cities	4 cities with 2 yr. terms		4 with "staggered" terms
<u>Manitoba</u>			
St. Boniface ✓	2		X
Brandon ✓	2		X
Winnipeg ✓	2		X
(Population 231,203)			
Three cities	3 cities with 2 yr. terms		3 with "staggered" terms

\* Based on official information.

X indicates "staggered" term

XX indicates "straight" term

Place and City	Length of Term	"Straight"	"Staggered"
<u>Ontario</u>			
Belleville✓	2✓		X ✓
Brantford✓	1		X ✓
Chatham✓	2✓		X ✓
Cornwall✓	1 - 2✓ (1950)		X ✓
Fort William✓	2		X ✓
Galt✓	2✓		X ✓
Guelph✓	1		
Hamilton✓	1		
(Population 178,686)			
Kingston✓	2✓ (1947)	XX ✓	
Kitchener✓	1		
London✓	1		
(Population 82,633)			
Niagara Falls✓	2✓		X — ?
North Bay✓	1		
Oshawa✓	1		
Ottawa✓	2✓	XX ✓	**
(Population 163,403)			
Owen Sound✓	2✓		X ✓
Peterborough✓	2✓		X ✓
Port Arthur✓	1		
St. Catharines✓	1		
St. Thomas✓	1		
Sarnia✓	2 (1950)		
Sault Ste Marie✓	1		
Stratford✓	1		
Sudbury✓	1		
Toronto✓	1		
(Population 681,802)			
Welland✓	1		
Windsor✓	2✓		X ✓
(Population 117,532)			
Woodstock✓	1		
Twenty-eight Cities	18 have 1 yr. terms 10 have 2 yr. terms	8 of these have "staggered" terms	

Quebec

Cap de la Madeleine✓	2	(By ward)	X
Chicoutimi✓	2	XX	
Drummondville✓	2	XX	
Granby✓	2 (3)		X
Grand Mere	2	XX	

\*\* School Boards in Ottawa are elected for 4 yr. terms, staggered.  
 X indicates "staggered" term  
 XX indicates "straight" term



Province and City	Length of Term	"Straight"	"Staggered"	
<u>Quebec (cont'd)</u>				
Hull	2	XX		
Joliette	3		X	
Lachine	2 (1949)	XX		
Levis	3	XX		
Montreal	3	XX		
(Population 1,061,905)				
Outremont	3	XX		
Quebec	3	XX		
(Population 183,411)				
Riviere-du-Loup	3	XX		
St. Hyacinthe	2		X	
St. Jean	3		X	
			X	
Valleyfield	2			
Shawinigan Falls	2	XX		
Sherbrooke	3	XX		
(Population 40,134)				
Sorel	2	XX		
Thetford Mines	2	XX		
Three Rivers	2	XX		
(Population 46,000)				
Verdun	3	XX		
Westmount	2	XX		
Jonquiere	2	XX		
La Tuque	2		X	
Rouyn	2		X	
St. Jerome	2	(By wards)	X	
Victoriaville	2		X	
Twenty-eight Cities	0 have 1 yr. term 19 have 2 yr. terms 9 have 3 yr. terms		10 have "staggered" terms	

<u>New Brunswick</u>				
Fredericton	2			X
Moncton	1			
Saint John	2	XX		
(Population 55,000)				

Three Cities      2 have 2 yr. terms      1 has a  
                          1 has 1 yr. term      "staggered"  
    term

<u>Nova Scotia</u>				
Halifax	3			X
(Population 100,000)				

X indicates "staggered" term  
 XX indicates "straight" term

Province and City	Length of Term	"Straight"	"Staggered"
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Nova Scotia (cont'd)			
Sydney ✓	2		X
Glace Bay ✓	2		X
Dartmouth ✓	2		X
New Waterford ✓	2		X
Truro ✓	2		X
Six Cities and Towns	1 has 3 yr. term 5 have 2 yr. terms 0 have 1 yr. term		6 have "staggered" terms
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<u>Total</u>			
Seventy-nine Cities and large Towns	10 have 3 yr. terms 50 have 2 yr. terms 19 have 1 yr. terms		39 have "staggered" terms

X indicates "staggered" term  
XX indicates "straight" term

NOTE:- since compilation of this table, information as to Charlottetown, P.E.I., has become available. The two year "straight" term obtains in that City.

#### COMMENT

1. The Cities of the East and the West of Canada seem to be out of step with Toronto.
2. Of the 19 Cities in Canada which have the one year term, 18 are in Ontario.
3. About three-quarters of the Cities and large Towns listed have terms in council longer than one year.
4. Over half the Cities and Towns listed operate under some form of the "staggered" term.
5. Several Cities are to vote on the question of a longer term at the next civic election.