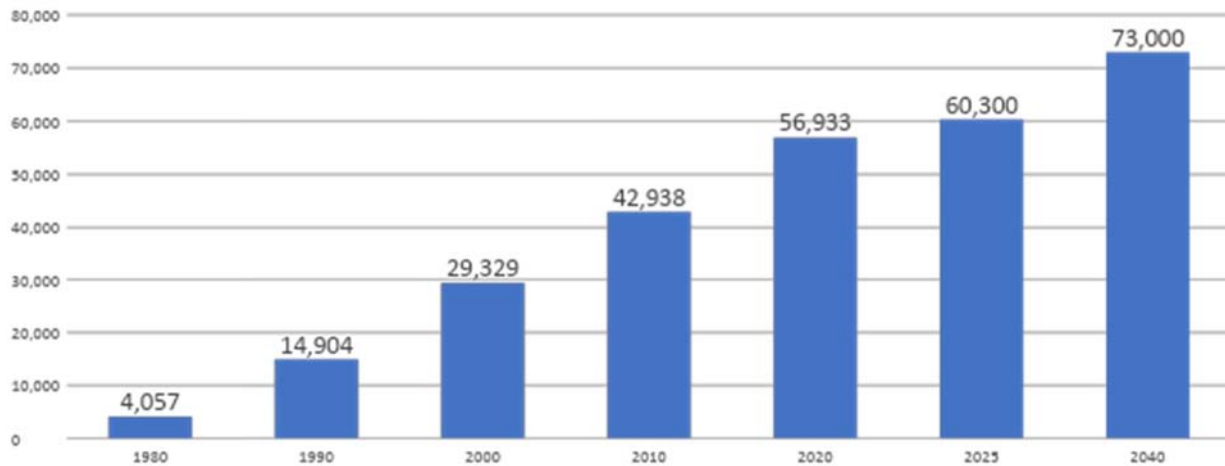


**Report to Madison City Government
By Madison City Government Transition Committee**

I. Background

Madison has been one of the fastest-growing cities in Alabama over the past two decades and has experienced tremendous growth over that time. As an Alabama top-10 city, Madison roughly doubled in size over the past twenty years and is projected to grow more than 25% in the next 20 years.



Madison was formally incorporated as a city in 1869. Since then, the data shows tremendous growth and transformation beginning in the late 1980s to today. In 1988, a transition to the current Mayor-Council form of government was made to better address the growth and development of the City.

- 1869—Formally incorporated as a City
- 1869-1988—Commission form of government
- 1988—Transition to Mayor-Council form of government
- 2015—Madison Governance Committee 2025 recommends change to Council-Manager form of government
- 2015-2020—Population growth continues, and Madison takes place in Big 10 Alabama cities
- 2021—Mayor convenes new Governance Transition Committee to take a fresh look at what form of government will serve Madison best into the future

The 2015 report of the Madison 2025 Governance Committee observed that rapid growth presented Madison with the opportunity to review the optimal form of municipal government that will benefit the citizens of Madison and allow the City to position itself for continued, sustainable growth. As a backdrop for its research, the committee observed that Madison is made up of highly educated citizens who expect excellent City services. However, the rapid growth of the City has put pressure on public services, and frequent turnover of elected officials has created some instability. They noted, for example, that prior to 2015, the City had 31 different Council members within only 7 election cycles, as well as 8 different Mayors within two terms.

A. 2021 Committee Development

On August 9, 2021, Mayor Paul Finley designated the Madison City Government Transition Committee and presented it to the City Council. The Committee held its first meeting on August 31, 2021. The committee is comprised of the following citizens:

Arthur Brackett
Roseanna Cox
Mike Oliver
Beth B. Richardson
James Ross
Cecilia Showalter
Megan Zingarelli (Staff Advisor)

II. Questions Presented

- A. Should Madison stagger its Council-Mayor elections and if so, when?
- B. Should Madison change its current form of government to a Council-Manager form of government and if so, why?

III. Methodology

A. Research Conducted and Findings Developed

The committee engaged in several months of research. This work included reviewing background information on the growth of the City and the 2015 report from the Madison Governance Committee. The committee also met and interviewed a variety of city leaders across

the state, as well as current Madison City Department Heads. The committee held several internal working meetings to develop questions, discuss issues, and prepare findings.

The committee met with the following city leaders from Madison and across Alabama to better understand the advantages and disadvantages of potential staggered elections and a Council-Manager form of government and to learn from the firsthand experience of these leaders:

1. Mountain Brook City Manager Sam Gaston (October 15, 2021)
2. Huntsville Mayor Tommy Battle (October 18, 2021)
3. Madison City - Former Council President Tommy Overcash (October 18, 2021)
4. Decatur City Attorney Herman Marks and Assistant City Attorney Chip Alexander (October 26, 2021)
5. Madison City - Various Department Heads (October 27, 2021)
6. Vestavia Hills City Manager Jeff Downes (November 1, 2021)
7. Auburn City Manager Megan McGowan (November 14, 2021)
8. Pelham City Manager Gretchen DiFante (December 6, 2021)
9. Madison City - Former City Council President, NLC President Cynthia McCollum (December 15, 2021)

IV. Conclusions and Recommendations

A. Recommendation: Madison should stagger its City Council elections so that they take place every two years, with roughly half of the Council plus Mayor elected at a time.

The committee, by majority vote, recommends that elections for City Council and Mayor be staggered (every two years). These elections would begin in 2025 and will require approval by the Alabama Legislature.

The primary driver for recommending staggered terms among the City Council and Mayor to every two years is the ensured continuity of experience on the City Council. This structure reduces the risk of a full Council turnover in one election. Moreover, momentum towards the strategic plans of the city continue even when elections for some are taking place. At the same time, staggered terms create a potential for fresh perspectives every two years.

The committee recognizes that staggering elections to every two years will increase the workload of the City Clerk's office and present additional costs to the city. The number of municipal elections would double, and the cost of each election can be expensive and entail the additional

task of hiring volunteers to staff the polls. However, despite these factors, the committee believes that the risk mitigation of the staggered-term structure for the good governance of the city far outweighs the additional cost.

B. Recommendation: Madison City should transition to a Council-Manager form of government as outlined by the Alabama Council-Manager Act.

The committee unanimously recommends that Madison change to a Council-Manager form of government. The committee further recommends following the procedures outlined in the Alabama Council-Manager Act, starting with a petition, then proceeding to a special election in which the citizens of Madison would vote on the change.

The recommended form of government places a credentialed city management professional in charge of daily operations of the city. That selection is made together by the City Council and Mayor. Consequently, the City Manager can be removed by a majority vote of the Mayor and Council. This structure ensures that the City Manager position will not become politicized and will work for the legislative branch of city government without bias or favor.

A Council-Manager form of government further provides continuity of city management even as elected officials change. In today's form of government, each new mayor can appoint a city administrator with no required experience or expectations that he or she work equally for each member of the City Council. Furthermore, a city can at any time elect a wildly popular Mayor who has no experience in public administration. The appointment of a professional City Manager ensures that the business of the city continues successfully even as new leadership and vision come on board.

The Council-Manager form of government ensures that policy-making and vision-casting resides with the officials elected by citizens, and the daily operations and administrative functions are carried out by a professional whose focus is to keep basic City services including trash collection, roadwork, mowing, inspections, and general maintenance running smoothly and on schedule. A CEO/COO analogy is a good one. With a rapidly growing city, today's form of government requires the Mayor to be directly involved with administrative and operations issues day in and day out. The new form of government provides the city with a professional "Chief Operating Officer" who can keep the city functions running efficiently, allowing the Mayor to focus on big-picture needs of the City. The City Manager can also help with overall city planning and monitor the city's adherence to a strategic growth plan set by the Mayor and Council, while ensuring efficient structure and function of various city departments. The presence of a professional City Manager also clarifies the reporting chain for city department heads and keeps politics out of the administration of the city.

In the Council-Manager form of government some changes to the Mayor's role will occur. It is the committee's view that these changes are advantageous. The Mayor and City Council will share legislative functions, while the Mayor will serve as President of the Council. The City Manager then will carry out the daily execution of policies set by the Mayor and Council.

The Mayor will be relieved from administrative and daily operations duties and can focus on strategic endeavors and carrying out the objectives of the citizens who elected him or her. Other aspects of the Mayor's new role will include:

- Retaining Chief Executive Officer capacity in city government
- Developing and executing a strategic vision of the city
- Serving as City Council President and at-large voting member
- Representing the city at key events
- Working with city partners, including other municipalities
- Engaging the public on a regular basis
- Promoting city activities and representing the city on municipal/community boards

The committee recognizes that the City Council could simply appoint a City Manager under the current form of government, but it does not believe that doing so would be advantageous for the City. The law that allows for appointment of a City Manager by ordinance provides that an appointed City Manager essentially has the same duties as the Mayor. Therefore, if the City Council appointed a City Manager that did not have the same priorities as the Mayor, a potential for conflict would be ever present. In addition, having two leaders with nearly identical roles could cause confusion in the City's leadership structure because it may be unclear whether Department Heads and Chiefs report directly to the Mayor or to the City Manager. In addition, following the procedures of the Council-Manager Act provided in state law will assure that the citizens of Madison are able to make the ultimate decision on whether to transition to the Council-Manager form of government.

V. Next Steps

- Recommend educating the public on the Council-Manager form of government and the path forward, including clarifying the roles of Mayor, Council, and City Manager
- Recommend following the procedures of the Alabama Council-Manager Act, which requires a petition from citizens and special election for governance transition
- Recommend a plan to pursue staggered term legislation
- Recommend defining a process to select and hire a qualified City Manager
- Recommend developing a plan for redistricting to six districts, with Mayor elected at large
- Recommend passing recommended steps to the Mayor and City Council so they can consider and/or start work on implementation if approved.