



**Citizen Advisory Committee on Governance**  
**Thursday, September 3, 2020**  
**4:00 – 5:30 p.m.**

**Committee Members:** Kristen Conner, Mimi Davis, Christy Long, Amy Peacock (Chair)  
Brandon Pierce, Cecy Ramirez, Janice Robinson, Eleanor Shell,  
Sam Smith Jr., Peter Smolowitz, and Liz Winer

**Guests:** Mayor Vi Lyles, Mayor Pro Tem Julie Eiselt, and Council  
Member Ed Driggs

**City Staff:** Patrick Baker, City Attorney; Lauren Livingston, Strategy and  
Budget; and Lauren Ruvalcaba, Strategy and Budget

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**Virtual Meeting Agenda**

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|---|-------------------------|
| 1. Call to Order/ Agenda Overview   | Committee Chair         |
| 2. City Council Historical Perspective Panel Discussion   | Mayor Lyles & Committee |
| 3. Review and Discussion of Committee Charges and Central Questions   | Committee               |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Mayor and City Council terms of office including the length of terms, as well as the method of implementation<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>i. Vote on term limits for two-year terms</li><li>ii. Vote on partisan versus nonpartisan elections</li></ul></li><li>• Mayor and City Council full or part-time positions and related compensation</li><li>• Discussion on Solicitation of Public Input</li></ul> |                         |
| 4. Updates and Questions  | Committee               |
| 5. Adjourn  |                         |
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Next Meeting September 17, 2020 at 4:00 p.m.</li></ul>  |                         |



**Citizen Advisory Committee on Governance  
Virtual Meeting Agenda  
Thursday, September 3, 2020  
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**Thursday, September 3, 2020 Agenda Packet  
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# **Executive Summary of Data Collection**

## Terms of Office and Methods of Election Research

In December 2019, Mayor Vi Lyles announced that an ad hoc committee, the Citizen Advisory Committee on Governance, would be formed to review the current structure of the Charlotte City Council and to make recommendations regarding the following:

- Elected officials' length of terms in office,
- Elected officials' full or part-time positions,
- Elected officials' related compensation,
- Updated policy guidelines and principles for City Council redistricting resulting from the 2020 Census, and
- Methods of implementation for proposed changes.

The Committee began regular meetings on June 25, 2020, and requested information concerning methods of election, compensation, and length of terms for cities comparable to Charlotte and for North Carolina jurisdictions. Main sources of data to develop this report included, (1) surveys of Charlotte's 20 peer cities, (2) surveys of U.S. Top 10 Council-Manager governments, (3) surveys of North Carolina cities, (4) data from the Institute of Government on all cities in North Carolina (looking at jurisdictions with populations over 50,000), (5) data from Mecklenburg County's Board of Elections, and (6) City of Charlotte historical records.

### Government and Methods of Election

The collected data indicated the following:

- The Council-Manager form of government is the most common form of government in North Carolina. All cities surveyed in North Carolina have the Council-Manager form of government, while 30 percent of Charlotte's peer cities have this form of government.
- Nonpartisan elections are the preferred election method for 90 percent of peer cities and 93.3 percent of the NC jurisdictions over 50,000.
- A combination of district and at large representatives on city councils is a prevalent form of representation in the peer cities (45 percent) and NC jurisdictions over 50,000 (60 percent). Many peer cities (55 percent) have only district representation.
- The size of the board tends to be 14 members for peer cities and eight in NC jurisdictions over 50,000. By state statute, a North Carolina governing board can be between three and 12 members.
- Most cities surveyed, 80 percent of the peer cities and 73.3% of the NC jurisdictions, have four-year terms.
- Cities are fairly split on staggered and non-staggered terms – 50 percent of peer cities and 50 percent of the NC cities have staggered terms.
- Fifty-five percent of the peer cities surveyed have some form of term limits. No NC jurisdictions have term limits. The NC General Assembly would have to pass special legislation to allow for term limits.

- Ten percent of peer cities surveyed have part-time mayors and 30 percent have part-time council members.
- All North Carolina jurisdictions over 50,000 have a part-time Mayor and Council.
- The average number of mayor and council support staff across peer cities is three for Mayor and 11 for City Council. Average support staff salary for Mayor was \$69,975, while average support staff salary for City Council was \$61,395.
- In North Carolina, elected officials are most often supported by the City Clerk's Office and the City Manager's Office.
- Overall Average Compensation:

City of Charlotte	
Mayor Total Compensation	\$45,096
City Council Total Compensation	\$33,915
Mecklenburg County	
Board Chair Total Compensation	\$56,431
Board Commissioners Total Compensation	\$48,563
North Carolina Cities and Counties	
Mayor Total Compensation	\$32,756
City Council Total Compensation	\$25,457
20 Peer Cities	
Mayor Total Compensation	\$130,879
City Council Total Compensation	\$59,750
Council-Manager Cities	
Mayor Total Compensation	\$78,717
City Council Total Compensation	\$48,336

In summary, according to the data collected, the profile of a "typical" city government and method of election would look like this:

	20 Benchmark Cities	North Carolina Municipalities
<b>Form of Government:</b>	Mayor - Council	Council-Manager
<b>Election Method:</b>	Some form of Nonpartisan	Nonpartisan Plurality
<b>Size of Council:</b>	14 members	Eight members
<b>Terms of Office:</b>	Four-years	Four-years
<b>Representation:</b>	District	District and At large
<b>Term Limits:</b>	Term limits	No term limits

## **Municipal Election Methods in North Carolina**

Four methods of election are available to cities in North Carolina:

- Partisan Elections
  - Candidates run for party nomination in primary elections.
  - Voters vote in only one-party primary.
  - Nominees of the parties appear on the ballot in the general election.
  - This is the current system used in Charlotte.
- Nonpartisan plurality elections
  - There is no primary election.
  - In the general election, candidates receiving the most votes win.
  - This is the most commonly used method of North Carolina cities.
- Nonpartisan primary/general elections
  - Candidates run in primary election.
  - Top two “vote-getters” for each seat, (or if there are several seats, twice as many candidates as seats) are nominated.
  - In the general election, top “vote-getters” win.
- Nonpartisan general/run off elections
  - There is no primary election.
  - All candidates appear on general election ballot.
  - Candidates receiving a majority of votes win.
  - If there is no candidate with a majority, then a runoff election is scheduled for the two highest “vote-getters”.

## **History of Local Elections in Mecklenburg County**

Nine times in the last 30 years voters in Charlotte/Mecklenburg have been asked to decide changes to local government for the city, county, and school board. No changes have been made, however, to Charlotte’s governing board since 1977. In 1974, the North Carolina Legislature changed the Mayor and City Council elections from nonpartisan to partisan. In 1977, in a petition-initiated referendum, the City Council changed from 7 at large members to 7 district and 4 at large members. In 2015, Mecklenburg County placed changing the Board of Commissioners length of terms from two years to four years on the ballot. The initiative was defeated, with a vote of 66 percent nays and 34 percent yeas.

# **Procedures for Modification of Form of Government and Election Methods**



## Procedures for Modification of Form of Government

Under NC G.S. 160A -101, the City Council is authorized to make a number of basic changes to the form of City government without any action or approval of the General Assembly.

1. The City Charter currently provides for two-year terms for the Mayor and City Council
2. State Law (G.S. 160A-101) authorizes the Council to change the length of terms
  - Mayoral term may not be less than two years nor more than four (does not have to be the same as Council)
  - Council terms may be two or four years, and need not be all the same length
  - Four-year Council terms may be concurrent or staggered
3. How to change
  - The General Assembly may amend the Charter by local act
  - The Council may amend by ordinance subject to approval by the voters at a referendum
  - The Council may amend by ordinance without a referendum – however, 5,000 signatures on a petition filed within 30 days forces a referendum
4. Processes for a change by Council
  - The Council adopts a resolution of intent and sets the date for a public hearing
  - The public hearing must be held at least 10 days after published notice and within 45 days of resolution
  - The Council must vote within 60 days of the public hearing but not before the next regular meeting
  - A notice of adoption of the ordinance must be published within 10 days after the adoption of the ordinance
  - If the ordinance is subject to a referendum, the referendum must be held at least 45 days after publication but not more than 90 days after the vote
  - If the ordinance is not subject to a referendum but a valid referendum petition is filed, the referendum must be at least 60 days but not more than 120 days after receipt of the petition
  - A referendum that is not held in conjunction with an otherwise scheduled primary or general election would cost approximately \$500,000.
5. Additional changes that may be made:
  - Number of members of the governing board – The size of Council can be between three and 12 members.
  - Composition of the governing board – Council may be composed according to one of five different ways described in the statute. Those include a Council composed of all members elected at large, all members residing in and elected from single member districts and other variations in district/at-large representation, nomination and/or election.
  - Elections – any of the following election methods can be used:
    - **Partisan** - Elections are partisan. Each political party holds a primary to nominate a candidate for each open position; in the subsequent election the person receiving the highest number of votes is elected.





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## Procedures for Modification of Form of Government Continued

- **Nonpartisan plurality** - Elections are nonpartisan, and the results are determined by plurality, with the person or persons receiving the highest number of votes elected to the open position or positions.
- **Nonpartisan primary and election** - Elections are nonpartisan. A primary is held to narrow the field to two persons for each position open; in the subsequent election the person receiving the highest number of votes is elected.
- **Nonpartisan election and runoff election** - Elections are nonpartisan. If the person receiving the most votes for a particular position does not have a majority of votes cast for that position, a run-off is held between the two top finishers.
- Selection of Mayor- The Mayor may be selected by all qualified voters for a term of two or four years, or the Mayor may be selected by Council from among its membership to serve at its pleasure. In the former method, the Mayor may be given the right to vote on all matters or limited to voting to break a tie; provided in no instance may the Mayor break a tie vote in which the mayor participated.

# **Length of Terms and Methods of Election in NC**



## *Length of Terms and Election Methods in NC*

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### **North Carolina Jurisdictions over 50,000**

#### **Mayor Terms**

Two-years: 9

Four-years: 7

#### **Board Terms**

Two-years: 5

Four-years: 3

Four-years (staggered): 8

#### **Election Method**

Majority: 3

Partisan: 2

Plurality: 7

Primary: 4

### **All North Carolina Jurisdictions**

#### **Mayor Terms**

Two-years: 287

Four-years: 251

Pleasure of Board: 14

#### **Board Terms**

Two-years: 148

Four-years: 42

Four-years (staggered): 351

Mix of staggered 2/4: 11

#### **Election Method**

Majority: 15

Partisan: 5

Plurality: 507

Primary: 25



**UNC SOG**

**Partisan vs.**

**Nonpartisan**

**Elections**

## **Nonpartisan vs. Partisan Elections**

North Carolina law permits cities, towns, and villages to use either partisan elections or any one of three versions of nonpartisan elections. In *partisan* elections, candidates run as nominees of specific political parties or as independents. Each political party selects its nominees in primary elections restricted to voters registered as affiliated with that political party. In *nonpartisan* elections, the candidates' party affiliation is not listed on the ballot and the political parties generally don't provide support for the candidates. This form of election emerged during the Progressive Era as a way to remove politics from city administration (Davidson and Fraga, 1988).

### **Possible effects of choosing either partisan or nonpartisan elections**

#### Election issues

Party labels can be a quick way for voters to identify candidates who share their policy preferences. For example, Schaffner, Streb, and Wright (2001) suggest that voters may not always be highly involved and informed and may therefore use party labels as an indicator of a candidate's policy preferences. They write that "Party labels, in this perspective, provide important cognitive information. They convey generally accurate policy information about candidates and their low cost and accessibility help voters to reach reasonable decisions (Aldrich 1995). It follows, then, that taking party labels away in nonpartisan elections and thereby raising the costs of information about candidates for voters, nonpartisan elections would make voting more difficult and thereby undermine the potential for popular control."

Some suggest, though, that the issues that divide political parties are irrelevant to municipal elections. This notion is suggested by the old saying that "There's not a Republican or Democratic way to fill a pot-hole."

As a related point, partisan elections sometimes inject national political issues into local races. Some suggest that nonpartisan elections are important to avoid having these national political issues play a role in local government elections. The main political parties, these people suggest, are primarily identified with these national issues.

#### Election fundraising

With partisan elections the parties may be involved in fundraising, which might ease the burden on individual candidates to solicit campaign contributions.

#### Voter turnout

Attachment to a political party may motivate people to vote. Schaffner, Streb, and Wright (2001) cite research that "...party identification is a, or even the central component of voter decision making. As an effective attachment, it motivates individuals to participate as a display of party support." Thus, nonpartisan elections may have lower turnout than partisan elections.

#### Election outcomes

Nonpartisan elections may give an edge to incumbent candidates. Schaffner, Streb and Wright (2001) explain: “Indeed, incumbency is the obvious and, in many cases, the only low cost cue available to voters in nonpartisan elections.”

Nonpartisan elections may help candidates who are members of whichever political party is the minority party because it reduces the stigma of belonging to or voting for the minority party (Welch and Bledsoe, 1986).

Research suggests that nonpartisan elections may favor Republicans. There are several reasons for this outcome:

1. Welch and Bledsoe (1986) cite research suggesting that while political parties do not support candidates during nonpartisan elections, other groups which generally favor Republicans (i.e. a Chamber of Commerce) may support candidates. Lascher (1991), however, cites a Democratic candidate who received support from an environmental group and Welch and Bledsoe (1986) suggest that community groups that tend to support Democratic candidates have also emerged.
2. Without party support, candidates may need to spend their own resources to create name recognition, and because Republican candidates tend to be wealthier, they may therefore benefit from nonpartisan elections. In addition, Welch and Bledsoe (1986) found that nonpartisan, at-large elections favor Republicans. This advantage is likely related to the increased cost of raising name awareness in an at-large election as compared to a district election.
3. If in fact nonpartisan elections have lower turnout, wealthier voters, who tend to vote Republican, are more likely to vote (Welch and Bledsoe, 1986). Lascher (1991), however, examined county supervisor elections in California and found that there was better turnout for supervisor elections than for the U.S. presidential elections in 1980 and 1984. It should be noted, though, that county supervisor elections in California are held at the same time as state and federal elections

#### Parties in nonpartisan elections

Welch and Bledsoe (1986) suggest that some cities that are legally nonpartisan are in reality very partisan, with political parties actively involved in campaigns. In addition, Davidson and Fraga (1988) highlight slating groups in four Texas cities and argue that these groups essentially function as de-facto political parties in nonpartisan elections.

#### Bibliography

Davidson, Chandler; and Fraga, Luis Ricardo. (1998). “Slating Groups as Parties in a Nonpartisan Setting” *The Western Political Quarterly*. 41(2):373-390.

Lascher, Edward L. Jr. (1991). “The Case of the Missing Democrats: Reexamining the ‘Republican Advantage’ in Nonpartisan Elections.” *The Western Political Quarterly*. 44 (3): 656-675.

Schaffner, Brian F.; Streb, Matthew; and Wright, Gerald. (2001). "Teams without Uniforms: The Nonpartisan Ballot in State and Local Elections." *Political Research Quarterly*. 54 (1): 7-30.

Welch, Susan; and Bledsoe, Timothy. (1986). "The Partisan Consequences of Nonpartisan Elections and the Changing Nature of Urban Politics" *American Journal of Political Science*. 30 (1): 128-139.

# **History of Local Elections in Charlotte and Meck. Co.**



### History of Local Elections in Charlotte/Mecklenburg County

YEAR	INITIATIVE
1974	NC Legislature changed Charlotte Mayor/City Council elections from nonpartisan to partisan
1975	Mayor and seven at-large member Council elected under partisan primary/general election
1977	Petition-initiated referendum to change seven at-large City Council seven district/four at-large -APPROVED
1977	City Council Elected under new seven district/four at-large plan
1981	Petition-initiated referendum to return to seven at-large member City Council - DEFEATED
1982	Referendum to change Board of County Commissioners from five at-large members to four district/three at-large members with district membs nominated in district primaries and elected in countywide voting - DEFEATED
1984	Plan to change Board of County Commissioners from five at-large members to four district/three at-large members with district membs nominated and elected in districts - APPROVED
1985	Plan to change Board of County Commissioners terms of office from two years to four years - DEFEATED
1986	Board of County Commissioners elected under new four district/three at-large plan
1992	Referendum to change Board of County Commissioners from four district/three at-large members to six district/three at-large members - APPROVED
1993	Referendum to change Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education for nine at-large members to six district/three at-large members with staggered four-year terms and providing the same districts for election as the Board of County Commissioners - APPROVED
1994	Board of County Commissioners elected under new six district/three at-large plan
1995	Charlotte-Mecklenburg Board of Education elected under new six district/three at-large plan with staggered four-year terms (at-large members initially elected for four years, district members initially elected for two years)
2002	Town of Cornelius Board of Commissioners four-year staggered terms - APPROVED (74 percent)
2005	Town of Cornelius Board of Commissioners two-year terms. APPROVED (60 percent)
2015	Mecklenburg County Board of Commissioner four-year terms - DEFEATED

# **Compensation Overview**

Citizen Advisory Committee on Governance  
Mayor, City Council Compensation  
September 3, 2020

**Background**

Current City of Charlotte Mayor and City Council compensation information:

- City of Charlotte

- Mayor

- Part-time

Total Compensation	
Current annual salary	\$27,196
Annual expense allowance	\$10,000
Annual auto allowance	\$4,800
Annual Technology allowance	\$3,100
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$45,096</b>

- Council

- Part-time

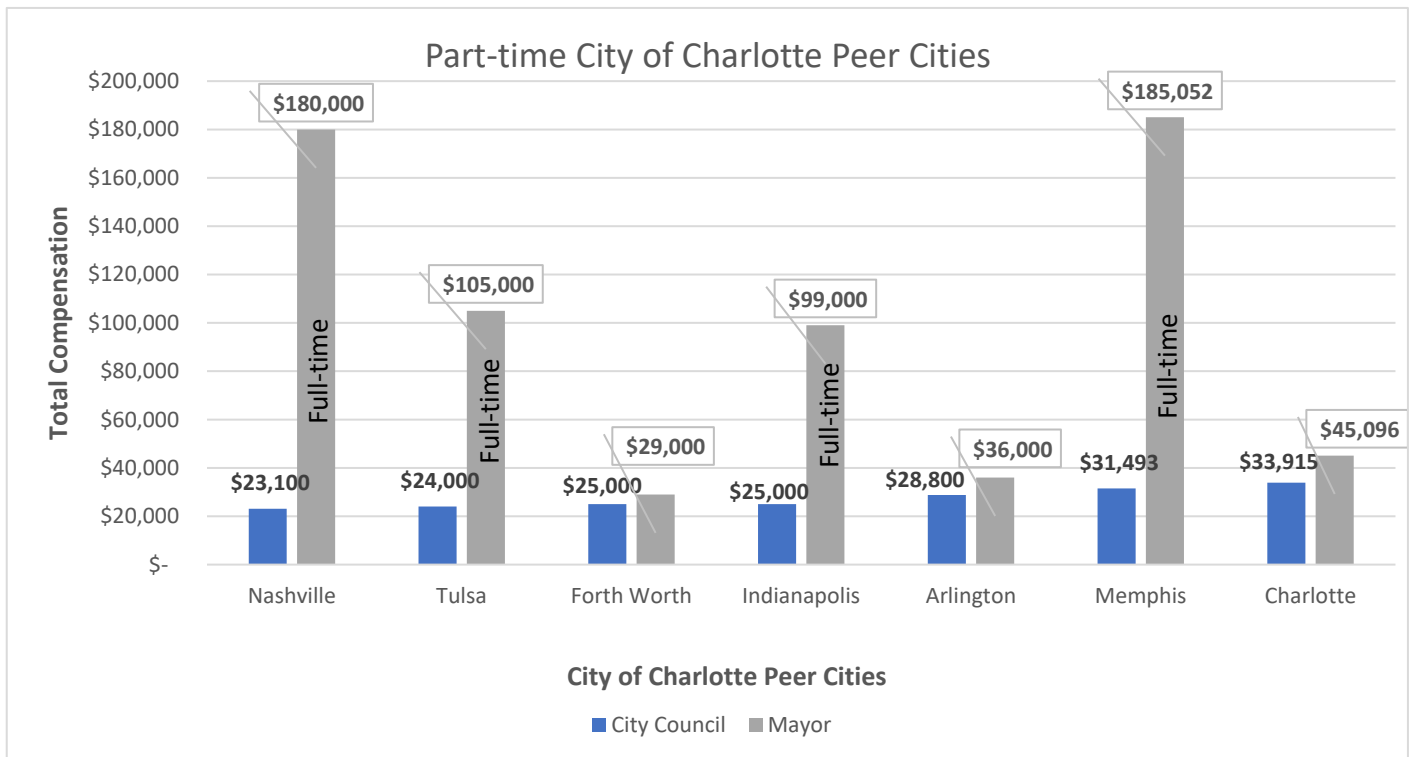
Total Compensation	
Current annual salary	\$21,015
Annual expense allowance	\$5,800
Annual auto allowance	\$4,000
Annual Technology allowance	\$3,100
<b>Total</b>	<b>\$33,915</b>

- Programmed annual three percent salary increase pending budget approval

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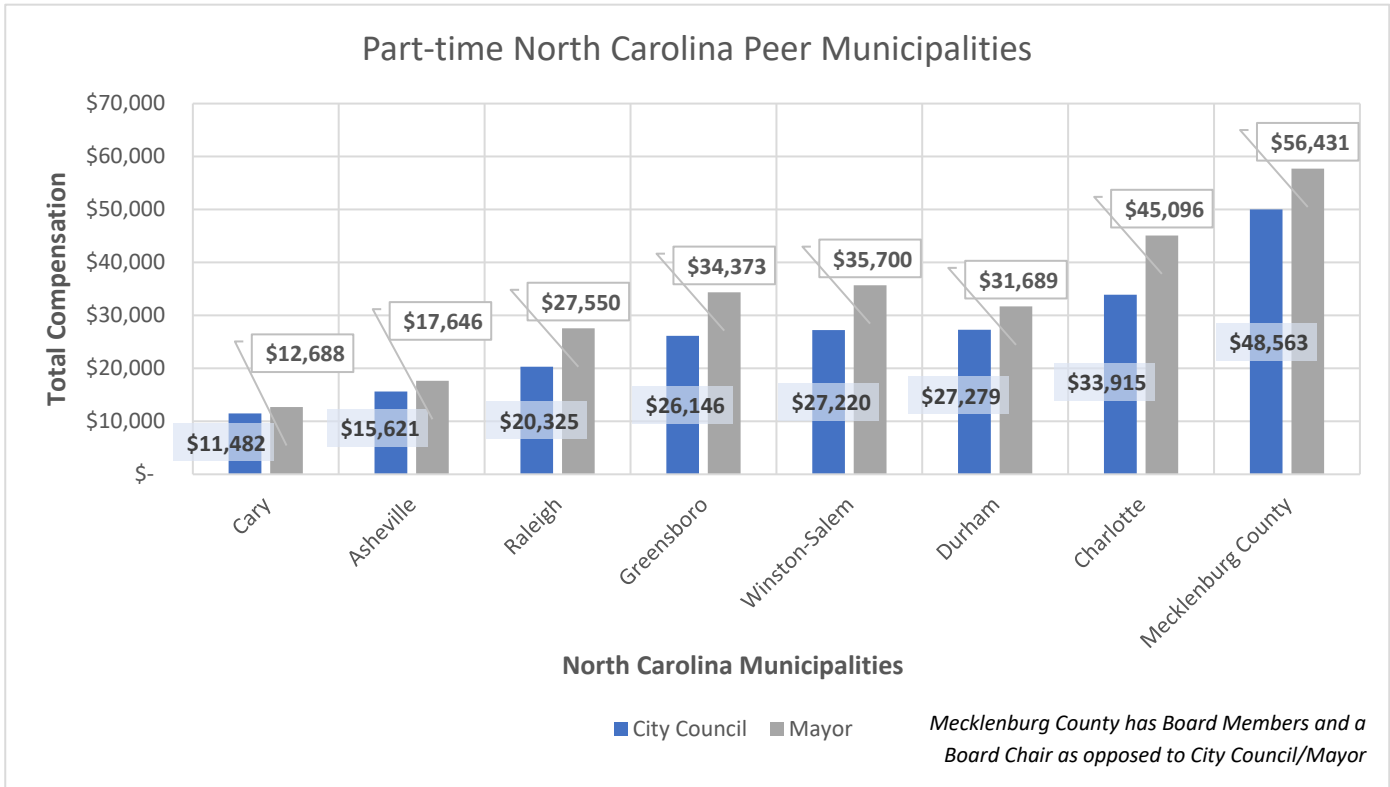
**Considerations**

- Part-time City of Charlotte Peer Cities
  - Six have part-time governing councils (Nashville, Tulsa, Fort Worth, Indianapolis, Arlington, and Memphis)
    - Of the six Charlotte's Mayor\* and City Council are the highest paid compared to other part-time peer cities
      - \*Four part-time governing councils have a full-time Mayor
- Full-time City of Charlotte Peer Cities
  - 11 have full-time governing councils (Dallas, Austin, Denver, Houston, Kansas City, Long Beach, Omaha, Portland, San Diego, Seattle, Minneapolis)
- Unidentified
  - Atlanta, Louisville, Columbus



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- North Carolina Benchmark Municipalities
  - Of the seven municipalities that Charlotte benchmarked against in the City of Charlotte's Human Resources Salary Survey, Mecklenburg County was the only municipality that had a higher paid governing body than Charlotte.
  - Both governing bodies for Charlotte and Mecklenburg County serve at a part-time capacity.



- City of Charlotte, Mecklenburg County Comparison
  - Based on previous Committee discussion on adjusting Charlotte's elected officials' compensation to be consistent with Mecklenburg County's commissioners' compensation.
  - City of Charlotte has a governing body with a Mayor and 11 council members.
  - Mecklenburg County has a nine-member Board of County Commissioners as the governing body of Mecklenburg County that includes one Board Chair.

Total Compensation Comparison			
Governing Body	City of Charlotte	Mecklenburg County	Difference between City of Charlotte and Mecklenburg County
City Council/ Board Member	\$33,915	\$48,563	(\$14,648)
Mayor/ Board Chair	\$45,096	\$56,431	(\$11,335)

- Factors to consider in raising Charlotte's part-time governing body up to Mecklenburg County's part-time total compensation rate:

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Mayor, City Council Compensation  
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- To bring each of the 11 Charlotte Council Members equal to Mecklenburg County's Board Members a total annual increase that includes the cost of benefits such as medical, retirement, and leave would be \$161,128
- To bring Charlotte's Mayor equal to Mecklenburg County's Board Chair, a total annual increase that includes the cost of benefits would be \$11,335
- Annual increase in total compensation for City of Charlotte's part-time governing body, \$172,463