



INDEPENDENT LA JOLLA

A History of San Diego City Structure

San Diego before Cityhood 1769-1850

San Diego was first settled by Europeans in 1769. Father Junipero Serra journeyed from Spain and settled the area in order to Christianize the local Indians. To accomplish his work, he founded the California Missions, of which San Diego was the first.

After Mexico achieved independence in 1821, San Diego, as well as the rest of present day California, became part of Mexico. An Alcade or Mayor was the head of the local government, Population at this time was sparse. The Mission and surrounding ranches dominated the San Diego landscape.

The next significant event in San Diego history was the Mexican-American War. The 1846 Battle of San Pasquale, the major battle in California, was fought in the Lake Hodges-San Pasqual area. Following the victory of the United States in the War, the Treaty of Guadalupe-Hidalgo in 1848 ceded the areas of California, Arizona, New Mexico and Texas from Mexico to the United States. With the discovery of gold in Northern California in 1848, the population of California quickly increased. This increase in the number of citizens soon qualified the territory for statehood. California was admitted to the Union in 1850.

California's Third City 1850-1931

San Diego was incorporated as a City March 27, 1850. The first City government consisted of a Common Council with five members and a Mayor, City Marshal, City Attorney, City Clerk, City Assessor and City Treasurer.

All were elected to their positions. Other officials were appointed by the Common Council. However after only two years the City was bankrupt and the state dissolved the Government, having the power to review and then approve or disapprove the actions of the Trustees. In 1872 the Board of Trustees was increased to five members and entrusted with some of its previous powers.

In 1887, the voters of San Diego adopted a new Charter. This document replaced the Board of Trustees with a Mayor-Council form of Government. Yet another Charter was adopted in 1889. This Charter, with modifications, was maintained until 1931.

The 1889 form of Government was patterned on the Federal and State Government examples. The Mayor was a strong executive elected City-wide who could veto legislation passed by the Common

Council. The common Council consisted of two Houses, a Board of Alderman (two representatives from each of nine wards) and a Board of Delegates (nine members elected at large). In 1905 the two Houses of the Common Council were consolidated into one House of nine members (one from each ward).

In 1909 the Charter was amended again. The nine member Common Council was replaced by a five member Commission. Each Commissioner was elected at large. In addition to being a legislator, each Commissioner was responsible for the administration of a City department.

1915 saw another revision of City government. The members of the Council were no longer Commissioners. Instead, they appointed a Manager of Operations who was responsible for the administration of City departments.

Following dissatisfaction with the 1915 form of government, a completely new Charter was to be written.

In 1929 a committee of prominent citizens, called the Board of Freeholders, was elected. The committee prepared a Charter which was turned down by the voters later that year. A new Board of Freeholders was elected in 1930. Their proposed Charter was adopted by the voters in 1931.

1931- A New Charter

The 1931 Charter, with modifications, is still in effect today. Under the original 1931 Charter, a Manager-Council form of government was created. A seven member Council (now 9 members) was created. The Council was comprised of six Council members and a Mayor. The Council was nominated by district but elected City-wide.

The Mayor chairs meetings of the Council, but has no veto power. The Council selects a City Manager who is responsible for the administration of most City departments.

Revisions to the 1931 Charter

There have been many revisions to the 1931 Charter. In 1963 the voters approved increasing the number of Council districts from six to eight. In 1974 the jobs of Mayor and Council were made full time. In 1988 San Diego voters approved changing the election system of Council members. Now both nominations and elections for Council are by district. Only the Mayor and City Attorney are elected City-wide.

The Charter Review Committee of 1989 concluded that present realities, such as district elections, and future probabilities including continuing growth, required substantive changes in the 1931 Charter. The report called for an increase in the number of Council districts from 8-10 and Mayor Veto power with a 2/3 Council override possible. However to date no major charter revisions dealing with the structure of City government have yet been submitted to voters.