

Report on a Mail Survey of Fargo Voter Attitudes Towards Local Governance

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Introduction

The Upper Midwest Center on Public Policy at North Dakota State University (NDSU) released the results of a mail survey of Fargo voters, finding that most voters are content with city services, but are less satisfied with the Fargo City Commission. Consequently, local voters are receptive to the idea of changing the current system of government in Fargo from at-large representation to a City Council format where officials represent specific districts within the city. **Indeed, the survey found that 49.4% of respondents would support such a change while 19.9% would not.**

The citywide mail survey was done in conjunction with the Center for Social Research at NDSU. The Center utilized the central voter files maintained by the North Dakota Secretary of State to derive a listing of 10,554 Fargo households that participated in the June 14, 2022 city commission elections (duplicate addresses removed). Two thousand surveys were mailed to a random sample of these households, producing 549 responses for a margin of error of +/-3.6 percent. Survey responses were mailed out late September with the first response received on September 26, 2023 and the last on November 14.

This study was funded through the 2023 Clouston Family Political Science and Public Policy Faculty Fellowship.

The City of Fargo has utilized a city commission format with four commissioners and a mayor elected at-large since 1913. Before that, Fargo was governed by a city council elected by-district.

Satisfaction With City Services

The survey asked respondents for their level of agreement with a series of statements about city services:

91.7% of respondents agreed/strongly agreed that “the city adequately provides public services such as utilities, garbage pickup, snow removal, etc.” 4.9% disagreed/strongly disagreed.

69.0% agreed/strongly agreed that “the city adequately maintains city streets and sidewalks.” 16.6% disagreed/strongly disagreed.

83.1% agreed/strongly agreed that “the city provides and adequately maintains city walk and bike paths, parks and green spaces.” 6.7% disagreed/strongly disagreed.

67.0% agreed/strongly agreed that “the Fargo Police Department has an adequate presence throughout the city.” 17.5% disagreed/strongly disagreed.

Finally, respondents were asked “In your opinion, city taxes and fees for services are too high, appropriate, or too low.” 42.5% stated ‘too high,’ 47.0% ‘appropriate,’ and 1.7% ‘too low.’”

Satisfaction With Local Governance

The survey asked “How satisfied are you with the current City Commission election style where commissioners are elected at large and represent the entire city.” 37.1% of respondents were somewhat dissatisfied/very dissatisfied, 17.8% were neither satisfied or dissatisfied, 43.0% were somewhat satisfied/very satisfied, and 2.3% didn’t know.

The survey asked respondents for their level of agreement with a series of statements about local governance:

23.6% of respondents agreed/strongly agreed that “the City Commission is aware of the specific needs of my neighborhood.” 32.8 disagreed/strongly disagreed.

39.0% agreed/strongly agreed that “the City Commission is trustworthy and dependable.” 26.8% disagreed/strongly disagreed.

32.5% agreed/strongly agreed that “the city’s decision-making process is transparent and easy to understand.” 35.8% disagreed/strongly disagreed.

40.6% agreed/strongly agreed that “there is adequate opportunity for citizen input on city issues.” 27.2% disagreed/strongly disagreed.

At-large vs by-district representation

The survey asked respondents for their level of agreement with a series of statements about at-large and by-district representation:

55.9% of respondents agreed/strongly agreed that “City leaders should be elected to represent specific districts or wards within the city.” 21.0% disagreed/strongly disagreed.

35.6% agreed/strongly agreed that “It is better to have city leaders who represent the entire city as a whole.” 35.5% disagreed/strongly disagreed.

65.7% agreed/strongly agreed that “Having city leaders who are elected to represent specific districts or wards within the city would lead to better understanding of the specific needs and issues in my neighborhood.” 13.6% disagreed/strongly disagreed.

42.6% agreed/strongly agreed that “Having city leaders who are elected at-large means the Commissioners work for the greater good of the entire city.” 26.2% disagreed/strongly disagreed.

Support for a City Council approach

Finally, the survey asked respondents: “Would you support changing from the current system of at-large representation to a City Council form of government where individuals represent specific districts or wards within the community?”

Definitely not support: 8.6%

Probably not support: 11.3%

Undecided, but might not support: 6.6%

Undecided, but might support: 21.7%

Probably support: 24.1%

Definitely support: 25.3%

Completely undecided: 2.5%

Thus, 49.4% indicated they would probably/definitely support such a change while 19.9% said they probably/definitely would not.

Demographics

According to the responses, 94.7% of the sample identified as white while 49.4% were female and 48.4% male. 43.3% were currently employed, 8.1% unemployed, and 46.3% retired. The average age was 63.6 years old.

Some 81.1% reported owning their own home. In addition, 80.0% reported living in Fargo for more than 15 years. Only 5.7% had lived in Fargo for 5 years or less.

25.2% of respondents identified their political ideology as liberal or very liberal while 33.5% identified as moderate and 38.5% as conservative or very conservative.

Respondents reported their household’s total income before taxes as:

Less than \$25,000: 6.7%

\$25,000-\$49,999: 13.4%

\$50,000-\$99,999: 27.1%

\$100,000-\$149,999: 17.1%

\$150,000 or more: 15.8%

Prefer not to disclose: 19.9%

Crosstabs

Placing the various measures in relation to one another allows for a deeper understanding of the survey results.

City taxes and service fees

Of the 225 respondents who asserted that city taxes and fees for services are too high for the services received, 56.0% would probably/definitely support changing to a City Council form of government while 17.8% would probably/definitely not support such a change.

Of the 247 respondents who asserted that city taxes and fees for services are at the appropriate level, 47.8% would probably/definitely support changing to a City Council form while 19.8% would probably/definitely not support such a change.

Unemployed, Employed, and Retired

Of the 42 respondents who reported being unemployed, 26.2% would probably/definitely support changing to a City Council format while 38.1% probably/definitely would not support such a change.

Of the 232 respondent who reported being employed, 53.9% would probably/definitely support a change to the City Council format, while 25.0% would probably/definitely not support such a change.

Of the 247 respondents who reported being retired, 47.0% would probably/definitely support a change to the City Council format, while 16.6% would probably/definitely not support such a change.

Homeownership

Of the 436 respondents who reported owning a home, 48.6% would probably/definitely support a change to the City Council format, while 19.0% would probably/definitely not support such a change.

Of the 101 respondents who reported not owning a home, 52.5% would probably/definitely support a change to the City Council format, while 23.8% would probably/definitely not support such a change.

Ideology

Of the 135 respondents who identified as liberal/very liberal, 54.1% would probably/definitely support a change to the City Council format, while 22.2% would probably/definitely not support such a change.

Of the 179 respondents who identified as moderate, 46.4% would probably/definitely support a change to the City Council format, while 17.3% would probably/definitely not support such a change.

Of the 201 respondents who reported being conservative/very conservative, 51.7% would probably/definitely support a change to the City Council format, while 20.9% would probably/definitely not support such a change.

How long lived in Fargo

Of the 31 respondents who reported having lived in Fargo for 1-5 years, 51.6% would probably/definitely support a change to the City Council format, while 19.4% would probably/definitely not support such a change.

Of the 42 respondents who reported having lived in Fargo for 6-10 years, 59.5% would probably/definitely support a change to the City Council format, while 19.0% would probably/definitely not support such a change.

Of the 34 respondents who reported having lived in Fargo for 11-15 years, 52.9% would probably/definitely support a change to the City Council format, while 20.6% would probably/definitely not support such a change.

Of the 434 respondents who reported having lived in Fargo for more than 15 years, 47.9% would probably/definitely support a change to the City Council format, while 19.8% would probably/definitely not support such a change.

Household Income

Of the 35 respondents who reported earning less than \$25,000 a year, 40.0% would probably/definitely support a change to the City Council format, while 20.0% would probably/definitely not support such a change.

Of the 71 respondents who reported earning \$25,000-\$49,999 a year, 50.7% would probably/definitely support a change to the City Council format, while 12.7% would probably/definitely not support such a change.

Of the 144 respondents who reported earning \$50,000-\$99,999 a year, 49.3% would probably/definitely support a change to the City Council format, while 18.1% would probably/definitely not support such a change.

Of the 92 respondents who reported earning \$100,000-\$149,999 a year, 54.3% would probably/definitely support a change to the City Council format, while 19.6% would probably/definitely not support such a change.

Of the 85 respondents who reported earning \$150,000 or more a year, 49.4% would probably/definitely support a change to the City Council format, while 23.5% would probably/definitely not support such a change.

Finally, respondents were given space towards the end of the survey to write any additional thoughts or comments they might have. These comments have been de-identified and included at the end of this report. The comments have been transcribed as they were written. 134 respondents contributed comments, which covered a variety of subjects related to city governance.

Historical Context

A city commission is a form of municipal government in which individually elected officials (commissioners) serve on a governing board that has both legislative and executive powers. City commissions typically have five or seven members who are elected at-large rather than by ward or district. Under the classic format, each commissioner is given administrative responsibility for at least one specific aspect or department of city government, such as fire, police, or finance. One of the commissioners may also be given the title of mayor, though this position is often symbolic.

The commission form of government originated in Galveston, Texas in 1900 after a hurricane devastated the city, killing an estimated 6,000 residents.ⁱ City leaders hoped the new system would be more efficient with less political conflict than what existed under old council system. The apparent success by this new form of government in quickly rebuilding the city and local economy made it attractive to municipalities across the nation. The Commission plan became a key component of the Progressive reform movement for good government in the early twentieth century.

The Commission plan spread quickly, with 40 cities incorporating the format by 1909, 248 cities by 1912, and 469 cities by 1918.ⁱⁱ These cities tended to be smaller municipalities with less than 100,000 citizens.

The North Dakota state legislature passed its version of the Commission plan in 1907, with the cities of Bismarck, Mandan, and Minot quickly converting to this format. However, the citizens of Fargo were uncomfortable with the state's initial approach, rebuffing efforts to reconfigure their city government. The Legislature amended the plan in hopes of assuaging Fargo concerns with some success. On April 7, 1913, Fargo voters approved a referendum to switch from its wards-based council to the commission system.

Other North Dakota cities to institute the Commission plan during this early period included: Mandan in 1907; Minot and Bismarck in 1909; Devils Lake, Williston, and Hillsboro in 1913; Ray in 1914; Marmath in 1915; Washburn in 1916; and Grand Forks in 1920.ⁱⁱⁱ

At first, the Commission plan proved quite popular, particularly amongst small municipalities in the southwest portions of the United States. However, the plan soon came under criticism for its lack of effective leadership. Commissioners would often focus on the narrow interests of their assigned department, rather than those of the city government as a whole. This encouraged departmental parochialism by city bureaucrats and employees, making administrative coordination difficult. Consequently, other forms of local governance, such as council-manager government, arose as attractive alternatives.

The Commission plan has also been questioned in terms of its representativeness. Candidates who win office based on citywide elections tend to consider issues on how it impacts the entire city. While this result has its benefits, it also means that the concerns of the individual neighborhoods, even those directly impacted by a change in city policies, are much more likely to be ignored. In addition, smaller groups within the city – whether considered in terms of race, ethnicity, or religion – will have much greater difficulties getting their issues onto the city agenda.

It is difficult to get a clear sense of how prevalent the Commission plan is at this point of time, but several suggestive measures are available. The US Census of Governments indicates that in 1987, 364 of the 19,200 municipal governments across the nation, or 1.90%, were classified as Commission governments. In contrast, 13,404, or 69.8%, were classified as Mayor-Council and 2,431, or 12.7% as Council-Manager.^{iv}

In 1992, 351 of the 19,279 municipal governments across the nation, or 1.82%, were classified as Commission governments while 15,176, or 78.7% were classified as Mayor-Council and 3,147, or 16.3%, as Council-Manager.^v

Finally, a 2018 survey by the International City/County Management Association indicated that 3.2% of responding governments used the Commission plan, though the response rate was much lower than the earlier US Census reports.^{vi}

Municipalities using the Commission plan have become quite rare with 21 states reporting that they do not have a single municipality overseen by commissioners.^{vii} North Dakota, with 26 to 29 cities utilizing the Commission plan, has become something of an outlier.

Table 1

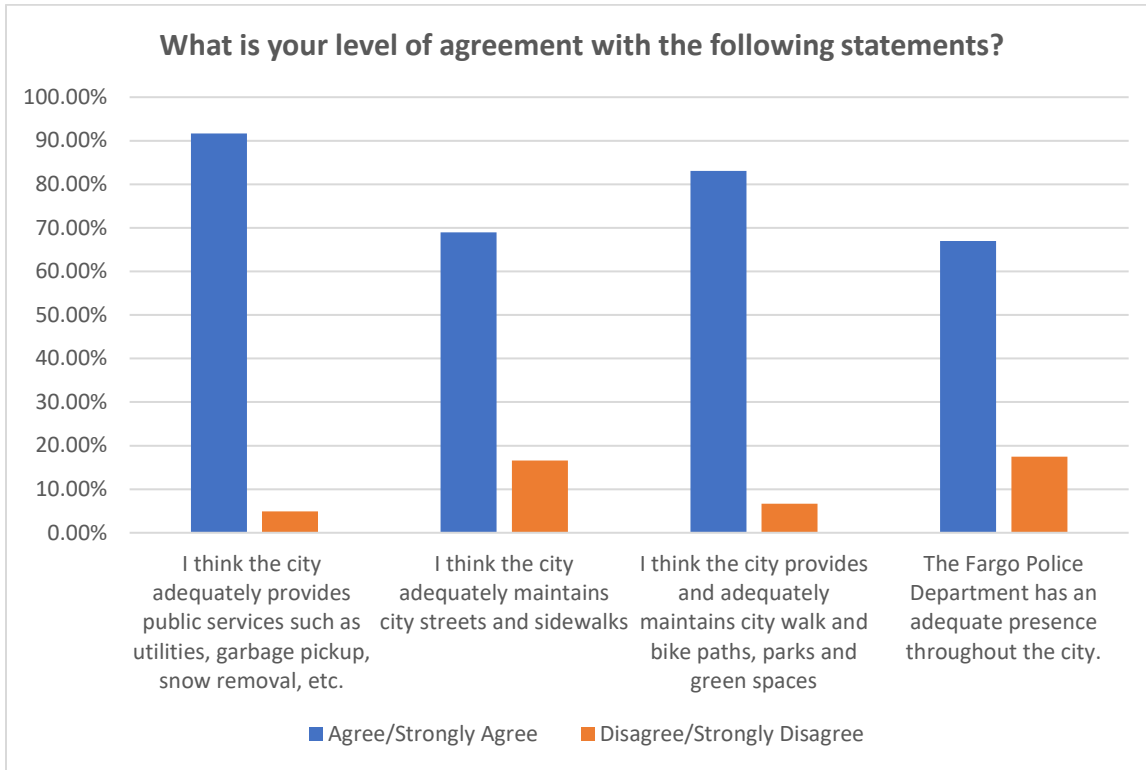


Table 2

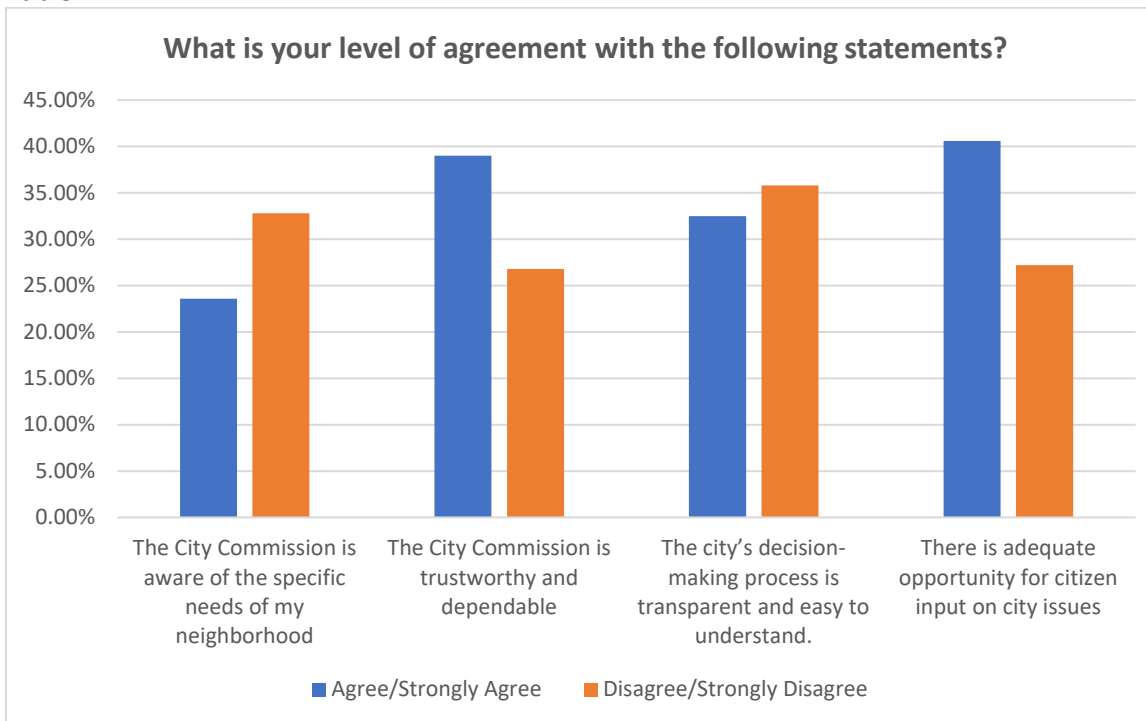
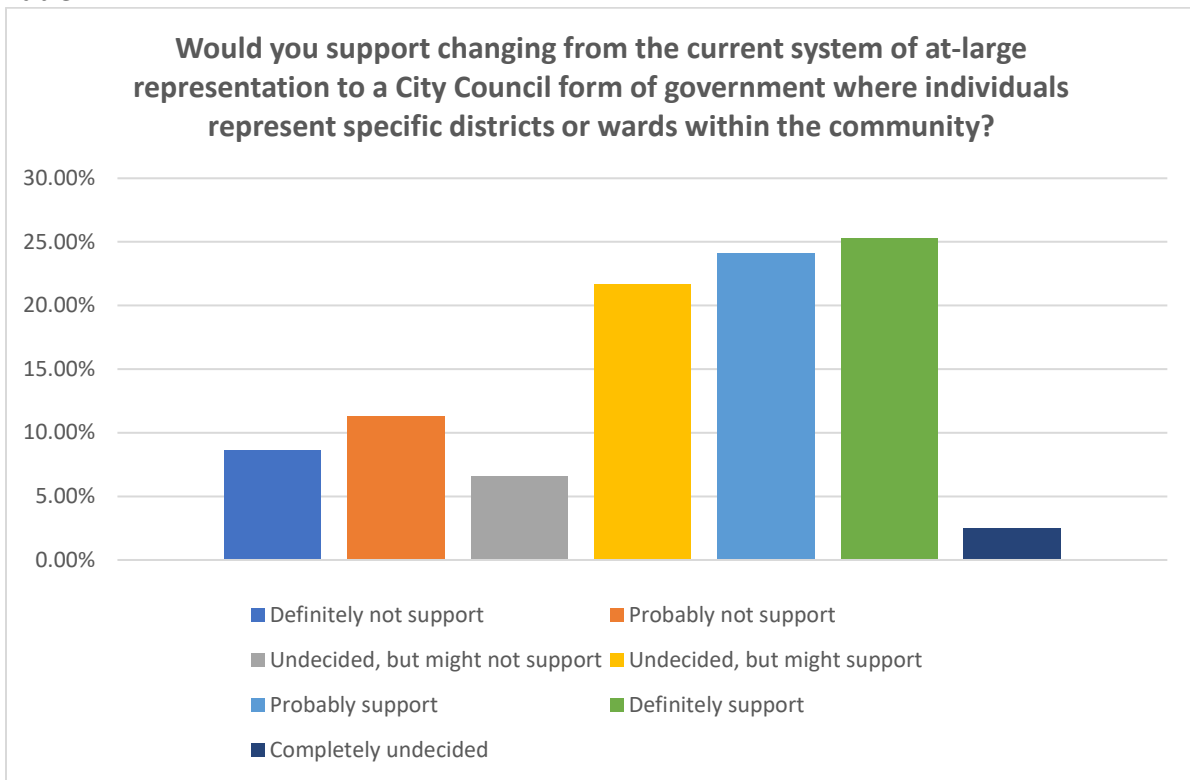


Table 3



Table 4



De-identified comments from the Comment Box provided at the end of the mail survey. Comments written elsewhere in the survey are not included.

You should factor into the study the use of rank-order voting. The council format where people represent a specific area of the city, invites polarization, us vesus them & "good for all" mindset gets left out of the picture. It would end up like the ND legislature, where rural bias is prevalent.
"Specials must end...it is outrageous. Projects must be funded & budgeted City government & schools must make cuts & give back when budgets are not met. small gov/small admin in schools! Fargo is too small for "districts" or "wards", and it is a wolf in sheep's clothing! Attempting to create "districts" or "wards" is a step toward marxism, create small divided sections of the city & constant litigation to re-draw those "lines". This is done to divide people and inject minority views or political ideologies into the city government. The intent is to continue to divide racial classes, political classes, economic class, social class and keep people divided
With the complexities of infill vs new growth I feel having all parties at the table is very important.
Why not both?
While not the topic of this survey- I strongly opposed "Ranking voting"! While this is currently the law, it perpetuates "good ole-boy" politics and dilutes s the one "person-one vote" rule. This needs to be changed.
When leaders are elected at large, it gives access to all of them! We are not limited to whom we can call with questions, concerns and comments.
We need younger people to be more involved. The Boomers have had their time. Let the younger generation have their input.
We need to end approval voting!
We need a primary / run off for Commission / mayor positions
We are ok with Ward in large towns like Fargo, G.F, Bismarck, Minot, Jamestown & D.L. Hate to see in small towns when hard to get anyone to run.
WARDS INVITE DIVISIVE VOTE TRADING.(THINK-MAYOR DALY OF CHICAGO; OR OUR CURRENT US HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIES!) CHAOS IN REF:#2 IT IS OBVIOUS THAT A SPECIAL INTEREST ORIENTED CLIQUE OF CITY COMMISSIONERS, ARE FISCALLY IRRESPONSIBLE. WE IN FARGO DON'T NEED TO BE "SPARTAN" IN OUR CITY AMENITIES; BUT WE DON'T NEED TO BE "PLUSH" EITHER.
They would know about the need in their district. They would have more personal contact with the citizens.
They talk of raising property tax. Solution: sell off park broad lane to developers. There is way to much park broad land in Fargo. To maintain it a lot of raising even used. Talk about a high maintenance. Dump half of it. they can walk and sit on side walks.
There is too much focus on downtown Fargo. The idea of district city leaders is good if they can avoid becoming adversarial. If it means there will be even less cooperation, leave it be. Also, property taxes are too high. Thank you to all city Commissioners who take the time to serve. Hopefully, the mayor will become a full-time position to be able to serve the growing community. Thanks -
There are far too city representatives on the council. Cities our size should have a legislature with a representative for every 1000 residents that are recallable at any time. This would be true political representation.
The special assessment need to go away. Just be transparent up front and add them to the price of the lot. They seem to be an always increasing slush fund for the city.
The school board does not seem to be especially financially responsible. The city assesses depends way too much on "comp prices" from nearby sales instead of on site review.

The risk of council (by-district) form of gov't is failure to support overall needs of the city rather, placing you 'district' above the needs of the city. I think it makes sense to elect "at large" commissioners each randomly assigned a representative district. District representation of each District, then they are assigned a new District.
The problem may be to get someone qualified to run in every district.
The present City Commission may get all the input about city matters but they do tend to pay more attention to items concerning their neighborhood. So in a way they are already "governing" as a council rather than than commission. I believe it is unfair (somewhat) for this size of city to have commission form of government. There is a chance that all 5 could be from the same area of the cit. Then nobody speaks for the rest! It is not bad now but as the city grows, I see problems
The overflow areas, where excess street water is drained into maybe death traps by drowning with younger age residents as they maybe looked at as swimming water pools when they fill up. Trenched in?
The idea of district representation sounds like a more logical approach, but who gets to define the districts? The people who are in power currently? Which means they'll stack the deck in their favor to retain control.
The current system forces the commissioners to be more moderate and compromise.
The current leadership is out of touch with the city needs. They have failed to disclose financial issues and spend time bickering and not representing the city of Fargo. Time to clean house.
The current commission members seem to be interested in downtown and south Fargo. North Fargo and the Madison are often appear to be forgotten. Would the mayor be considered a member by the council? The current county commission is by waid but coted at large - this has never made sense to me
The current city commissioners are only focused on their own neighborhoods & personal interests. There's a pattern of consistent erroneous spending, while constantly increasin taxes & special assessmenents. Also, the special assessments are out of control too high and unfairly assessed. Fargo's city commissioners have too much control over these decisions or otherwise lack budgetary common sense. They also do not value the public's input nor concerns over these types of issues whatsoever.
The concern with districts is the potential lack of quality/effective candidates from every district; it would depend on how many districts there were.
The commission keeps cutting taxes yet the maintenance of streets, sidewalks has deteriorated. They seem to only focus on certain areas of town, such as developing Downtown Fargo. But ignore other areas. Housing has become more unaffordable but there are a lot of empty higher end housing.
The commission does not currently reflect all of Fargo. At-Large positions will be less responsive as city grows. Time to change Thanks!
The brine the city sprays to combat ice gets on my lawn and kills the grass. The plows do not widen the road like in other areas of town. Why do they haul away the snow in Downtown Fargo at my expense. When I owned a business, I had to pay for that myself. The tax breaks the rich get don't make sense. If you have an attorney on payroll you can get it. They never seem to pay. Downtown appears to be one big Bar. why does the City cater to so much drinking and we wonder why kids struggle.
Thanks for your work on this issue!
Taxed Enough Already. NEED CITY people representation. Not City agenda representation.
Rude to the fair for "all" citizens.
QUIT TAKING GLASS IN RECY BINS BECAUSE CONTRACTOR SAID IT WAS HARD ON HIS EQUIP. BUT W.FARGO AND MOOREHEAD STILL DO?

Property taxes are way too high. 15% increase each year for the last three years. I don't care what type of council, I just want the spending to be controlled. Only the government gets away with raising taxes 15% each year, no business could do that.
Presently, they only serve the downtown and North Fargo area. They forget tax payers live on the far south side of town. If elected by district, I could be represented.
Police do great work, but we are understaffed as our other companies in our region (schools, healthcare, restaurants). I commend their bravery.
Play hardball with the state to bring back approval voting. The people of Fargo voted for it, state legislators activity working against the will of the people should be disqualified for office.
PERHAPS DISTRICT ELECTION LEADERS would realize THE TAY BURDEN THE CURRENT COMMISSION HAS PUT ON HOME OWNERS. WHEN VALUATIONS GO UP, TAXES GO UP. YOU CANT DISGUISE TAX INCREASES BY TRYING TO SELL "LOWER MILLS". DISTRICT ELECTION LEADERS WOULD BE MUCH MORE THAN IN TUNE WITH THEIR AREA TAXPAYERS. THE CURRENT AT LARGE COMMISSION HASN'T MET A TAX INCREASE THAT THEY DIDNT LIKE. EARLY THIS SPRING, THE COMISSION WAS SETTING TAXPAYERS UP FOR FEE & PROPERTY TAX INCREASES. I'm SURE THEY WILL CONTINUE TO TAXES SPEND WITHOUT ANY REAL LOOK AT BUDGET CUTS. PLEASE CONSIDER DISTRICT ELECTED COMMISSIONERS.
Our property taxes are egregious. We will be moving away from this area in the next 2 yrs. b/c of the property taxes.
One thing: Maybe they shouldn't open \$ 1million on an alley & putting it on the news. Its a place all the homeless hangout. They use it as their toilette. What a waste.
Not sure about pros and cons of this matter
None
NO N/A
Never thought much about how satisfied I am about the current city commission election style. Most residential streets are a mess. Fargo sustainability and resiliency committee are bad index + waste of time & money.
My general impression is that Fargo city leaders are focused primarily on downtown businesses and that developers have a great influence on and access to leaders. My hope for district representation is a focus and connection between neighborhoods with diverse needs and leaders.
Much like our state legislature is divided into districts to represent their constituents, city council government would allow more knowledgeable representation at a level.
Most of City Commissions represent development, not the citizens. Fargo is getting over developed. When citizens go to meeting about slowing development or protecting neighborhoods, our concerns and wishes are ignored!!
Loves to spend, so they raise taxes?? too many secret meetings??? Fargo police department: Perhaps from major crimes/ So many "Liberal" oriented questions/choices !!!
Like preference rating for city elections and don't think the state legislature had the right to tamper with it. It worked well with an at-large system.
Leave this as is
leave gender out of city politics.
Keep as is, no change
I've seen a lot of politics in my 50 yrs of voting. I have discovered that politicians follow their own "personal" agendas rather than the people they are supposed to represent. There are very few who truly represent the people who voted them in. So I have my doubt about commissioners and elected by district voting.

Its probably the best for those of us that struggles to get to city meeting. he would have dedicated person to communicate with about concerns.
It's not so much WHO a leader represents, but HOW they were elected. Approval voting is grossly unfair, and I predict it will lead to one-party/ one philosophy domination over time. See enclosed note. He also appended his signature and attached a document with the inscription "clever deception"
It would be nice if they were chosen off experience instead of popularity.
It seems to me that apartment buildings are used as tax shelters, and the homeowners are crushed by the tax burden put on them. Where are all of these car washes coming from? really !!! Is it necessary to have one on every block in Fargo? Are they paying their share of taxes?
It seems that a city council that is elected based on the region they serve would be more equitable. It wouldn't make sense for, for example, 4 people from W.Fargo to represent all parts of the city like downtown.
It is ridiculous that over 50% of my property taxes go to the education system in Fargo. I also don't care for how much focus is on downtown Fargo, when a vast majority of residents don't live there, nor feel safe/comfortable even visiting downtown.
It is not how they are elected or areas they govern. The issue is they want to spend millions on a walk bridge instead of getting adequate law enforcement.
IT FEELS RIGHT THAT IT MAY BE OVERWHELMING IF THERE ARE MORE THAN 20 FOLKS ON THE LEADERSHIP DECISION-MAKING HOWEVER, THE DIVISIONS/LINES MAY HAVE TO BE REDRAWN TO DETERMINE THE ADEQUATE # OF SERVICE MEMBERS.
INTERESTING QUESTION! WOULD LIKE INPUT FROM THOSE BETTER QUALIFIED TO SAY WHICH IS BETTER!!
In Congress, certain states have been seen to make poor decisions that benefit their state at the expense of others. I worry going to an election by district system would be taken advantage of similarly. However, I also appreciate that at-large representation inherently favor the more involved politically voters, and that would skew to the wealthy and those who frankly don't need much time & attention to continue to do well. Goin by district also creates more of an us/them dynamic. For example, we already see impacts when it comes to wealthy schools and poorer schools in the same city. Not my district, not my problem. I would alternatively propose a system where citizens were chosen at random for some period, two weeks, a month, I don't know, but then it changes to another random resident. Pay for it, and the randomness makes it easier to get a range of perspectives with less risk of extremists getting elected to larger terms. How many politicians supposedly already answer to us? Senators, representatives, governors, mayors. Reducing that number would increase ease of informed voting while maintaining the role through a duty like system.
I'M NOT ENTIRELY SURE WHERE PEOPLE LIVE IN WOULD CREATE GREATER COLLABORATION OR DO A BETTER JOB REPRESENTING THE CITY. I THINK IDEOLOGY & POLITICAL BIAS PLAYS A FAR BIGGER ROLE. PLUS, SOME WARDS MAY HAVE A SIGNIFICANT DISPARITY IN INCOME & LIVING ARRANGEMENTS SO REPRESENTING BOTH GROUPS WOULD BE DIFFICULT.
If you are a Professor at NDSU Teaching polilics you are misinforming your students (I a heard) NDSU is noted as a very WOK teaching how bad america is. This country is the greatest in the world. not all of us conservatives are racist . If you are teaching WOKness, (stop it) you know you are , you know. there are millions upon millions of citizen doing and saying the right things to improve this country. and relations between all human beings. Quit pushing your agenda and telling student all the thing and the people are bad. If you are, all those that are liberal will not succeed. you are very one envying to ruin this great Republic. all humans are created by (God) we are are equal;. Skin color or heritage is not what we go by. I also heard that any conservative and Christian get failing grades or kick out of class (not good). Make America great again (don't ruin it)

I'm concerned about how the districts would be drawn up and voting blocks that might form from it.
I would like to see some changes on the upkeep of some private properties. I would like the city to acknowledge me when I ask for help instead of being told there is "nothing we can do." Something needs to be done about the abandoned homes in our neighborhoods. the fact that they bring the value of other "nice" properties down. Landlords need to be held responsible for what goes on in their buildings and they should all be held responsible for maintaining the inside outside of their building. Our college area of town is looking really poor. The trash, street racing, loud parties and ugly properties need to improve. Parking is an issue, no one seems to want out give out a ticket. So many issues in our city needs improvement, but nothing gets done. But our mayor gets a \$50,000 raise per year! For what? My taxes go up, utilities go up, insurances and groceries as well. I didn't get a raise this year!
I would like a Forum on it if it can discuss *all* the pros + cons of it. It should be made available several times if televised.
I work in Moorhead under Ward style and find it to be not representative of the whole. Council is siloed by design. With technology there are many many ways for citizens to be heard. Folks just have to engage if they have a problem. Currently Peipkorn working mostly for North Fargo yet I live in North FRgo and he does not represent my views. Welcome to a Democracy. Love it still.
I will vote 2 elect Fargos Mayor and commissioners who have Fargo's Best interests in mind. Thank you. Denny
I think you would, at the very least be heard where you are at vs. what area gets the mist attention based on income, political affiliation, etc.
I think what we have now is working just fine.
I think wards/council are absolutely necessary not only for representation but as a county to the idea that the city is responsible (or rather the commission) for all economic growth including incentives, tax exempts, and picking and choosing which company/developer gets a bonus. Further, I think a council system would have a greater impact on keeping our property in check. They are crazy.
I think that about covers it.....
I think setting up town meetings for public discussion on different farms of local government, as well as giving out educational material on these different farms would be an excellent idea and at least start a discussion in Fargo about what kind of local government will be best for out future.
I think people living in a district they represent would since those residents more of a voice is what's needed in that area.
I think it's a good idea, but the current city commission won't like it. I don't like a few of the current commissioners. I don't think they represent their city with the best interests at heart. There's a few with too big of egos and that aren't educated enough on current affairs to be up there making decisions that affect our LGBTQ community and it's blatantly clear.
I think it would be a good move for fargo to a council system. The city is too large for a commission. current commisinoers Preston, Strand and Kolpack live close to downtown, Piepkorn in north Fargo and Mahoney in deep south fargo. This leaves a great deal of the city unrepresented, including my side. Guaranteed representation would be beneficial.
I think five added Chairs to the City Council would improve City concerns greatly, which might in my opinion create more flexibility to a growing city.
I think every meeting all commissioners discuss the various districts. All work together to address the biggest needs of a district, then prioritize versus other districts needs.
I prefer electing them at large as their job should be in the best interest of the entire city ... not just their district.
I prefer a "Cosmopolitan as opposed to insular attitudes. By district elections, I feel would lead to insular feelings. I read a book "The short History of the French Revolution" that described how the extreme

liberals guillotined 5,000 extreme conservatives,....and then true extreme conservatives guillotined 5,000 extreme liberals. I feel more could be done to curtail ultra liberal and ultra conservatives attitudes before it gets to the guillotine phase.
I love living in Fargo!
I like the idea that each commissioners' actions are responsive to the whole community rather than each to a specific ward.
I like that our current systems give each neighborhood an equal voice & that our leaders need to consider all members of the city when they vote. I think that district elected leaders may have a better understanding of their particular districts, but that it would eventually become even more as a council based on income levels, individual agendas, and politics. I'd also be concerned that the council could end up either very conservative or very liberal depending on what is happening in the local news at the time of election. Our leaders should be more unbiased and looking out for the community as a whole, and I think that continuing to elect them as a whole community is more likely to maintain that standing. I'd be curious to learn more about both systems of governance, but haven't had any major issues (aside from tax relief for certain projects and the obnoxious lower-middle income homeowner who won't be able to afford selling their house for another 27 years) with the current system that would push me to actively advocate for district representatives.
I like at-large representation. However, five is too few. I'd like to see at least seven as there is less chance of 'rogue' member prevailing with a bad idea. Ward elections would cause neighbor battling it out at the city level.
I have never thought of it as something that would be considered or available. I think a mix of both would be ideal. Have at large commissioner but board members who are appointed to certain districts & report to an at large commissioner.
I have lived with both forms of government I believe officials elected by district there is favoritism.
I have been aware of arguments for a change to council form of government and follow it closely. Looking at a snapshot of the current 5-member Fargo City Commission makeup...[damaged]...don't know where Denise lives. Right there, we have a good representation of Fargo. And, as to the argument that by virtue of a commissioner/council member living in a certain area, how do you guarantee that he/she will even vote as to the wishes of the neighborhood or necessarily know of issues? Fargo is too big (geographically) to divide into "neat" neighborhoods. It is *really* spread out and I do not see the point. In summary, I believe that the commission form of government suits Fargo. Fargo is a progressive town (purple) and we have progressive/liberal and conservative/moderate voices represented amongst our 5 members. *HOWEVER*, I think increasing the number of commissioners to 7 is a good idea.
I feel the city has gotten a little out of control with property tax valuation
I feel that when they have their meeting at and on a sat at 9:00 AM. So more can make it there.
I feel by district electors would represent my household better. they would be aware of area demographics and needs. Hey I might even know them personally and have things in common.
I FEEL A REPRESENTATIVE FROM MY AREA WOULD KNOW OUR NEEDS MORE THAN ANYONE LIVING OUTSIDE OUR AREA. WE LIVE IN AN OLDER SECTION OF TOWN AND NEED MUCH INFRASTRUCTURE WORK. WE HAVE LIVED, FOR EXAMPLE, IN OUR HOME FOR 46 YEARS AND STILL DON'T HAVE A CURB IN FRONT OF OUR HOUSE.
I feel a lot of elected officials can look at the city of Fargo as a whole and work for the betterment of everyone, but some areas could be underserved by not being represented.
I don't like the idea of by-district representation because people will spend precious time focusing on what their street or block needs rather than considering the effects on the whole city. Not everyone would do this, but even one person per cycle doing it wastes time, energy, and potential resources.

I don't know enough about the pros & cons of the two systems to make a judgement. I am interested in hearing opinions as to the supposed benefits of both systems.
I came from a small town my father was elderman for 16 years with M.s Mentaly Alert! A woman mayor for years and all wards represented.
I believe the at-leaders are better as they understand the bigger picture for the city as it grows
I appreciate the growing diversity on our commission. I do feel representation by those who actually live and experience the day to day of the area they reside provides for better choices. I also feel it is important to educate those in those positions of standards meeting formats, roberts rules, reasons for deadlines for open discussion, etc.
I appreciate that Fargo uses ranked choice voting for city commission- I think it bridges the concerns of "neighborhood-specific" issues with the desire for cohesive, broader minded decision making for the city.
I am concerned that south Fargo grows the older parts of the city will be less important.
I am against by district, just leads to corruption and we have enough of that already.
Hopefully we would get to know at least one commissioner better. It would also be a good idea to attend a meeting, just to observe the dynamics.
Having leaders elected by district would probably benefit the poorer sections of town, on the other hand, making decisions for the whole city has it's positive points, too. Mixed feelings on this one.
GOOD REPRESENTATIVES WILL DO A GOOD JOB UNDER EITHER OPTION. THE ISSUE IS ELECTING GOOD LEADER/REPRESENTATIVES
going to meetings a waste of time. They listen t you but that's it. actions Different!
Given the fact that the population of Fargo has increased significantly, I believe looking at the form of city our government is a much needed task.
Fargo is to large and diverse for only 4 commisioners.
Fargo has gotten to be more diverse, with the southwest region of Fargo feeling like a different city than the downtown and northern regions. So maybe it is time for some changes.
Fargo has blue leadership in a rod state. all reasonable proposals are voted down 4-1 with Piepkorn the only reasonable Commissioner. This is no fault of the style of government. It is just the Forum doing hit pieces on conservative candidates like Roers so Mahoney can TAX, TAX, TAX, SPEND, SPEND,...
Fargo city leaders were traditionally elected on a non-partisan basis. That had been changing, but the move to ranked-choice voting was what has created a completely partisan situation. The city has the most dense population which now controls who is elected. The needs of various neighborhoods all vary. North side neighbors are different than downtown, and even neighborhoods on the south side have varying needs. Those varied needs must be addressed. If commissioners represent those varied needs, than in order to get things done, compromise will be reached. The current trend of the commission is highly one-sided, and shows no slowing.
Fargo city GOV. has a liberal majority, they would like to elect leaders by district, They also have the power to re-district a city to fit their agenda, This is just another way for them to stay in power.
Fargo citizens should have more members governing than they currently have.
Electing at large will result in those commissioners still placing more emphasis on their part of the city giving a benefit too those areas (especially if more than one commissioner lives in the same area) to the detriment of neighborhoods without representation.
Elected by district Represent me. Current system its special interest Bonanza.
Elect at large but expand to 7 commissioners.
Easier access to meeting & minutes

District/Ward format opens the door to types of corruption that many cities have had to deal with.
District representation allows leaders to focus on specific needs, requirements, etc. The leaders by district then can meet as a collective to plan and exchange ideas as a whole .Even with specific representation, the greater good for the entire community must be taken into account.
Detroit is at-large. How'd that go? They can live in rich enclaves, not worrying about all citizens. Residency requirements.
Concern is getting adequate, quality candidates to run for individual districts. In theory, this would be better to representative different neighborhoods/developments but worry if there would be interest for all districts.
Compared to Minneapolis, for example, Fargo is well governed. Also, the Police + Sheriff Depts. are respected. We have good decent law enforcement people! Thanks be to God! Fargo is still a decent place to live! Sincerely,.
Commissioners like Arlette Preston, who live downtown, have no idea what people on the north side want or need. She is focused o a10 block area around the downtown area. Nothing against her in that respect. She's doing what's best for her specific area. Without really knowing it, she is proving that fact that a council system would work better. Each area needs an Arlette Preston for their area and its specific interests. It may seem from my answers to Question 1; a& d that I'm with the way the Commission is doing, those things are the basics of what government should do. And they do that fine. It's when they start dealing with urban, cultural and social issues is where I feel they waste money and don't listen. I would hope that a city council member from nearer to where I live would stick to what helps our neighborhood, and not be focused on a community Engagement Center that focuses on downtown and throws money at people who continually make bad decisions. An at-large commissioner who lives downtown does not care as much about how much a homeowner pays in taxes for things that homeowner may or may not want. A person directly from our neighborhood would know and care. It's the same principle as not having Washington DC dictate to everyone. A council system would be decentralized and would provide better representation for each section of town.
I think a ward system is a solution in search of a problem. If we were to switch to me, I would prefer a mixed system and a much, much larger governing body. I also think the covrent size of the commission is too small-a more pressing issue than parochial needs of people in imaginary lines. My biggest worry w/ a ward system is that the boundaries would match those of the state legislature for sake of ease and reducing ballot complexity. But! that cedes power to Bismarck. Everything West of 45th is basically Hell. The less Fargo interacts, the better The next problem w/ words is that they don't actually solve a representation issue. Not directly. My "Neighborhood" isn't my politics. Simply using streets and Avenues to stand-in fac that doesn't make sense. Use a proper proportional voting system. We already have Approval voting. So expand the size of the body, and then add SPAV. That way my choices as a voter aren't limited to whichever dipshit runs for office in my word. Anyway-Fargo has had task forces look into this and the devil is always in the details. So the status quo stands. The any way to get it done is for someone to pick their favorite flavor-the are that advantages then personally- and fund a campaign.
city taxes and fees are too high for the services I receive especially the park board
City leaders commission raises takes on increases assessments to fund the level of projects they want to do. Rather than funding the projects the citizen/tax payers can afford. Also commission gives tax breaks to almost any business who asks for it. Using increased taxes on assessment/ mil levies to make up the difference.
Changing to election by district is a ridiculous idea that would lead to grid lock and interfighting with no results.

At present, decisions are made by mayor and city commission with no input from citizens. Building, Building huge buildings and tearing down present buildings. We are very very limited on any "historic buildings" in our town. Example of Philadelphia where they should have buildings from the 1700's - like Besse Ross of Liberty Hall. The new buildings are huge- they are "Sun- Blocker" for anyone living in neighborhood.

In speaking for our neighborhood: We belong to Roosevelt Neighborhood we went to too many various meeting with City Commission and Newman Center. We as a neighborhood wanted a Residential look. Promised a 2 story building and look what we have a solid block of Newman Center + church that takes up a solid block, (4 to 5 stories high) (30 or more homes were destroyed to have this monster building) . The "Roers" company was allowed to do what they wanted to do, with a profit for "Roers". City Commission & mayor allowed this inspite of Roosevelt neighborhood association!!! , a local Mechanic that has a functioned in this neighborhood for 40 plus years, repairing vehicles for people was shut down by the city. Why? Why? Why? People on City Commission & mayor no longer wanted him to continue his career in our neighborhood. The mayor of City Commission have become a Monopoly for Fargo. How sad! Yes, we have a problem! (EXCUSE ANY SPELLINGS PLEASE)

AS A HOME OWNER AND REIREE, I WOULD BE BETTER SERVED BY A REPRESENTATIVE FROM MY DISTRICT. I WOULD BE MORE APT TO CONTACT THE INDIVIDUAL IF I HAD ISSUES.

Approval voting needs to go. It's wrong.

A lot of focus is on downtown or South Fargo growth, North Fargo seems to be forgotten. I feel if city leaders were elected by district maybe North Fargo would get some attention too.

A combination 5 by district 3 at large.

ⁱ Ramas, Mary G, 2021, "Galveston's Response to the Hurricane of 1900," *Texas Almanac* at <https://www.texasalmanac.com/articles/galvestons-great-hurricane>

ⁱⁱ Rice, Bradley Robert, 1977, *Progressive Cities*, Austin, Texas; University of Texas Press.

ⁱⁱⁱ Ibid.

^{iv} United States Bureau of the Census, *1987 Census of Governments: Government Organization*, 1987.

^v United States Bureau of the Census, *1992 Census of Governments: Government Organization*, 1992.

^{vi} The International City/County Management Association, 2019, *2018 Municipal Form of Government Survey: Summary of Survey Results*, at

file:///C:/Users/Bauroth/Downloads/2018%20Municipal%20Form%20of%20Government%20Survey%20Report.pdf

^{vii} United States Bureau of the Census, *1992 Census of Governments: Government Organization*, 1992.