Guide to the City Council records

Committee hearing transcripts 1886-1937 with gaps

Finding aid prepared by Kristen Swett
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Repository: City of Boston Archives and Records Management Division
Title: City Council Committee hearing transcripts
Collection No.: 0100.002b
Dates: 1886-1937 with gaps
Quantity: 4.0 Cubic feet (4 record cartons)

Historical note

Boston was incorporated as a city on February 23, 1822 by chapter 110 of the Acts of 1821. This act was adopted by the voters on March 4, 1822. The City Charter established the form of government as a Mayor; a Board of Aldermen; and a Common Council; to be called when conjoined, ‘the City Council.’ The Mayor and Aldermen were vested with the administration of the police, and executive power of the corporation generally, with specific enumerated powers. All other powers belonging to the corporation were vested in the Mayor, Aldermen and Common Council exercised by concurrent vote.

The Mayor served as ex officio Chairman of the Board of Aldermen until 1855. Section 29 of Chapter 448 of the Acts of 1854, an act to revise the charter of the City of Boston, provided for the choice of a permanent chairman by the Board of Aldermen who presided at all meetings of the board and at conventions of the two branches in the
absence of the Mayor. The administration of the police, together with the executive powers of the corporation generally, all the powers formerly vested in the Selectmen of Boston, and all the powers subsequently vested in the Mayor and Board of Aldermen, as county commissioners or otherwise, were vested in the Board of Aldermen. The Mayor if present continued to preside but without a vote. All other powers belonging to the corporation continued to be vested in the Mayor, Aldermen and Common Council, exercised by concurrent vote.

Powers related to the administration of the Police were transferred to the Board of Police Commissioners by chapter 244 of the Acts of 1878. Chapter 266 of the Acts of 1885, an act to amend the charter of the City of Boston, transferred to the Mayor the power to appoint, subject to the approval of the Board of Aldermen, all officers and boards elected by the City Council or Board of Aldermen, and all offices that may be established in the future. The positions of City Messenger, Clerk of Committees and other clerks of the City Council were exempted from this provision. All executive powers vested in the Board of Aldermen were transferred to the Mayor to be exercised through the several officers and boards of the City in their respective departments, under the general supervision and control of the Mayor. The Mayor no longer would be a member, nor preside at any meeting, nor appoint any committee of the Board of Aldermen.

Chapter 486 of the Acts of 1909 abolished the City Council and both branches thereof. The act established a City Council consisting of nine members elected at large. The City Council retained the power to approve ordinances and loan orders presented by the Mayor and the budget. All heads of departments and municipal boards, excluding the school committee and those appointed by law by the governor, would be appointed by the mayor without confirmation by the City Council.

Chapter 479 of the Acts of 1924 provided for the election of 22 City Councilors, one from each ward beginning with the biennial election in 1925. Chapter 356 of the Acts of 1951 provided for the election of 9 City Councilors at large.

Chapter 190 of the Acts of 1982 (Tregor Bill) made major changes to the financial operations of the City and to the budgetary powers of the Mayor and City Council. Chapter 605 of the Acts of 1982 provided for a City Council of thirteen members, one each from nine districts and three at large, effective with the preliminary election in September of 1983.

City Council committees are established under the Rules of the City Council. Prior to 1910, the Board of Aldermen and the Common Council both had their own Rules and established their own standing committees and special committees. The two bodies came together for joint standing committees and joint special committees. From 1910 to the present, the President of the City Council appoints members to standing and special committees. Committees hold hearings to discuss matters and hear testimony from the public.

Scope and Contents note

This collection includes transcripts of City Council committee hearings dating from 1886-1937. It is not a comprehensive collection of all committee hearings from this time period. The transcripts in this collection are filed chronologically in the record cartons. However, the transcripts are organized by committee in this finding aid. The transcripts are typewritten verbatim records of hearings on various topics including building limits, bicycle path on the common, automobile vehicles, Woburn rifle range, municipal lighting et al.

Related Material

Collection #0100.001: City Council proceedings
### Series I: Hearing transcripts

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