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Rapid City has changed its form of government four times since it was incorporated as a city in 1883 and has been under every form of municipal government permitted by state law except one. That form is the mayor-council with a city manager.

While there is a current effort to change the present aldermanic form to a commissioner form, no petitions had been filed at city hall as of Friday.

While the electorate changed city government four times there have been numerous elections to change which failed; four during the reign of the city manager-commissioner form before the fifth effort was successful and twice under the present form.

Once there was an effort to remove the governing body through a recall election which might be called ed unsuccessful since all the incumbents were returned to office. But that is another story.

The old “hay camp” started out with the aldermanic form in 1883 under Mayor James H. Whitney and an eight-member common council since the city then had only forty wards. This form lasted 25 years until people voted in 1909 to change to the five-man commission.

Under the five-man commission, all members of the governing body are elected at large with one candidate running for mayor and the commissioners running for office with specific responsibility in the administration of the city.

These areas of authority are the commissioners of streets, the commissioner of finance, the commissioner of water and sewer, and the commissioner of police and fire.

After the voters approved the change by 341 to 297, the new governing body was elected at the regular annual election in April 1910. The first five-man commission was composed of R. J. Jackson as mayor and William Dodge, James Brennan, A. L. Overpack and John McElroy Jr. as the four commissioners.

This form lasted only four years until 1914 when the voters decided by 464 to 243 that a three-man commission would be better. Under this form the mayor assumed the additional responsibility of police and fire and public welfare and the two commissioners were elected officials responsible for the public responsibility through mutual agreement.

The first three-member commission was composed of William E. Robinson as mayor and Ethan Allen and John D. Newcomer as commissioners.

This form lasted only seven years. In January 1921, voters decided 588 to 270 to go to the city manager form with a nine-member commission. Under state law, when a city manager is hired as the chief administrator the governing body can be either the nine-man commission or the mayor-council form.

Since the election merely asked the voters to approve hiring a city manager, the three-man commission was expanded to nine members all of whom were elected at large.

At the subsequent annual municipal election the nine commissioners elected were George Philip, Charles P. Tittle, Harry Wentrzy, C. E. Gray, Julius Linde, A. K. Thomas, A. B. Claypoole, August F. Reiners and George F. Schneider.

Gray, who was the mayor under the old government, was named by his eight colleagues to remain in that office. The commission also appointed A. W. Vincent, a local man, as the first city manager. He was selected from among nearly 70 applicants from all over the country.

This form endured for more than 35 years with four attempts to change without success.

In 1958 voters turned down a proposal to return to the five-man commission. In 1941 a choice of either the three-man or five-man commission failed as did another effort in 1944. In 1948 a proposal to change to the aldermanic form failed but in November 1959, by a nearly 2 to 1 margin, the voters threw out the city manager-commission government and approved returning to the five-man commission.

Twice in the last 18 years under this form of government the public has voted against any change; in 1961 and again in 1963. The last effort asked to change to the mayor-council-city manager form. It went down to defeat nearly two to one.

Petitions presently are being circulated to call for a change back to the five-man commission. There is some feeling that the increasing burden of city business would merit a full-time governing body with elected officials responsible for the various departments of government.