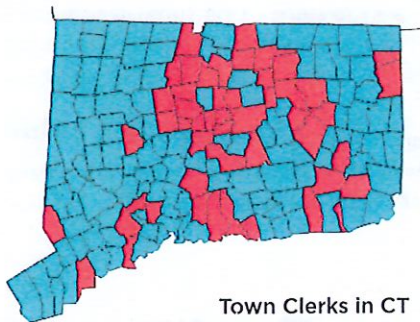


# Debate Over Elected vs Appointed

CCM intern walks us through two ways of selecting local officials

By Matt Labanara

In Connecticut towns and cities, there are two ways of selecting our local officials: either by electing them or through appointment by a municipality's CEO (chief elected official). In reviewing local charters throughout Connecticut, I looked into which municipalities hold elections for town clerks, treasurers, and tax collectors, and which ones are appointed. There has been some debate over whether some cities and towns should move their local officials to become either elected or appointed. There



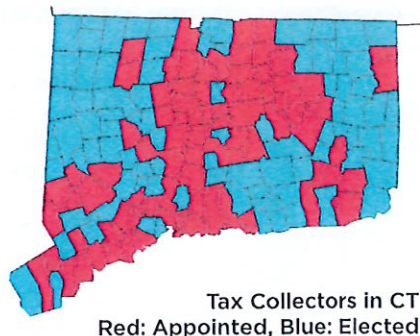
are certain benefits and disadvantages to each selection method.

Currently, there are 119 municipalities with elected town clerks, while 50 appoint theirs. 87 towns and cities hold elections for their tax collectors and 82 have systems of appointment. For the position of treasurer, 102 are elected while 67 are appointed. A majority of municipalities in Hartford County opt to appoint all three of these officials rather than electing them. Many coastline cities and towns in Fairfield County also have appointed treasurers and tax collectors. Municipalities that do not operate under a local charter follow Connecticut state law (Conn. Gen. Stat. § 9-189) which calls for all three of these positions to be elected.

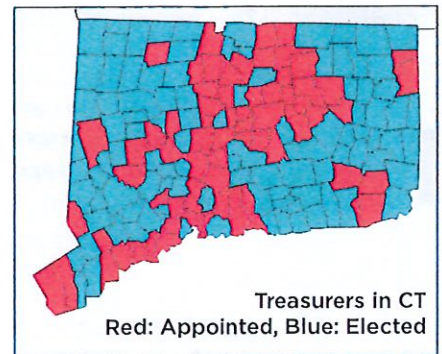
Those who believe that their local officials should be elected argue that it is a natural element of democracy for the people of a town

or city to have a say in who runs their government. They are also concerned about the potential for a conflict of interest, as appointed officials may feel obligated to interests of their CEO rather than their constituency. The Rose Institute of State and Local Government at Claremont McKenna College notes that electing local officials discourages "bureaucratic cronyism" while also ensuring that elected officials are adapting to the needs and concerns of voters. Even though there are no formal qualification requirements for elected officials, voters are still likely to consider experience and expertise in a particular area when voting for these positions.

There are also strong arguments for keeping town clerks, tax collectors, and treasurers appointed by their CEO's. Some feel that it is unnecessary to politicize a non-representational position. Unlike elected positions, appointed roles require some form of experience and skills in order to be selected. In addition, a study from the National Bureau of Economic Research analyzed the effectiveness of city treasurers regarding debt management. They found that appointed treasurers were able to reduce their cities' borrowing costs by about 13% as compared to elected treasurers. The study concludes that "appointed officials conducting the more-technical monetary and regulatory policy, and elected officials conducting the less-technical fiscal policy, is appropriate."



While the majority of Connecticut municipalities use elections to decide their local officials, some are revising their charters to change the selection process. New Britain recently switched the positions of revenue collector and town clerk to both become appointed rather than elected. It is unclear whether this change will be replicated across other Connecticut cities and towns. The debate over elected versus appointed officials will likely continue for years to come as local politicians work to determine the best selection methods for their municipalities.



## References

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