

Ward Representation In Newton:  
Lots of Other Cities Have It — With Great Results  
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Summary

The Charter Commissioners believe that local representation is bad for Newton; that we should not have any Ward councilors. Is it true? Is ward representation bad for Newton?

Newton is ranked by the Wall Street Journal (WSJ) as the Number 1 Best City in the country. So Ward representation has not made Newton a terrible place. But we can dig deeper and look at the WSJ's full list of 50 Best U.S. cities. In that list, there are 43 cities comparable to Newton.

It turns out that 60% of those Best cities have ward representation. So the idea that local representation is bad for a city is — that idea is simply wrong.

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Introduction: the issue of ward representation

The Charter Commission wants to eliminate Ward representation in Newton. Right now, we have 24 councilors. Eight are elected specifically by the ward where they live; the other 16 are elected "at-large," which means city-wide. The Commission wants all councilors to be elected at-large.

Is there hard data to support or refute the Commission's view? We decided to look at cities that are considered particularly good places to live. If local representation is prevalent among excellent cities, we can conclude that local representation is not to be feared and in fact is likely to contribute to the excellence of a city.

Wall Street Journal's list of best cities

The Wall Street Journal (WSJ) compiles a list of the 50 Best U.S. Cities.<sup>1</sup> WSJ bases their selection on multiple factors, using a well-considered methodology. The 2016 list includes Newton, which has the honor of being ranked #1, the very best city in the U.S. to live in.

Most of the cities on the list are comparable in size to Newton, but we eliminated 6 cities because they had over 200,000 people<sup>2</sup>, which is more than twice the size of Newton. We also eliminated Newton itself from the list because the point of this exercise is to compare all the other cities to Newton. So we're left with 43 cities. See the data in the chart below.

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<sup>1</sup> Only cities over 65,000 population are considered. For more information see <https://www.usatoday.com/story/money/2016/10/28/americas-50-best-citiesto-live-24-7-wallst/92826664/>

<sup>2</sup> Population figures for the WSJ list came from the 2010 U.S. Census. The WSJ rankings were published in 2014.

WSJ Rank	City	Population	Total Council Size	Number At-large	Number Local	Has Local Councilors
50	Westland, MI	84,000	7	7	-	
49	Kenosha, WI	99,000	17	-	17	Yes
47	St. Charles, MO	65,000	10	-	10	Yes
46	Cape Coral, FL	154,000	7	7	-	
45	Warwick, RI	82,000	9	-	9	Yes
44	Sioux Falls, SD	154,000	8	3	5	Yes
43	Alexandria, VA	140,000	6	6	-	
42	Clifton, NJ	84,000	7	7	-	
41	Sterling Heights, MI	130,000	6	6	-	
40	West Jordan, UT	103,000	6	2	4	Yes
39	Layton, UT	67,000	5	5	-	
38	Rio Rancho, NM	87,000	6	-	6	Yes
36	Cranston, RI	80,000	9	3	6	Yes
35	Norman, OK	111,000	8	-	8	Yes
34	Broken Arrow, OK	99,000	5	1	4	Yes
33	Quincy, MA	92,000	9	3	6	Yes
32	Nashua, NH	86,000	15	6	9	Yes
31	Longmont, CO	86,000	6	3	3	Yes
30	Orem, UT	88,000	6	6	-	
28	Hoover, AL	82,000	7	7	-	
26	Centennial, CO	100,000	8	-	8	Yes
25	Fort Collins, CO	144,000	6	-	6	Yes
24	Waukesha, WI	71,000	15	-	15	Yes
23	Olathe, KS	126,000	6	2	4	Yes
22	Meridian, ID	75,000	6	6	-	
21	Beaverton, OR	90,000	5	5	-	
19	Naperville, IL	142,000	8	8	-	
18	Charleston, SC	120,000	12	-	12	Yes
17	Richardson, TX	99,000	6	2	4	Yes
16	Missouri City, TX	67,000	6	2	4	Yes
15	Weston, FL	65,000	4	4	-	
14	Edmond, OK	81,000	4	-	4	Yes
13	New Rochelle, NY	77,000	6	-	6	Yes
12	Carmel, IN	79,000	7	2	5	Yes
11	Boca Raton, FL	84,000	5	-	5	Yes
10	Johns Creek, GA	77,000	6	6	-	
9	Flower Mound, TX	65,000	5	5	-	
8	Cary, NC	135,000	6	2	4	Yes
7	Troy, MI	81,000	6	6	-	
5	Evanston, IL	74,000	9	-	9	Yes
4	Pleasanton, CA	70,000	4	4	-	
3	Mountain View, CA	74,000	7	7	-	
2	Bellevue, WA	122,000	7	3	4	Yes
1	Newton, MA	85,000	24	16	8	Yes

Findings and conclusions from the WSJ list

The main finding is that 26 (60%) of the 43 Best cities have local (district or ward) councilors. So we can say with confidence that as a general rule there is no apparent downside to having local representation. If anything, the results suggest an upside, since 60% of these cities do have local representation, and all of them are deemed excellent cities.

It's also striking (a secondary finding) that wherever we find local representation, there are at least as many local councilors as at-large ones.

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A second data set: The Charter Commission's list of cities

The Charter Commission assembled their own list of 19 Massachusetts cities most similar in size to Newton). The Commission list displays the number of locally elected councilors in each city and the number of at-large ones. Thus, we can learn from it how many Massachusetts cities have local representation, just as we were able to do for the WSJ Best cities. Unfortunately, there is no excellence rating of these Massachusetts cities, so we can't say whether local representation is correlated with excellence.

The table below shows the relevant numbers.

City	Population	Total Council Size	Number At-large	Number Local	Has Local Councilors
Peabody	52,000	11	5	6	Yes
Chicopee	56,000	13	4	9	Yes
Revere	54,000	11	5	6	Yes
Taunton	56,000	9	9	-	
Medford	57,000	7	7	-	
Haverhill	60,000	9	9	-	
Malden	61,000	11	3	8	Yes
Waltham	62,000	15	6	9	Yes
Lawrence	78,000	9	3	6	Yes
Somerville	79,000	11	4	7	Yes
Fall River	89,000	9	9	-	
Lynn	92,000	11	4	7	Yes
Quincy	93,000	9	3	6	Yes
Brockton	94,000	11	4	7	Yes
New Bedford	95,000	11	5	6	Yes
Cambridge	107,000	9	9	-	
Lowell	109,000	9	9	-	
Springfield	154,000	13	5	8	Yes
Worcester	183,000	11	6	5	Yes

<i>Newton</i>	<i>88,000</i>	<i>24</i>	<i>16</i>	<i>8</i>	Yes
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### Findings and conclusions from the Charter Commission's data

We see the same patterns in the Commission list that we saw in the WSJ list, but a bit more pronounced. Local representation is the norm. Of the 19 Massachusetts cities on the list, 13 of them — 68%-- have local representation. That is slightly higher than the 60% we saw in the WSJ list.

Also, as with the WSJ cities, when there is local representation, the local reps are in the majority. All but one of the 13 locally-represented cities have more local councilors than at-large ones. For the WSJ list, the situation was precisely the same: all but one of the relevant cities had more local councilors than at-large ones.

Finally, although we don't have objective ratings of how excellent the Massachusetts cities are, we can still take a look at the six that lack local representation. These all-at-large cities are

Taunton	Fall River
Medford	Cambridge
Haverhill	Lowell

None of these cities are on the WSJ Best list. Several of them are well known to have pronounced economic and social problems. Certainly there are many reasons aside from city council structure that makes life difficult in some of these cities. But it's very instructive to look at the situation in one of these all-at-large cities, the city of Lowell.

Lowell is 40 percent minority, one of the highest percentages of any city in Massachusetts. Yet in Lowell, "there isn't a single non-white municipal elected official on the nine-member city council or the six-member school committee," as author Ted Siefer notes.<sup>3</sup>

He goes on to explain: "...at-large voting systems have fallen out of favor in Massachusetts and in other parts of the country, specifically because of their tendency to lead to the underrepresentation of minorities. In 1981, after a campaign by voting rights activists, Boston residents voted to end exclusive at-large voting, in favor of the current system of nine district and four at-large councilors. In the South, federal judges have ruled that entirely at-large voting schemes violate the Voting Rights Act of 1965. Ferguson, Missouri — the country's latest emblem for racial discord — is currently facing a lawsuit that seeks to end at-large voting for its school board."

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### Overall conclusion

We examined two data sets: the WSJ list of Best cities, and the Charter Commission's list of Massachusetts cities. The data we have seen leads us clearly to the conclusion that Newton's Charter Commission has taken a wrong turn. Local representation is the norm, and evidence suggests that it is more likely to be good for a city than bad. Newton should retain local representation.

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<sup>3</sup> "Why whites control Lowell city government" in Commonwealth Magazine, Spring 2016. The link is <http://commonwealthmagazine.org/politic/why-whites-control-lowell-city-government/>