



## CITY COUNCILS

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**CITY COUNCILS** (*anjoman-e šahr*) in Persia.

*The origins of municipalities.* Until the late 13th/early 20th century most cities were run by ward (*maḥalla*) leaders and other prominent local personalities (see [cities iii. administration and social organization](#)), who would gather to consider action whenever a communal need arose: organizing a public celebration, establishing relief centers during drought, and the like. During the reign of Nāṣer-al-Dīn Shah (1264-1313/1848-96), as contact with the West increased, the idea of an organization to run the affairs of Tehran and keep it clean gained ground. The Edāra-ye eḥtesābīya (Office for public order) was created, and Maḥmūd Khan Kāšānī Eḥtesāb Āqāsī (later Eḥtesāb-al-Molk) was appointed its director (Maḥbūbī, p. 129). In 1306/1888-89, when Moḥammad-Ḥasan Khan E'temād-al-Salṭana, minister of publications (*enṭebā'āt*), supervised the office, the staff totaled 278 people, including the chief (*ra'īs*), his deputies (*nāyeb*s), officers (*šāḥeb-manšabs*), water carriers (*saqqā's*), and runners (*farrāšes*; E'temād-al-Salṭana, p. 377). The residential quarters continued to maintain their own organizations, however, and ad hoc councils continued to function and to assist the office of public order. In 1326/1907, after the [Constitutional Revolution](#), the Majles (parliament) established corporate municipalities (*baladīyas*) for the first time in Persia.

*Evolution of elected city councils.* The Supplement (*motammem*) to the [Constitution](#) of 1324/1906 stipulated the creation of local councils with power to supervise matters affecting the public welfare; in the same year the Majles



ratified a bill requiring that in each city the public should directly elect a number of individuals to a city council (*anjoman-e baladīya*, later *anjoman-e šahr*), which was to have limited powers to supervise municipal affairs in cooperation with a mayor appointed by the government.

In 1314 Š./1935 the bill was amended to increase the powers of the councils. They were given authority to determine urban tax rates (*‘awārez*) and to scrutinize municipal income and expenditures. Furthermore, the election of council members was to take place in two stages: After elections in each city the Ministry of the interior would select candidates from among those with the most votes and recommend them to the cabinet for approval.

Because it limited the authority of the councils and allowed the government the final choice of council members, this law was unpopular. As a result, in 1334 Š./1956 a new municipalities law (*Qānūn-e šahr-dārī*) was passed; it was amended in 1345 Š./1966. Municipalities were defined as establishments responsible for conduct of urban affairs: construction of streets and squares, public gardens, and parks; supplies of light and water; sanitation and hygiene; supervision of general and physical education; measures against floods and fire; organizing the affairs of merchants and shopkeepers; supervision of food and people’s daily needs; supervision of public places like coffeehouses, restaurants, and cinemas; and reviewing the overall urban plan (see [cities iv. urbanization and modernization in persia](#)), with the right to final determination (*Wezārat-e kešvar*, pp. 1-3, 22-29; *Komīsiūn-e mellī*, II, p. 1074). Any center of 5,000 or more inhabitants could be constituted as a municipality. The powers of the city councils were considerably increased, and they were granted the right to appoint and dismiss mayors. Council members were to be elected directly by the people for terms of four years.

The law established five categories of municipality, based on the size of the population, and specified the size of the city council for each: 5,000-10,000 five members, 10,000-50,000 seven members, 50,000-100,000 nine members, 100,000-250,000 twelve members, more than 250,000 fifteen members. The city council of Tehran, which had thirty members, was excluded from this classification (*Komīsiūn-e mellī*, II, p. 1075). While a council was being formed or an election was in progress the Ministry of the interior was responsible for urban administration.

*Duties of city councils.* The main duties of city councils, as defined in the law, included good management and safeguarding of the city’s assets and finances,



as well as supervision of its income and expenditures; ratification of the annual municipal budget and its allocations; approval and supervision of municipal contracts; municipal programs related to health and hygiene; ratification of municipal taxes (*‘awārez-e šahr-dārī*); construction of public laundries (*raḳtšūy-kāna*), latrines (*ābrīz*), and cemeteries and arrangements for hygienic transfer of the dead; regulation of cinemas and theaters, public transport, electricity, and other urban services; control of prices for food and other essentials; approval of construction and expansion of urban streets, squares, and public gardens; appointment of the mayor for a period of two years and his dismissal for valid cause; and approval of municipal statutes (Wezārat-e kešvar, pp. 22-29).

*Method of work.* The city-councils law of 1345 Š./1966 was implemented, after some delay, in 1347 Š./1968-69. The first council to convene was that of Tehran. It drafted and approved a set of rules and regulations (*ā’in-nāma*) to serve as guidelines in the discharge of its duties; its forty-one articles served as a model for other city councils. The first order of business was to formalize the selection of a new mayor for Tehran. One day before the formal nomination of the mayor the government would tell the chairman of the council the name of the man it had designated for the post. The chairman would inform the members, who would then vote for the mayor designate in a “secret” ballot. Twelve commissions, headed by council members, were established to take charge of negotiations and contracts; financial affairs; budget and organization of the municipality; town planning and reconstruction; urban taxes; public hygiene; daily needs; guild affairs; urban services; general and physical education; legal affairs; and liaison with neighborhood councils.

Each commission consisted of five members, and no individual could sit on more than two commissions. Proposals to the council were referred to the relevant commission or commissions, where they were debated before appropriate officials and sometimes even the mayor and experts, who would be called on to offer further explanations. The council met once a week in open session, attended by the mayor, reporters, and spectators. At these meetings reports from the commissions were reviewed and debated, and the testimony of municipal officials was heard. When a motion was passed, the chairman of the council would convey the decision to the mayor in an official letter.

The Tehran city council reviewed and acted on 577 proposals in its first year (*Eṭṭelā’āt-e sāl-e 1350*, pp. 535-50). Another initiative taken by this council and



emulated in the provinces was appraisal of the city's master plan, an outline of proposed expansion for the next twenty-five years, which had been completed in 1350 Š./1972 under the supervision of the Ministry of housing and development; the council debated the plan at a meeting attended by representatives of the public, particularly neighborhood-council members and parliamentary deputies from Tehran. The result was an addition of thirty-two explanatory articles (*Eṭṭelā'āt-e sāl-e 1351*, pp. 337-53).

*City councils after 1357 Š./1978-79.* All city councils were dissolved after the Islamic Revolution, and in 1358 Š./1979 the revolutionary council passed a law (Qānūn-e šūrāhā-ye maḥallī) stipulating the formation of local councils (*šūrā*) on five administrative levels: village (*deh*), rural district (*baḳš*), city (*šahr*), county (*šahrestān*), and province (*ostān*). Members of village and city councils were to be elected by popular vote. In the new Constitution eight articles (VII, C-CVI) were devoted to the definition of local councils. In 1361 Š./1982 a law for the formation of Islamic civil councils (Qānūn-e taškīlāt-e šūrāhā-ye eslāmī-e kešvarī) established eight types of councils, ranging in constituency from the village to the nation as a whole. The Islamic city councils were granted duties and authority similar to those under previous laws (Wezārat-e kešvar, pp. 856-74), but such councils have not yet been formed. In 1364 Š./1985 a new law provided that until Islamic city councils were established the minister of the interior would manage the municipalities.

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