Elected to represent you. Assigned to oversee departments.

Why Palos Park should modernize its government

Steve Desmond | Steve for Safety | Veterans Day | November 11, 2026

Palos Park voters elect commissioners to the Village Council. They do not vote separately on who will oversee police, finances, streets, or public property. Departmental responsibilities are assigned afterward through a Council majority vote. [1]

Winning a Council seat does not, by itself, establish the expertise needed to administer a municipal department.

That distinction matters. Residents deserve elected representatives who listen, establish priorities, scrutinize spending, and demand results. They also deserve qualified professional management with clear responsibility for carrying out those priorities.

My proposal is straightforward: Council governs. Manager manages. Residents get answers.

Why the structure deserves to change

Palos Park adopted commission government when it incorporated in 1914. Its history deserves respect, but the structure should be judged by how well it serves residents today. [2]

I believe combining elected policymaking with responsibility for individual departments is a dated approach. It can complicate coordination, blur responsibility, and make it harder to separate independent oversight from administration.

Consider a recurring traffic-safety concern. Addressing it may require police enforcement, public works, funding, and coordination with IDOT. Residents should not have to navigate those responsibilities themselves. Someone should coordinate the response, explain the next steps, and report what happened.

The same principle applies to infrastructure, permits, spending, and other Village services.

We already have a manager. We need clearly defined responsibility.

Palos Park's published code gives the Village Manager broad administrative responsibilities, including administrative control over departments subject to the governing authorities' direction. The police provisions also make the chief answerable to the mayor through the Public Health and Safety Commissioner. [3, 4]

Residents should know how this works in practice: who is in charge and who must answer when something goes wrong.

A public review should make clear who runs daily operations, brings departments together, evaluates their work, and answers for unresolved problems.

What I would change

I support a clear division of responsibility.

The mayor and Council should represent residents, establish policy, approve budgets, examine alternatives, and hold the manager accountable for performance.

The Village Manager should have clearly defined authority to coordinate daily administration and supervise department heads, consistent with applicable law. Department heads should remain responsible for their professional functions.

Residents would retain direct access to the mayor and every commissioner. Their elected representatives would continue to advocate for them and question results.

Professional management must remain accountable to elected leadership. Illinois' statutory managerial form provides for a manager appointed by—and removable by a majority of—the elected governing body. [5]

What residents should experience

Every concern should enter a consistent process:

- A timely acknowledgment.
- An identified person responsible for handling it.
- Clear next steps and reasonable updates.
- An explanation of the outcome, including any limits on what the Village can do.

Acknowledging a concern is the beginning. Residents deserve thoughtful follow-through.

Will officials support a change that reduces their departmental authority?

Reform would ask elected officials to give up individual administrative responsibilities and concentrate on governing together. Some may support that change; others may prefer the existing arrangement.

Residents should ask every candidate: Will you support a public review—even if its recommendations reduce your own authority?

I will apply that standard to myself as mayor. The test should be what best serves residents, and any change requiring voter approval should go before them.

How we get there

First, determine what we can fix under the current rules and show residents the changes. If our form of government stands in the way, put a specific proposal for changing it before residents.

I will ask for a public legal review so residents know what we can change now, what needs an ordinance change, and what must go to voters. Illinois law provides a referendum process for adopting the statutory managerial form. [6]

Before asking for your vote on a change, I will explain how it would work, what the transition would cost, and how we would measure improvement. A new structure alone will not fix poor service. People still have to do their jobs and answer for the results.

Preserve Palos Park’s character. Modernize how its government works.

Every resident should know who is handling a concern, what happens next, and who must answer for the result.

Sources and scope

Sources reviewed October 15, 2026. This is a campaign position paper. Structural concerns and proposed benefits are assessments, not findings that the governmental structure caused a specific service failure. Published ordinances should be checked against current official records before implementing changes.

[1] Illinois Municipal Code, 65 ILCS 5/4-5-3, departmental designations by Council majority. https://www.ilga.gov/Documents/legislation/ilcs/documents/006500050K4-5-3.htm

[2] Village of Palos Park, History, incorporation in 1914 under commission government. https://www.palospark.org/269/History

[3] Palos Park Village Code, section 238.04, Village Manager powers and duties. https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/palospark/latest/palospk_il/0-0-0-27212

[4] Palos Park Village Code, section 248.03, police supervision and reporting. https://codelibrary.amlegal.com/codes/palospark/latest/palospk_il/0-0-0-27359

[5] Illinois Municipal Code, 65 ILCS 5/5-3-7, statutory manager appointment and removal. https://ilga.gov/documents/legislation/ilcs/documents/006500050K5-3-7.htm

[6] Illinois Municipal Code, 65 ILCS 5/5-1-4, adoption of managerial form. https://www.ilga.gov/Documents/legislation/ilcs/documents/006500050K5-1-4.htm