

The council also underwent modification in its early years. In 1808 the use of electors to select the second branch was discontinued in favor of direct popular elections, and the property requirements for council members were also sharply curtailed. An increase in population led to the redistricting of Baltimore's fourteen wards into twenty in 1845. Because of the increase in the number of wards, representation in the first branch was reduced from two members to one member per ward to maintain a manageably sized body. Concurrent reorganization of the second branch provided for the election of delegates from every two contiguous wards.

In 1860, the mayor had his authority abruptly diminished in some areas. The state stripped the executive of its jurisdiction over the local police and created the Board of Police Commissioners to superintend the force. This action was justified by the inability - or unwillingness - of the Baltimore police to put down the violent election riots of the 1850s. Pointing to the city's laxity concerning fair voting procedures, the state also transferred responsibility of election supervision from the mayor to the police commissioners.

The influence of the mayor continued to expand during the second half of the nineteenth century. Mayoral initiative guided the growth of the city bureaucracy, and most new jobs created were tied into mayoral patronage. Despite this single source of power, the city government developed haphazardly; by the late 1890s over forty municipal agencies existed, all of which functioned independently of one another.

A remedy was sought in 1898 when Mayor William T. Malster appointed a commission to frame a new city charter. Quickly approved, the charter consolidated the profusion of city agencies into nine departments. The most significant change was the creation of a Board of Estimates charged with determining the municipal budget. As the mayor and two of his appointees formed a majority on the five member board, the executive gained centralized control of budgetary matters.

The 1898 municipal charter drastically reduced the power of the city council. Previously the joint ways and means committee of the council annually set the municipal tax rate and the appropriations schedule for municipal departments. With establishment of the Board of Estimates, the council could only reduce appropriations in the budget as prepared by the board. Through the mayor's domination of the board, his power increased while that of the council ebbed. The desire for greater council efficiency led in 1922 to the restructuring from a bicameral to a unicameral body. Three delegates elected from each of the six newly created councilmanic districts served four year terms. This system remains in effect today.