



The Citizen Advocacy Center's Guide for Elected Officials

(Created 07/2007)

Elected officials must learn about the complexities of municipal government primarily through experience. This often makes it difficult for newly elected officials to gain the knowledge necessary to carry out their duties. The Citizen Advocacy Center has created this brochure so newly elected officials can receive a general overview of municipal government as well as for the general public seeking basic information about local government.

Note: While the contents of this brochure apply to cities, villages, and towns, the term "City" is used generally to refer to a local government.

Forms of Local Government

Council-Manager

Most Chicagoland suburbs use what is known as the Council-Manager form of local government. Typically, towns with a population of at least 12,000 utilize this form of local government. The Council-Manager system includes:

- 1) **City Council:** The city council is elected by voters either at-large or by wards. A typical City Council contains between five and fifteen members and composes the legislative branch of the local government.
- 2) **Mayor:** The mayor is the head of the executive branch of the local government, acts as the presiding officer during meetings, and carries out ceremonial duties.
- 3) **City Manager:** The City Manager handles government operations and executes policy as formed by the City Council.
- 4) **Municipal Departments:** The Council-Manager system divides the government into various departments, including, but not limited to:
 - Urban Planning and Zoning
 - Economic Development and Tourism
 - Public Works
 - Parks and Recreation
 - Police
 - Fire
 - Emergency Medical Service
 - Emergency Management
 - Accounting/Finance
 - Human Resources
 - Legal, including Risk Management
 - Transportation
 - Information Technology
 - Housing

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Mayor-Council

While larger municipalities use the Council-Manager form of local government, smaller towns generally use the Mayor-Council system. The Mayor-Council form of government contains many of the same characteristics as the Council-Manager form. However, there are two different structures within the Mayor-Council system:

"Weak Mayor": The Ceremonial or "Weak Mayor" structure is comprised of a strong City Council that has executive and legislative powers. The City Council also has the power to appoint officials and approval mayoral nominations. As indicated by the name, the Mayor does not have great power within the executive branch of government.

"Strong Mayor: The Executive or "Strong Mayor" system is formed by a powerful Mayor in the Executive Branch and a weaker City Council. Within this system, the Mayor may choose a chief administrator to oversee department heads, prepare the budget, and assist in organizing departments. The Mayor also has veto and line-item veto power within this system. As the name implies, the "Strong Mayor" system takes power from the City Council and gives it to the Mayor.

General Overview of Local Government Officials

Municipal employees include both elected officers and staff hired by the city. While each municipality has different elected and non-elected officials, city officials generally include the following positions:

- Mayor (presiding officer)
- City Clerk (local election official)
- Treasurer (finance expert)
- Aldermen (members of City Council)

Municipal Staff is typically composed of employees such as:

- Police Chief
- Finance Director
- Assistant Administrator for Community Development
- City Manager (also called the City Administrator)
- City Attorney

In some municipalities, the Mayor appoints the City Attorney and the City Manager with the City Council's consent. Otherwise, the City Council or other qualified bodies appoint these positions. Secretarial staff and interns help with administration to assist the City Manager. Administrative staff members also assist with city departments, community and intergovernmental policy, economic advancement, special assignments and employee contract consultations.

Legislative Branch

City Council:

- Delineates powers to various officials
- Calls meetings to discuss additional issues such as the sale of property or annexation
- Remains entrusted with city funds
- Confirms or rejects appointments of positions such as City Clerk and City Treasurer and may appoint certain officers and members of committees/commissions
- In session, may form motions, resolutions, and ordinances
- Confirms and establishes the budget
- Imposes taxes
- Distributes contracts
- Has direct control of the City Manager and City Attorney, who are generally appointed with the Council's consent

City Council members have the difficult task of representing their constituency while staying true to their point of view on an issue. This mandates open communication between public officials and constituents and clear explanations from public officials explaining why and how decisions are made.

Council terminology:

City Council members are typically called **aldermen**. Aldermen produce **motions**, or proposals. Within the City Council, motions can become either resolutions or ordinances. A **resolution** is usually a temporary measure to permit the Mayor or Clerk to sign contracts. An **ordinance** is a municipal law created to reform or add to the Municipal Code. Examples of ordinances unrelated to amending the Municipal Code are those that involve taxes, annexation, and the sale of property.

State law requires government meetings in Illinois to be open to the public, but for very limited circumstances. State law also requires public bodies to post meeting agendas at least 48 hours before the

meeting takes place. For more information please see the Citizen Advocacy Center's Open Meetings Act brochure.(Insert OMA cite)

Standing Committees:

Aldermen are typically divided into committees such as the Finance, Community Development and Planning, and Public Safety Committees. The Mayor appoints the chairs and members of the various committees with the approval of the City Council. Most City Council work is accomplished during committee meetings, however, any action approved in committee must also be approved by the full City Council.

There are four fairly standard committees within municipal government:

Public Works and Buildings Committee:

- Strives to provide vehicular safety
- Maintains streets, sidewalks, sewers, etc.
- Supervises all public works and buildings within the city

Public Affairs and Safety Committee:

- Supervises municipal licensing/regulation programs
- Regulates and manages public transportation
- Administers educational activities and safety
- Maintains traffic control signs

Finance Committee

- Discusses and manages policy relating to:
 - Expenditures
 - Spending
 - Employees
 - Finances and appropriations
 - Data processing
 - Indemnities
 - Public improvement funding

Developing, Planning, and Zoning Committee:

- Controls policy involving:
 - Economic progress
 - Construction of buildings and homes
 - Planning
 - Zoning

Some cities utilize a **Committee of the Whole** so that every member of the Council is a member of each committee. With the Committee of the Whole, the committee meetings often follow the same rules of procedure as City Council meetings.

Executive Branch

Mayor:

- Acts as Chief Executive Officer of the city
- Presides over sessions of the City Council
- Attends City Council meetings and votes in the event of a tie

- Has the power to appoint a chief deputy to act as Mayor if the Mayor is absent or becomes disabled
- Signs authorized documents of municipal government
- Possesses the power to approve and/or veto certain ordinances, resolutions, and motions approved by the City Council (such power is only present in a “Strong Mayor” form of local government)
- Appoints both the City Attorney and City Manager with the City Council’s approval (in some municipalities)
- Shares certain powers with the City Council such as defining the roles of officers and workers, maintaining the budget to guide spending and profits, and distributing funds for use by the city government
- In certain municipalities, the Mayor also serves as the Local Liquor Commissioner and thus enforces all laws dealing with the possession and distribution of liquor. This includes the powers to: examine liquor license applicants, hold investigations regarding violations, invalidate liquor licenses, and suspend liquor dealers’ licenses. The Mayor may also appoint a Liquor Commissioner to complete these duties.

A Mayor’s primary job entails policy-making and continually consulting with city staff to discuss issue of public concern and how those issues affect city policy and decision-making. For example, in an interview with Mayor Marcucci of Elmhurst, he stated that the Mayor is also the City Liquor Commissioner. In addressing issues that arise as Liquor Commission, he opined that generating revenue is not his primary concern, as revenue received by the city for liquor ordinance violation is nominal. Rather, his primary concern was the safety of children. In a similar interview, the Mayor Brummel also discussed policy making as the primary role of the mayor, and the how issues can become complex very quickly. For example, Mayor Brummel discussed the issue of mosquito control and how the city has to balance mosquito control, which can result in harmful carcinogens being sprayed into the air with the necessity to control mosquitoes due to public safety and health concerns, such as the West Nile Virus.

City Clerk:

- Secures official documents, accounts, and the city seal
- Keeps track of records, elections, and City Council minutes. Recording City Council minutes involves noting any actions taken, including the motions, resolutions, and ordinances passed in session.
- Keeps an account of all other contracts, such as permits, licenses, and deeds
- Controls the publication of legal notices, voter registration, and the allocation of senior citizen taxi and RTA passes

The City Clerk has a unique position of not being required to vote during City Council meetings. According to Patty Spencer, the City Clerk of Elmhurst, she thinks that this makes the job very interesting as she is able to learn about all sides of the issue.

Deputy City Clerk:

- Serves as the primary assistant to the City Clerk
- Handles the daily duties to keep the city administration running smoothly
- Assists with municipal elections
- Performs secretarial duties within the department
- Assists the City Clerk in the maintenance of documents and records
- Replaces the City Clerk in the case of absence or disability

City Treasurer:

- Manages and supervises the protection and security of city finances
- Forms monthly statements, maintains receipts, and ensures that canceled warrants are updated and duplicated

City Manager:

The City Manager is the chief supervisor of the city and implement policy set by the city council. The City Manager is the head of all departments and is responsible for all the day-to-day jobs including ensuring that the streets are fixed and overseeing citizen interaction and land use. The City Manager's duties also include:

- Participating in council debates and discussions when invited, and may suggest topics of discussion, but does not vote in City Council meetings.
- Controls the appointment of department chairs
- Oversees department chairs and determines their compensation
- Creates regulations for officials to follow
- Assists in budget preparation by supplying relevant information and ensuring that other officials also provide pertinent information

Administrative Branch

Municipal government is divided into various departments in order to accomplish municipal tasks more efficiently. Some of the more common departments and their associated tasks and duties will be discussed below.

The Finance Department:

- Grants support services to the municipality
- Possesses complete control over monetary spending and accounting
- Keeps records of all spending
- Disperses municipal funds
- Records and maintains all fiscal reports and receipts
- Aids with the preparation of the budget
- Prepares expenditure reports for the City Council

Within the Finance Department, typically there is also the Information Technology Division and the Finance Department, which includes the Human Resources Division.

The Fire Department:

- Maintains safety within the city
- Contains employees who are particularly knowledgeable about:
 - Hazardous materials mitigation response
 - Rescue, especially during any type of disaster
 - Fire investigation
- Informs the public on topics such as CPR and fire safety
- Performs child seat checks to ensure the safety of children

The Emergency Services and Disaster Planning Agency (ESDA):

- Makes sure that significant warning is given out in the event of a disaster
- Ensures public safety in the event of a disaster
- Prepares the necessary precautions against hazards and disasters
- Trains and equips volunteer rescue squads

The ESDA also works to enhance city safety standards. For instance, the ESDA can establish alert radio systems in schools, hospitals, and colleges to produce warning signals during a disaster.

The Department of Planning, Zoning, and Economic Development (PZED):

- Expands and preserves the city's general development plan
- Assists with city development, especially in the areas of tourism and business retention
- Works with other municipal bodies to organize events and monitor land use

The Police Department:

- Protects the safety of the community for those who live, work, or visit the area
- Enforces all city, state, and national laws

The Public Works Department:

- Maintains streets, public parking lots, city equipment, and public buildings
- Supervises and manages the collection of sewage
- Contains numerous Divisions such as: Street Maintenance, Building Maintenance, Electrical, Forestry and Grounds Maintenance, Utility, Engineering, and Equipment Maintenance

Advisory Boards and Commissions:

Within the city, the Municipal Code provides for boards and commissions to allow the city to function efficiently. Each board and commission is composed of between three and seventeen volunteer members from the community. Elected officials serve as chairs to manage the boards and commissions.

Standard boards and commissions include:

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|-------------------------------------|----------------------------------|
| • Advisory Architectural Commission | • Historic Preservation |
| • Board of Local Improvements | • Historic Commission |
| • Building Code Board of Appeals | • Library Board of Trustees |
| • Commission on Youth | • Police Pension Fund Trustees |
| • Economic Development Commission | • Senior Citizens' Commission |
| • Fire and Police Commissioners | • Veterans' Memorial Commission |
| • Firemen's Pension Fund Trustees | • Zoning and Planning Commission |

Robert's Rules of Order

Robert's Rules of Order is a set of formal rules of procedure used to maintain order for all public gatherings, including City Council and Committee meetings. These guidelines create procedures for a meeting including:

- Calling the assembly to order
- Taking a Roll Call
- Reading the minutes from the previous meeting
- Hearing Committee reports
- Completing any Special Orders (topics previously scheduled to be discussed in this meeting)
- Unfinished business
- New business
- Announcements
- Adjournment

During meetings, public officials utilize motions to express an opinion or pass a piece of legislation. Motions include:

- Main Motions to present a new topic for discussion
- Subsidiary Motions to make amendments to the main motion
- Privileged Motions to bring up an urgent issue that is irrelevant to business
- Incidental Motions to provide a method for questioning procedures which are not necessarily related to the topic of discussion

Robert's Rules also establish guidelines for presenting motions. The following steps must be taken to present a motion:

- Only one speaker at a time may hold the floor
- The person holding floor may make the motion
- Someone must second the motion (without this step, the motion dies)
- The Chairman or Presiding officer states the motion, after which it may be amended only with the consent of the other members
- Dialogue and debate about the motion
- Vote on the motion

There are multiple methods used to vote on a motion. Members may vote by a voice vote (saying "aye" or "no" to express opinion); roll call vote (each member's name is called to give each member a chance to say "yes" or "no" to the motion); general consent vote (when asked by the presiding officer if there are any objections to the motion, silence implies consent); a division vote (raise hands or stand to show approval of the motion); or ballot (write consent or rejection of the motion on a piece of paper).

Before being approved, motions may be put "to table" or "postponed indefinitely". A motion to table is used to kill a motion. A motion to postpone indefinitely allows for the motion to be re-opened at a later date. This enables members to essentially kill a motion without officially adopting or discarding it.

FOR MORE INFORMATION

- Real People Working in Real Government by Blythe Camenson
- Civil Service Handbook 15th ed. Provided by Thomson Peterson's
- Visit the Elmhurst website at: <http://www.elmhurst.org>
- For more information about Robert's Rules of Order visit: <http://www.kenyon.edu/x21670.xml>
- Visit the Citizen Advocacy Center website for information on local government issues: <http://www.citizenadvocacycenter.org>

Special thanks to Mayor Marcucci of Elmhurst, Mayor Brummel of Warrenville, and Elmhurst City Clerk Patty Spencer for their assistance in conducting research for this brochure.

The Citizen Advocacy Center, a nonpartisan, 501(c)(3), not-for-profit organization, is dedicated to building democracy for the 21st Century by strengthening the public's capacities, resources, and institutions for self-government. If you are interested in more information, becoming a volunteer, or making a tax-deductible contribution to the Center, please feel free to contact us:

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