

HOW LOCAL GOVERNMENT SHAPES OUR DAILY LIVES

Many decisions that impact us every day — our schools, parks, libraries, roads, and public safety — are made at the local level. Here's how local government works.



STRUCTURE OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

Local governments are organized around population centers. Their agencies provide resources and services, and we elect the leaders who govern locally.

There are two layers of local government: **counties and municipalities**. Each state's constitution defines them and determines what power they have. Sometimes they are further divided into school or fire districts.



WHO GETS ELECTED

- **Mayors** represent their municipality (city/town) and lead their respective council.
- **City/town councils** and **county commissioners** review and approve local budgets and establish local ordinances.
- **School boards** set curriculum, decide school policies, and approve and oversee budgets.
- **Judges** ensure that local laws are fairly upheld.



HOW LOCAL GOVERNMENT IS FUNDED

These important services are funded by:

- **Taxes** on our personal property (land, homes, and vehicles) and in some places, sales taxes.
- **Bonds and millages** that are proposed as ballot initiatives and voted on by the public during elections. The process of how these get on ballots varies by state.



FUNCTIONS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

- **Parks & Recreation** provides green spaces, playgrounds, sports and recreation facilities and programs, community gardens, public pools, and public art.
- **Public schools** educate the majority of kids in our communities.
- **Public libraries** lend books and other resources, provide free internet and computer access, offer programs and activities, and host public meeting spaces.
- **Police departments, fire departments, and emergency medical services** keep our communities safe, protected, and supported during emergencies.
- **Municipal courts, jails, and prisons** uphold the law and address crime.
- **Public Works departments** include water, sewer, trash collection, recycling, street and sidewalk maintenance, bike lanes, fire hydrants, parking, and accessibility.
- **Public transportation** like buses and trams are vital for people without their own vehicles or the ability to drive.
- **Zoning and land use** offices regulate the development of housing and businesses.
- **Social Services** include public housing and public health initiatives like free or low-cost vaccines.
- **Advisory boards and committees** assist with everything from animal welfare to historic preservation.



WHAT ROLE DO WE PLAY?

We pay our taxes and support bonds and millages, but we can do so much more! **We can help shape our communities by staying informed about local issues, attending board meetings, volunteering on local committees, voting in every election, and even running for office ourselves.** We all play a part in creating a safe, welcoming, and enjoyable community to live in!