

## **Chapter 6**

# **Elected Officials and Council**

## **Structure and Role**

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This material is provided as general information and is not a substitute for legal advice. Consult your attorney for advice concerning specific situations.

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## HANDBOOK FOR MINNESOTA CITIES

# Chapter 6

# Elected Officials and Council

# Structure and Role

*Understand the council's role in city governance, including eligibility for office, council powers versus individual council member roles, and delegation of council power. Learn about the special roles of the mayor and clerk and use of both independent and advisory boards and commissions.*

### RELEVANT LINKS:

[Minn. Stat. § 412.02, subd. 1.](#)  
[Minn. Stat. § 412.191, subd. 1.](#)

Handbook, [The Statutory City](#).

Handbook, [The Home Rule Charter City](#).

[Minn. Const. art. VII, § 6.](#)  
[Minn. Stat. § 201.014.](#) [Minn. Stat. § 204B.06.](#) See also, *Jude v. Erdahl*, 207 N.W.2d 715 (Minn. 1973).  
[Minn. Const. art. VII, § 1.](#)

## I. Elected officials in general

The cornerstone of city government in Minnesota is the elected city council. The council makes the policies that determine a community's present and future well-being. Because people look to their local government for leadership, much of the responsibility for community development falls on the shoulders of city council members.

Although not all statutory cities have the same elective offices, all statutory cities are required to have a mayor and at least three council members. Whether a statutory city elects other officers depends on several factors, including the form of government under which it operates.

The mayor is a voting member of the council in statutory cities, and the clerk is a voting member of the council in Standard Plan cities. The mayor and clerk in all cities have some special duties. This chapter discusses the duties of these positions and the council's role in city governance.

For home rule charter cities, the city's charter specifies the type and number of elected officials.

### A. Eligibility for office

The Minnesota Constitution and state law set the qualifications for elective office. To hold elective city office, individuals must be entitled to vote at any election, at least 21 years of age on the date of taking office, U.S. citizens, and residents of the city for at least 30 days before the election. An individual who has been convicted of treason or any felony under either state or federal law cannot hold elective office in Minnesota unless the individual's civil rights have been restored. Additionally, an individual who is under a guardianship in which the court order has revoked the individual's right to vote or is found by a court of law to be legally incompetent cannot hold elective office in Minnesota.

This material is provided as general information and is not a substitute for legal advice. Consult your attorney for advice concerning specific situations.

## RELEVANT LINKS:

[Minn. Stat. § 351.02\(6\).](#)  
[Minn. Stat. § 412.02, subd. 2a.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 10A.01, subd. 26.](#)  
[Minn. Stat. § 10A.07.](#)  
[Minn. Stat. § 10A.09, subds. 1, 6a.](#)

[Statement of Economic Interest](#), Minnesota Campaign Finance Board.

[Affidavit of Official Interest in Claim](#), LMC Model Form.

LMC information memo,  
[Official Conflict of Interest](#).

[Minn. Stat. § 412.02, subd. 2.](#)  
[Minn. Stat. § 351.02.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 205.07, subd. 1a.](#)

A.G. Op. 471-M (Nov. 23, 1999).

[Minn. Stat. § 358.05.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 358.05. State v. Schram](#), 85 N.W. 155 (Minn. 1901) (concluding that the position of village marshal was a public office for purposes of an oath requirement).

If an individual fails to qualify for elective office within the allotted time, the city council can, by resolution, declare a vacancy and proceed to fill it by appointment. Individuals appointed to fill vacancies must also satisfy the requirements for elective office.

Elected officials and some appointed officials of cities with populations over 50,000 located in the seven-county metropolitan area must comply with reporting requirements regarding conflict-of-interest disclosure and economic-interest reporting. Candidates for elected office in these cities must submit statements of economic interest to the city council within 14 days of filing an affidavit of candidacy.

Individuals who accept employment as a public or local official in these cities must file the disclosure statement within 60 days of accepting employment. In both cases, the law requires the filing of annual statements.

## B. Terms of office

Terms of office in statutory cities begin on the first Monday in January after the election. The terms of the old officers in statutory cities end at this time, or as soon as the newly elected officers qualify by taking an oath and filing a bond, if one is required. If the newly elected officer refuses or fails to qualify, the incumbent officer continues to hold office until the council declares the office vacant and appoints a successor. The terms of all city council members in charter cities expire on the first Monday in January of the year in which they expire. All officers of charter cities are required to hold office until their successors qualify. The length of the various terms of office is set by state law. The attorney general has advised that a person elected to fill a vacancy is eligible to qualify and assume office once they receive an election certificate.

## C. Oath of office

Whether or not public officials need a bond, they must take and sign an oath of office before exercising any of their powers. This includes members of councils, boards, commissions, and administrative officers. This applies to appointed and elected officials.

It is not clear whether appointed city clerks or individuals holding other appointed city positions are required to take and sign an oath of office. The answer will depend on whether a particular appointed position would be considered a “public office” within the meaning of the state law requiring the oath.

## RELEVANT LINKS:

See [Minn. Const. art. V, § 6.](#)  
[Minn. Stat. § 358.05.](#)

See sample, [Oath of Office and Acceptance](#), Minnesota Secretary of State.

[Minn. Stat. § 358.08.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 358.09.](#)  
[Minn. Stat. § 358.15.](#)  
[Minn. Stat. § 358.10.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 358.52, subd. 6.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 358.11\(3\).](#)

LMC Information Memo, [LMCIT Property, Crime, Bond, and Petrofund Coverage Guide](#), Section VI-A, Bond coverage.

[Minn. Const. art. VII, § 6.](#)  
[Minn. Const. art. XII, § 3.](#)  
[Minneapolis Term Limits Coal. v. Keefe](#), 535 N.W.2d 306 (Minn. 1995).

There are no administrative opinions or court decisions that address the issue of whether an appointed city clerk holds a public office for purposes of the oath requirement. A city should seek a legal opinion from its city attorney to determine whether an individual holding a particular appointed position must take and sign an oath.

The required oath is: "I, (name), do solemnly swear that I will support the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution of the State of Minnesota, and that I will faithfully discharge the duties of the office of (insert brief description of office) of the city of (insert city), Minnesota, to the best of my judgment and ability, so help me God."

If the officer objects to an oath on religious grounds, the word "affirm" can substitute for the word "swear," and the phrase "and this I do under the penalties of perjury" can substitute for the phrase "so help me God."

Any person with authority to take and certify acknowledgments can administer the oath, including the city clerk, a justice of the peace, a notary public, or a register of deeds. City clerks in Minnesota are ex officio notary publics, meaning that they have the powers of a notary public within the state. The candidate taking the oath must lift their hand while reciting the oath. The candidate qualifying for office must take the oath and sign a copy of the oath in the presence of the administering official. The signed copy should go to the city clerk for filing. City assessors should file their copy with the county auditor.

If an officer must also submit a bond, the oath should be attached to the bond and both documents should go to the council for approval and then to the clerk for filing. The information memo linked to the left contains information about which public officers can or must be bonded.

## D. Term limits

The Minnesota Constitution establishes the eligibility requirements for public office but does not authorize the adoption of additional requirements. This means that a statutory or charter city cannot enact term limits as an eligibility requirement.

## E. Vacancies

[Minn. Stat. § 351.02.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 351.02\(1\).](#)

### 1. Death

The vacancy exists as of the date of death.

**RELEVANT LINKS:**

[Minn. Stat. § 351.02\(8\).](#)

If the elected officer has not yet begun the term of office, the vacancy exists from the date the term would have started.

## **2. Resignation**

[Minn. Stat. § 351.02\(2\).](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 351.01, subd. 1.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 351.01, subds. 2, 3, and 4.](#) See informal A.G. letter opinion dated Mar. 3, 2003 (advising that Minnesota law does not require that a written resignation be “received” by the council during a formal meeting in order to be effective).

A resigning elected public official must submit a written resignation to the council. After receiving a resignation, the council should pass a resolution stating it has received and accepted the resignation and declaring that a vacancy exists.

Unless the resignation expressly states that it will take effect at a future date, the resignation will be effective when received by the council. If the resignation states that it will take effect on a specified date, the vacancy occurs on that date if it has been received by the council or other official authorized by the council to receive documents on its behalf, even if the council has not formally accepted it at a council meeting. To withdraw a prospective resignation, the resigning officer must submit a written statement of withdrawal in the same manner as the resignation. In order to be effective, the withdrawal must be received before the council accepts the resignation by resolution or before an officer authorized to receive it has issued a written acceptance.

## **3. Removal by operation of law**

In most situations, it is not possible to remove statutory elected officials before the end of their terms, for cause or otherwise. Cities should consult with their city attorneys before attempting to remove any elected official.

Statutory city voters have no recall authority. Some home rule charters, however, give voters this option, but there remains some question as to whether this type of charter provision is constitutional.

In certain situations, removal by operation of law can occur. A vacancy occurs if an elected official is convicted of any “infamous” crime. An infamous crime is a felony – a crime for which a sentence of imprisonment for more than one year can be imposed.

For example, bribery is a felony, so a bribery conviction would result in the elected official’s immediate removal from office. Additionally, any public officer convicted of bribery is permanently disqualified from holding public office.

Misconduct of a public officer or employee, as defined by law, is a gross misdemeanor. Therefore, a misconduct conviction is not an infamous crime, and does not automatically result in an elected official’s removal from office.

[Minn. Stat. § 609.43.](#) [Minn. Stat. § 609.02, subd. 4.](#)

## RELEVANT LINKS:

Minn. Stat. § 351.02(5).  
Minn. Stat. § 358.05. Minn.  
Const. art. V, § 6.  
See Minn. Stat. §§ 609.415-  
475.

Minn. Stat. § 13D.06, subd.  
3. *Brown v. Cannon Falls  
Twp.*, 723 N.W.2d 31 (Minn.  
Ct. App. 2006). *Funk v.  
O'Connor*, 916 N.W.2d 319  
(Minn. 2018).

Minn. Stat. § 351.02(4). See  
Minn. Stat. § 200.031 for a  
list of factors considered in  
determining residency.  
A.G. Op. 126-h (Oct. 19,  
1955).

Minn. Stat. § 351.02(6).

A.G. Op. 99 (Aug. 26, 1920).

Minn. Stat. § 412.02, subd.  
2b.

A vacancy does occur, however, when an elected official is convicted of an offense involving a violation of the individual's official oath. Many offenses that are not felonies or "infamous" crimes may involve a violation of an individual's oath and may result in a vacancy upon conviction.

A vacancy also occurs if a council member is found to have intentionally violated the open meeting law in at least three separate court actions. If a court finds a third separate, intentional violation, it must declare the position vacant and notify the appointing authority or clerk.

## 4. Termination of city residency

A vacancy occurs when a city council member ceases to be a resident of the city. Residency is a factual question that the council must determine in each case. Voting in the city is only one indication of residence. The office holder's intent and availability to perform official duties are additional criteria that should be considered. A council member becomes a non-resident when the property where the council member lives is detached from the city.

## 5. Failure to qualify for office

An elected official fails to qualify for office by refusing or neglecting to take the oath of office, to give or renew an official bond, or to deposit such oath or bond within the time prescribed by law. This type of vacancy is not automatic. A newly elected official may qualify at any time prior to the council declaring the office vacant.

## 6. Abandonment

Whether abandonment of office actually occurs is difficult to determine. The intent of the office holder is the controlling factor. The attorney general, while cautioning that this is a question of fact, has indicated that failure to participate in council activities for three months is sufficient grounds for declaring abandonment of office.

## 7. 90-day absence rule

A vacancy in the office of mayor or council member may be declared by the council when the office holder is unable to serve in the office or to attend council meetings for a 90-day period because of illness, or because of absence from or refusal to attend council meetings. If any of these conditions occur, the council can, by resolution, declare a vacancy and then fill it at a regular or special council meeting.

## RELEVANT LINKS:

See LMC information memo, [Official Conflict of Interest](#), for more information.

[Minn. Stat. § 412.02, subd. 2.](#)  
[Minn. Stat. § 205.07, subd. 1a.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 351.07.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 412.02, subd. 2a.](#)  
A.G. Op. 59a-30 (July 24, 1996).

[Accepting Councilmember Resignation and Declaring a Vacancy](#), LMC Model Resolution.

[Minn. Stat. § 412.02, subd. 2a.](#)  
A.G. Op. 471-M (Oct. 30, 1986).

The appointed council member will serve for the remainder of the unexpired term, or until the absent council member is again able to resume duties and attend council meetings, whichever is earlier. When the absent council member is able to resume duties and attend council meetings, the council must, by resolution, remove the temporary office holder and restore the original office holder.

## 8. Qualifying for a second or incompatible office

If an officer accepts a second office that is incompatible with the first, the first office is automatically vacated. (Section J of this chapter discusses incompatible offices in more detail).

## 9. Expiration of elected term

Generally, the vacancy occurring at the conclusion of an incumbent's term of office is filled immediately by the successor. If no one has been elected, the incumbent fills the office until the council appoints a successor and that person qualifies for the office.

## 10. Habitual drunkenness

State law provides that the habitual drunkenness of any person holding office is good cause for removal from office.

## F. Filling vacancies

While a council might identify and declare the facts giving rise to a vacancy, for all practical purposes they occur automatically and are not based upon any removal action. Because the council must fill vacancies in elective offices, it should determine whether a vacancy exists. After investigating the facts, the council should pass a resolution declaring a vacancy and then fill it as soon as possible.

State law provides that statutory city councils (including the mayor), make the appointment to fill a vacancy, except in the case of a tie vote. When there is a tie vote, the mayor makes the appointment. This means that all members of the council, including the mayor, can vote on the appointment. As long as at least a quorum of the council is present, a majority vote of those present is sufficient to make the appointment.

State law does not place any limitation on a mayor's ability to make an appointment in the case of a tie vote. As a result, the mayor can appoint any qualified person willing to fill the vacancy even if that person was not the subject of the original appointment vote.

**RELEVANT LINKS:**

[Minn. Stat. § 412.121](#). [Minn. Stat. § 471.46](#).

[Minn. Const. art. VII, § 6](#).

[Minn. Stat. § 415.15](#).  
A.G. Op. 471-M (Dec. 27, 1977).

[Minn. Stat. § 412.02, subd. 2a](#).

[Minn. Stat. § 412.02, subd. 2a](#).

See Office of the Minnesota Secretary of State, [Candidate Filing Periods](#).

[Minn. Stat. § 412.02, subd. 2a](#).

LMC information memo, [City Special Elections](#).

[Minn. Stat. § 412.02, subd. 2](#).  
[Minn. Stat. § 205.07, subd. 1a](#).

A.G. Op. 471-M (Nov. 23, 1999).

If the vacancy is for the mayor's office and the council casts a tie vote, the acting mayor should make the appointment. The acting mayor cannot, however, appoint themselves.

The council can appoint any individual who is eligible for election to that office. Generally, to be eligible a person must be a U.S. citizen, a resident of the city, entitled to vote at any election, and at least 21 years old.

The council is not required to appoint any candidate previously defeated in an election for the office.

A resigning council member cannot vote on the appointment of the successor to that vacancy. A council member who is elected mayor, however, can participate in the appointment vote to fill the vacancy in their former council position.

Under certain circumstances, individuals appointed to fill council vacancies serve on a temporary basis, and the city must hold a special election to elect a permanent replacement to fill the vacancy.

Two factors determine whether an election is required: first, whether filing has opened for the next regular city election, and second, the length of the unexpired portion of the term at the time of the vacancy.

If the vacancy occurs on or after the first day to file as a candidate for the next regular city election or if less than two years remain in the unexpired term, the city does not need to hold a special election, and the appointed person can serve out the remainder of the unexpired term.

In the alternative, if the vacancy occurs before the first day to file as a candidate for the next regular city election and more than two years remain in the unexpired term, the city must hold a special election to fill the council vacancy at or before the next regular city election, and the person elected will serve out the remainder of the unexpired term.

If the council chooses to hold a special election to fill a vacancy at a time other than at the regular city election, it must first adopt an ordinance specifying the circumstances under which the election will be held.

State law generally provides that the terms of elected city officials begin on the first Monday in January following the election. However, the attorney general has advised that a person elected to fill a vacancy is eligible to qualify and assume office when they receive an election certificate.

## RELEVANT LINKS:

### **G. Council members ineligible to fill certain vacancies**

[Minn. Stat. § 471.46.](#)

City council members, including mayors and elected clerks, cannot be considered to fill vacancies in other city elective offices if the council has the power to make the appointment to fill the vacancy.

This rule applies even if a council member resigns from their position on the council before the council makes the appointment.

An exception to this rule is that the council can appoint one of its members to the office of either mayor or clerk. In such a case, the council member being considered for the appointment cannot vote.

### **H. Gifts**

[Minn. Stat. § 471.895.](#)  
[Minn. Stat. § 10A.071, subd. 1.](#)  
[Minn. Stat. § 471.895, subd. 1\(b\).](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 471.895, subd. 1\(d\).](#)

Elected and appointed “local officials” are generally prohibited from accepting gifts from “interested persons.” A “gift” is defined as money, real or personal property, a service, a loan, a forbearance or forgiveness of debt, or a promise of future employment, that is given and received without the giver receiving something of equal or greater value in return.

A “local official” is defined as an elected or appointed official of a city, or of an agency, authority, or instrumentality of a city. The gift prohibition clearly applies to all members of a city council and to appointed officials on city boards, commissions, and committees.

However, it is not clear whether city employees like city managers and city administrators would also be considered local officials under the gift law. Because so many city employees can be involved in a city’s decision-making process, some cities have decided that the safest course of action is to assume that the gift law applies to all city employees.

An “interested person” is a person or a representative of a person or association with a direct financial interest in a decision the local official is authorized to make.

An interested person under the gift law likely includes anyone who may provide goods or services to a city, such as engineers, attorneys, fiscal advisors, contractors, and sales representatives.

Additionally, virtually every resident of the city and anyone doing business in the city could at some time have a direct financial interest in a decision a city official is authorized to make and thus could qualify as an interested person.

## RELEVANT LINKS:

The following are possible examples where a resident or business owner's financial interest could be affected:

- Levying property taxes.
- Levying special assessments.
- Valuation of property for tax purposes.
- Issuing a license.
- Zoning property.
- Granting a land-use permit.

As a result, any person doing business or residing in the city may potentially be an interested person, as far as a city council member is concerned. Whether a resident or business owner is an interested person, as far as members of boards and commissions are concerned, depends on the types of decisions or recommendations the boards or commissions are authorized to make.

It is important to note that, under the gift law, the decision or recommendation a city official is authorized to make is not required to be pending. If an individual could, at any time, have a direct financial interest in a decision or recommendation that a city official would be authorized to make, that individual would likely be considered an interested person.

There are a few limited exceptions to the gift law. For example, the following types of gifts are permitted under the gift law:

[Minn. Stat. § 471.895, subd. 3.](#) [Minn. Stat. § 211A.01, subd. 5.](#) See Minnesota Campaign Finance and Public Disclosure Board, [Public and Local Officials Handbook](#), for more information about gifts and contributions.

- Political contributions.
- Services to assist an official in the performance of official duties.
- Services of insignificant monetary value.
- A plaque or similar memento recognizing individual services in a field of specialty or to a charitable cause.
- A trinket or memento costing \$5 or less.
- Informational material of unexceptional value.
- Food or a beverage given at a reception, meal, or meeting away from the recipient's place of work by an organization before whom the recipient makes a speech or answers questions as part of a program. (This exception probably permits only the principal speakers at meetings to receive gifts of food or beverage).
- Gifts given because of the recipient's membership in a group, a majority of whose members are not local officials, if an equivalent gift is offered to or given to the other members of the group.

## RELEVANT LINKS:

- Gifts between family members, unless the gift is given on behalf of someone who is not a member of that family.
- Food or beverages given by a national or multi-state organization of governmental organizations or officials at a reception or meal to attendees at a conference sponsored by that organization if a majority of the dues to the organization are paid using public funds and an equivalent gift is given or offered to all other attendees.

[Minn. Stat. § 465.03, \*Kelly v. Campaign Fin. and Pub. Disclosure Bd.\*](#), 679 N.W.2d 178 (Minn. Ct. App. 2004).

The law prohibits gifts to city officials, not to cities. Thus, an interested person can give a gift to a city. If the giver has no control over who will receive the gift and the gift was not targeted to a specific person, perhaps a city official could benefit from that gift. If the person who benefits from the gift has any control over its use, the gift would likely be prohibited.

For example, if an interested person gave a city five tickets to a football game, the council members probably could not use the tickets for themselves.

[Minn. Stat. ch. 10A.](#)  
LMC information memo,  
*Official Conflict of Interest.*

Metropolitan cities with a population over 50,000 are subject to additional regulations. Under the Ethics in Government Act, local officials in these cities are also prohibited from receiving gifts from “lobbyists” and “principals” although there are exceptions similar to those for the gift law.

Minnesota Campaign Finance and Public Disclosure Board, [Advisory Opinions](#).

The Minnesota Campaign Finance and Public Disclosure Board issues advisory opinions regarding the lobbyist gift ban. These opinions may be relevant to any Minnesota city struggling with the application of a gift ban to a particular situation.

## I. Conflicts of interest

There are two types of conflicts of interest that a council member may encounter: those involving contractual situations and those involving non-contractual situations.

### 1. Contractual situations

[Minn. Stat. § 471.87, Minn. Stat. § 412.311.](#)  
LMC information memo,  
*Official Conflict of Interest.*

Public officers are generally prohibited from having a personal, financial interest in any sale, lease, or contract that they are authorized to make in their official capacity. There are limited exceptions to this law.

City council members who knowingly authorize a prohibited contract, even though they do not benefit from it, may be guilty of a crime. The council member who would benefit from the contract could also be guilty of a crime if that person entered into it knowing that it was prohibited.

**RELEVANT LINKS:**

A.G. Op. 90-E-5 (Nov. 13, 1969).

A.G. Op. 90e-6 (June 15, 1988).

LMC information memo,  
*Official Conflict of Interest*.

The attorney general has advised that the conflict-of-interest law applies to any council member “who is authorized to take part in any manner” in the making of the contract. Simply abstaining from voting on the contract is not sufficient. The attorney general reasoned that if the Legislature had only wanted to prohibit interested officers from voting on the contract, it would not have used the word “authorized.”

## **2. Non-contractual situations**

There are also situations where council members may find that they have an interest in a non-contractual decision that the council will make. This type of interest does not have to be financial in nature. These non-contractual matters may include things like council decisions on zoning, local improvements, and the issuance of licenses.

Although not generally prohibited by state law, an interested council member most likely should abstain from participating in the council discussion and from voting on these issues.

## **J. Incompatibility of offices**

*State ex rel. Hilton v. Sword*, 196 N.W. 467 (Minn. 1923).  
*Kenney v. Goergen*, 31 N.W. 210 (Minn. 1886).

*McCutcheon v. City of St. Paul*, 216 N.W.2d 137 (Minn. 1974).

“Compatibility of Offices,” House Research, Rev. July 2012.

Whether a city official can also serve the city or other government entity in some other capacity is a complicated issue. State law generally does not prevent a person from holding two or more government positions. However, without specific statutory authority, government officials cannot hold more than one position if the functions of the positions are incompatible.

The common law doctrine of incompatibility applies to the functions of two inconsistent offices. However, there is no clear definition of what constitutes an “office” for the purpose of the law. Certainly, it would include all elected offices. Additionally, the Minnesota Supreme Court has reasoned that it would also apply to those appointed positions that have independent authority under the law to determine public policy or to make a final decision not subject to a supervisor’s approval. As a result, the incompatibility law might also apply to appointed positions such as city administrators, managers, and police chiefs.

### **1. Public employment**

#### **a. Federal employment**

5 U.S.C. §§ 7321-7326.

Federal employees are generally prohibited from being candidates in local partisan elections. An election is considered “partisan” if candidates are elected as representing political parties.

## RELEVANT LINKS:

[Minn. Stat. § 43A.32. Minnesota Management and Budget.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 410.191. Minn. Stat. § 412.02, subd. 1a.](#)

A.G. Op. 471-M (Dec. 11, 1957).

See, for example, [Minn. Stat. § 410.191. Minn. Stat. § 412.02, subd. 1a.](#)

See *Kenney v. Goergen*, 31 N.W. 210 (Minn. 1886).  
*State ex rel. Hilton v. Sword*, 196 N.W. 467 (Minn. 1923).

LMC information memo, [Official Conflict of Interest](#).

### **b. State employment**

State employees generally can run for and hold elected office as long as there is no conflict with their regular state employment. The commissioner of Minnesota Management and Budget will determine whether a conflict exists.

### **c. City employment**

State law prohibits the mayor and council members in both statutory and home rule charter cities from being “employed” by their city. The term “employed” is defined as “full-time permanent employment as defined by the city’s employment policy.” This law applies to individuals elected or appointed to serve as mayor or city council member on or after August 1, 2010.

For part-time positions, it must be determined if the positions qualify as offices and if the elements or responsibilities of the two positions are incompatible with one another.

## **2. Incompatible offices**

Unless otherwise limited by law, an individual can apply for a job or run for an office that is incompatible with a current position without resigning from the current position. When the individual is elected or appointed to an incompatible office, the individual is considered to have resigned from the first position.

Generally, positions are incompatible when a specific state law or charter provision:

- States that one person cannot hold two or more specific positions.
- Prohibits the officer from holding another position.
- Requires that the officer devote to the position full-time.

In addition, positions may be incompatible if the holder of one position or the group or board of which the person is a member:

- Hires or appoints the other.
- Sets the salary for the other.
- Performs functions that are inconsistent with the other.
- Makes contracts with the other.
- Approves the official or fidelity bond of the other.

## RELEVANT LINKS:

See League of Minnesota Cities, *Minnesota Mayors Handbook*, Appendix G.

[ICMA/MCMA Code of Ethics](#).

[Minnesota Campaign Finance and Public Disclosure Board](#).

[Minn. Stat. § 10A.01, subd. 22.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 10A.09, Minn. Stat. § 10A.071, subd. 2.](#)  
[Minn. Stat. § 10A.07.](#)

LMC information memo,  
[Official Conflict of Interest](#).

## K. Codes of Conduct

Some cities have adopted their own policies on ethics and conflicts of interest. These policies must be consistent with state law.

They generally take one of two forms: either a values statement expressing core principles for ethical conduct or a formal code of conduct. State law does not require cities to adopt an ethics policy.

Additionally, many professional organizations have adopted rules of conduct to guide individuals working in particular fields. For example, the International City/County Management Association (ICMA) as well as our state's affiliate (MCMA) has adopted a code of ethics that defines a city manager's core set of values and a city manager's ethical obligations to the city council, other staff, the general public, and the profession itself.

## L. Ethics in Government Act

[Minn. Stat. ch. 10A.](#)

The Ethics in Government Act (Act) regulates campaign financing and requires certain local officials to make public disclosures of certain information. The Act only applies to local officials of cities in the seven-county metropolitan area with a population over 50,000.

The Minnesota Campaign Finance and Public Disclosure Board administers the Act. Individuals subject to the Act may request an advisory opinion from the Board to guide their compliance with the Act.

The Act defines a local official as a person who holds elected office in a political subdivision or who is appointed to or employed in a public position in a political subdivision in which the person has:

- The authority to make major decisions regarding the expenditure or investment of public money.
- The responsibility to make recommendations to the governing body about major decisions regarding the expenditure or investment of public money.
- The authority to vote as a member of the governing body on major decisions regarding the expenditure or investment of public money.

Local officials subject to the Act must comply with three main requirements. First, they must file statements of economic interest. Second, they are prohibited from accepting gifts from lobbyists or principals. Third, they must file conflict-of-interest statements in certain circumstances.

## RELEVANT LINKS:

### M. Publications and websites

[Minn. Stat. § 10.60, subds. 2, 3.](#)

The purpose of a city website or publication must be to provide information about the duties and jurisdiction of the city or to facilitate access to public services and information related to city responsibilities or functions. A city website or publication cannot include pictures or other materials that tend to attribute the website or publication to an individual or group of individuals instead of to the city. A city publication cannot include the words “with the compliments of” or contain letters of personal greeting that promote an elected or appointed official of a city.

[Minn. Stat. § 10.60, subd. 3.](#)

A city website cannot contain a link to a blog or website maintained by a candidate, a political committee, a political party or party unit, a principal campaign committee, or a state committee.

[Minn. Stat. § 10.60, subd. 4.](#)

A city website or publication can include biographical information about an elected or appointed official, a single official photograph of the official, and photographs of the official performing functions related to the office.

There is no limitation on photographs, webcasts, archives of webcasts, and audio or video files that facilitate access to city information or services or inform the public about the duties and obligations of the city office or that are intended to promote trade or tourism. A city website or publication can include press releases, proposals, policy positions, and other information directly related to the legal functions, duties, and jurisdiction of a city official or organization.

[Minn. Stat. § 10.60, subd. 5.](#)

Cities can adopt more restrictive standards for the content of city publications or websites.

### II. City council and its powers

It is the duty of the mayor, clerk, and council members to ensure that the city fulfills its duties under the law and lawfully exercises its powers.

Handbook, [Liability](#).

City officials can sometimes be held personally liable for failing to act or for taking unauthorized actions on the part of the city. To avoid personal liability, city officials should gain a working knowledge of the laws that regulate city government. Whenever there is any doubt about the validity of an action or procedure, city officials should consult their city attorney.

#### A. Role of the individual council member

Council members’ statutory duties are to be performed, almost without exception, by the council as a whole. For example, it is the council and not individual council members that must supervise administrative officers, formulate policies, and exercise city powers.

## RELEVANT LINKS:

Council members should devote their official time to problems of basic policy and act as liaisons between the city and the general public. Council members should be concerned, not only with the conduct of daily affairs, but also with the future development of the city.

The most important single responsibility of a council member is participation at council meetings. In statutory cities, each council member, including the mayor, has full authority to make and second motions, participate in discussions, and vote on every matter before the council.

[Minn. Stat. § 412.191, subd. 2.](#) [Minn. Stat. § 13D.04.](#)

In a statutory city, the mayor or any two council members of a five-member council, or any three council members of a seven-member council, can call a special meeting. However, it is important to ensure that proper notice is given.

As individuals, council members have no administrative authority. They cannot give orders to or otherwise supervise city employees unless specifically directed to do so by the council. The council, however, has complete authority over all administrative affairs in the city. In Plan B cities, this authority is generally restricted to conducting investigations and establishing policies to be performed by the city manager.

Under a state law that was repealed in 2001, all members of the council, including mayors, were “peace officers.” Council members were authorized to suppress any “riotous or disorderly conduct” in the streets or public places of the city. The mayor and individual council members no longer have this peace officer authority.

## B. The council’s authority

*Van Cleve v. Wallace*, 13 N.W.2d 467 (Minn. 1944).

The city council is a continuing body. New members have no effect on the body except to change its membership. This means that all ordinances and resolutions remain in effect until the council alters or rescinds them, or until they expire through their own terms.

At any time, the council can change any resolution, ordinance, or administrative order, whether or not the individuals presently on the council are the same as those serving when the council originally took action.

[Minn. Stat. § 306.41.](#)  
*Reed v. City of Anoka*, 88 N.W. 981 (Minn. 1902).  
*Ketterer v. Indep. Sch. Dist. No. 1 of Chippewa Cnty.*, 79 N.W.2d 428 (Minn. 1956).

There are exceptions to this rule. For example, the council cannot dissolve a perpetual cemetery-maintenance fund. Additionally, the council cannot rescind or unilaterally alter any valid contracts. This means that the law of contracts applies to the council as it does to any other party. Whether a contract was validly made is a question of fact.

## RELEVANT LINKS:

The following information outlines the major areas of council authority and responsibility.

### **1. Judging the qualification and election of its own members**

[Minn. Stat. § 412.191, subd. 2.](#)

The council evaluates the credentials of individuals who are, or who claim to be, members of the council. This power includes certifying election results, determining whether an individual has the necessary qualifications to hold office, and deciding whether a council vacancy exists.

### **2. Setting and interpreting rules governing its own proceedings**

[Minn. Stat. § 412.191, subd. 2.](#)

The council has the following powers:

- To preserve order during its own meetings.
- To establish rules of procedure.
- To compel the attendance of members at meetings and to punish non-attendance. The council does not have the power to remove members from office, but it can punish members by fines or by deducting a part of the absentee's compensation for failure to comply with attendance orders.

### **3. Exercising all the powers of cities that the law does not delegate to others**

Except for powers that state law delegates to a specific official or independent board or commission, the council has the authority to exercise all powers given to the city.

### **4. Legislating for the city**

[Minn. Stat. § 412.191, subd. 4.](#)

The council can enact ordinances by a majority vote of all of its members, except where a larger number is required by law. The power to legislate also includes setting administrative policies and otherwise establishing public policy for the city.

[Minn. Stat. § 412.231.](#)

The council has the power to declare that violations of any ordinance are a crime and can prescribe penalties for ordinance violations. The statutory city code limits the penalty for ordinance violations to a fine of up to \$1,000 or up to 90 days in jail, or both.

## RELEVANT LINKS:

### 5. Directing the enforcement of city ordinances

The council directs the enforcement of city ordinances by determining the level of law enforcement, setting qualifications for the police chief and police officers, purchasing certain types of equipment for police use, and by directing and supervising the work of police officers. The city council also directs all departments and employees responsible for the administration of its policies and ordinances in the general administration of their duties. The city council generally should not direct the enforcement efforts of its employees as to particular situations.

### 6. Appointing administrative personnel

In Standard Plan and Plan A cities, the council has the sole authority to appoint all city employees.

[Minn. Stat. § 412.661.](#)

In Plan B cities, the council appoints a city manager, who in turn appoints all city employees. The council cannot dictate that the city manager appoint a particular person to city employment. Additionally, the council cannot give any orders to employees hired by the manager.

### 7. Transacting city business

The transaction of city business includes a wealth of activities, such as purchasing, executing legal papers, taking bids, letting contracts, making discretionary administrative decisions, and evaluating the work of the administrative departments and personnel.

### 8. Managing the city's financial operations

The council has full authority over the city's financial affairs, including but not limited to:

[Minn. Stat. § 412.241.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 412.251.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 412.701.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 275.065.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 412.241.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 412.241.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 118A.02.](#) [Minn. Stat. §§ 427.01-02.](#) LMC information memo, *City Deposits and Investments.*

Councils should seek the advice of their staff and of consultants in making many of these decisions.

## RELEVANT LINKS:

### **9. Appointing members of the boards**

[Minn. Stat. § 412.111.](#)

The council can create departments and advisory boards and appoint officers, employees, and agents for the city as deemed necessary for the proper management and operation of the city.

### **10. Conducting the city's intergovernmental affairs**

[Minn. Stat. § 471.59.](#) [Minn. Stat. § 465.58.](#)

The council can make agreements for the joint exercise of powers through agreements with other units of government, appoint people to serve on intergovernmental bodies, conduct city business with state and federal agencies, and participate in intergovernmental programs and the work of municipal associations, such as the League of Minnesota Cities.

### **11. Protecting the welfare of the city and its inhabitants**

[Minn. Stat. § 412.221, subd. 32.](#)

Elected officials must formulate policies that will help the city solve future problems and adjust to social and economic trends. This requires long-range planning regarding city facilities and needs.

### **12. Providing community leadership**

In addition to participating in civic events, city officials must provide leadership by promoting new ideas and suggesting new programs to improve the community and its surrounding areas.

### **13. Other specific powers**

The city council also has specific powers in the following areas:

[Minn. Stat. § 412.221, subds. 3, 28.](#)

**Buildings.** The council has the power to construct or acquire structures needed for city purposes, and to control, protect, and insure public buildings, property, and records. The council also has the power, by ordinance, to regulate the construction of buildings.

[Minn. Stat. § 412.221, subd. 5.](#)

**Actions at law.** The council has the power to provide for the initiation or defense of actions in which the city may be interested. The council can employ attorneys for this purpose.

[Minn. Stat. § 412.221, subd. 6.](#)

**Streets.** The council has the power to lay out or change streets, parks, and other public grounds. By ordinance, the council can regulate the use of streets and public grounds.

[Minn. Stat. § 412.491.](#)

**Parks.** A statutory city can establish, improve, maintain, and manage parks and recreational facilities and, by ordinance, protect and regulate their use.

**RELEVANT LINKS:**

[Minn. Stat. § 412.221, subd. 8.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 412.221, subd. 9.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 412.221, subd. 11.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 412.221, subd. 16.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 412.221, subd. 17.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 412.221, subd. 18.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 412.221, subd. 21.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 412.221, subd. 22.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 412.221, subds. 24, 25.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 412.221, subd. 25.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 412.221, subd. 26.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 412.221, subd. 27.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 412.221, subd. 30.](#)

**Trees.** The council has the power to provide for and, by ordinance, regulate the setting out and protection of trees, shrubs, and flowers in the city or upon its property.

**Cemeteries.** The council has the power to acquire, hold, and manage cemetery grounds and to sell and convey cemetery lots. By ordinance, the city can regulate cemeteries and the disposal of cadavers.

**Waterworks.** The council has the power to provide for and, by ordinance, regulate the use of wells, cisterns, reservoirs, and other types of water supply.

**Hospital.** The council has the power to establish hospitals.

**Fire prevention.** The council has the power to establish a fire department, appoint its officers and members, and prescribe their duties. The council also has the power, by ordinance, to prevent, control, or extinguish fires.

**Naming streets.** The council has the power, by ordinance, to name or rename the streets and public places of the city and to number or re-number the lots and blocks of the city. The council can make and record a consolidated plat of the city.

**Animals.** The council has the power, by ordinance, to regulate the keeping of animals, to restrain their running at large, and to authorize their impoundment and destruction.

**Health.** The council has the power, by ordinance, to provide for the disposal of solid waste, sewage, garbage, and other unwholesome substances.

**Noise and nuisances.** The council has the power, by ordinance, to regulate and prevent noise and to define and provide for the prevention or abatement of nuisances.

**Amusement.** The council has the power, by ordinance, to prevent or license and regulate billiard tables, bowling alleys, gambling devices, circuses, theatrical performances, amusements, or shows of any kind.

**Vice.** The council has the power, by ordinance, to restrain and punish vagrants, prostitutes, and individuals guilty of lewd conduct.

**Dances.** The council has the power, by ordinance, to license and regulate the operation of public dance halls and the conduct of public dances.

**Restaurants.** The council has the power to license and regulate restaurants and public-eating places.

**RELEVANT LINKS:**

[Minn. Stat. § 412.221, subd. 31.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 412.221, subd. 32.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 415.01.](#)

**Sewer and water connections.** The council has the power, by ordinance, to require the owner of any property that is abutting or adjacent to any street in which sewer and water mains have been laid to install a toilet in such buildings and connect it with the sewer and water mains.

**General welfare.** The council has the power to provide for the government and good order of the city, the prevention of crime, the protection of public and private property, and the promotion of health, order, and convenience through the enactment of ordinances.

**Township powers.** The council has all the powers given to towns in chapters 365 and 368 of the Minnesota Statutes.

## C. Council committees

Although state law does not require the use of committees, some councils find that they are helpful in reducing workload. By dividing their membership into several committees, a council enables its members to devote most of their time to specific areas of the city's operations. Each council member becomes a relative specialist in these areas and that council member's services become of greater value to the council as a whole.

Council action is necessary to establish committees, either in the council's bylaws, by special resolution, or through a motion. The council can set up special and standing committees. The council appoints special committees to deal with a single transaction or project. For example, the council might appoint a special committee to study the advisability of purchasing land for a new park. Standing committees concentrate on work that is continuous or repeated from time to time during the year. Many cities, for example, have a standing committee on finance.

Sometimes councils set up their committees on a functional basis. Such committees deal with fire, police, health, public works, welfare, or public utilities. This system encourages council members to handle administrative details and, consequently, does not make full and proper use of the city's administrative officers. Thus, councils should try to limit their work to special policy problems or to certain staff or public relations functions that are not the responsibility of administrative personnel. Examples include committees on auditing, personnel, budget, public reporting, purchasing, and licensing.

Committees can exercise all duties the council has legally assigned to them. They can have the authority to conduct investigations and to make recommendations. Committees, however, cannot make decisions on behalf of the council.

## RELEVANT LINKS:

See LMC information memo, [Meetings of City Councils](#), for more information.

Committees of the council are subject to the same rules as the full council under the open meeting law.

In many cities, it is routine for the council to approve a committee's recommendations if it has done a thorough and competent job. It is important, however, for all council members to be aware of their independent obligation to the city when considering whether to adopt a committee's recommendation. It is only the council's final decision, and not the committee's recommendation, that can bind the city. For example, committees cannot enter into contracts or employ workers even if a specific motion of the council delegates such power to them.

## D. Delegation of council power

A.G. Op. 624a-3 (Nov. 2, 1998).  
*Muehring v. Sch. Dist. No. 31 of Stearns Cnty.*, 28 N.W.2d 655 (Minn. 1947).  
*Jewell Belting Co. v. Village of Bertha*, 97 N.W. 424 (Minn. 1903). *Minneapolis Gas-Light Co. v. City of Minneapolis*, 30 N.W. 450 (Minn. 1886).

Absent specific statutory or charter authority, a city council cannot delegate its legislative or quasi-judicial power. In addition, a council cannot delegate any administrative power of a discretionary nature. Merely ministerial functions, however, can be delegated to an officer or committee.

### 1. Discretionary and ministerial powers

The courts have not been explicit in describing the meaning of discretionary administrative power. They have, however, provided several rules that offer some basis for distinguishing which powers the council can delegate.

*Johnson v. State*, 553 N.W.2d 40 (Minn. 1996).

Discretionary powers or functions are those that involve the exercise of judgment. Ministerial functions are absolute, fixed, and certain so that no judgment is necessary in fulfilling them.

For example, the approval of a budget is a discretionary function while the signing of legal papers is a ministerial function. There are many tasks, however, for which the difference is largely one of degree. The courts, in these cases, generally differentiate by using a test of reasonableness.

### 2. Administrative standards

Courts generally permit the delegation of administrative power when the council establishes a fixed standard or rule to guide the subordinate. The courts usually permit delegation when the subordinate has reasonable discretion in administering an established standard or rule.

Administration of land-use ordinances, building codes, and many other ordinances are examples.

## RELEVANT LINKS:

### 3. Making vs. executing the law

Finally, the courts sometimes recognize a distinction between the power to make the law and the authority to execute it. A council cannot delegate the power to make a law, but the council can delegate the authority to execute it.

### E. Salaries of mayor and council members

[Minn. Stat. § 415.11.](#)

The city council in second class, third class, and fourth class cities establishes, by ordinance, the salaries of the mayor and council members in an amount that the council deems “reasonable.” Generally, no change in salary can take effect until after the next succeeding regular city election. An ordinance changing council salaries should specify the date when the changes will take effect.

[Minn. Stat. § 415.11, subd. 3.](#)

A city council, however, can adopt an ordinance to take effect before the next city election that reduces the salaries of the mayor and council members. The ordinance must be in effect for 12 months, unless another period of time is specified in the ordinance, after which the reduced salary reverts to the salary in effect immediately before the ordinance was adopted.

Salaries can be an annual or monthly sum, or a per-meeting rate. The ordinance should specify whether the per-meeting rate applies only to regular meetings or to both regular and special meetings.

[Minn. Stat. § 43A.17, subd. 10.](#)

Cities are prohibited from including provisions for vacation or sick leave in the compensation plan for council members. Cities are also prohibited from reducing the salaries of council members because of absences from official duties because of vacation or sickness.

[Minn. Stat. § 415.10.](#)

Iron Range cities have special legislative authority to make per-diem payments to council members up to \$25 per day, not to exceed \$250 per year, for absences from the city while on official city business.

See IRS Publication: [2020-2021 Special Per Diem Rates](#). IRS Publication 463: [Travel, Gift and Car Expenses](#). IRS Publication 15: [\(Circular E\), Employer's Tax Guide](#).

Some non-Iron Range cities have sought to pay their councils using per-diem rates. Cities should be careful in this area. A per diem is an expense allowance or an advanced reimbursement for business travel away from home. The IRS has strict guidelines for per-diem pay, including dollar limits above which the per diem must be treated as wages for tax purposes.

Cities wishing to establish per-diem rates for council members should consult with their financial advisors or the IRS for further guidance.

[Minn. Stat. § 211B.10, subd. 2.](#)

An employer must allow a council member to take time off from regular employment to attend council meetings.

## RELEVANT LINKS:

The time off can be without pay, with pay, or made up with other hours as agreed to between the employee and the employer. When the council member takes time off without pay, the employer must make an effort to allow the employee to make up the time with other hours when the employee is available.

No retaliatory action can be taken by the employer for absences to attend meetings necessitated by reason of the employee's public office.

## F. Compensation of Mayor and Councilmembers

### 1. Payroll

IRS: [Tax Withholding for Government Workers](#).

For purposes of tax withholding, an elected official is an employee of the city. Even if taxes are not being withheld, the IRS treats them as employees for tax purposes. Therefore, the city should collect a W-4 form and any other forms or information necessary to set them up in the city's payroll system. Elected officials should be paid via payroll check with any applicable taxes withheld and should receive a W-2 at the end of the year. The same is true for any appointed members of boards and commissions who receive compensation.

### 2. Unemployment & Workers Compensation

Minn. Stat. § 268.035.

MN Unemployment Insurance: [Covered vs. noncovered employment](#).

Elected officials are defined as "non-covered" employees, therefore their hours and wages are not required to be included in quarterly reports to Minnesota Unemployment. Elected officials are employees for workers compensation purposes.

### 3. Employment Eligibility

U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services: [Handbook for Employers](#).

Federal regulations require employers to complete an I-9 when hiring anyone who will be compensated. While elected and appointed officials are not "hired", they are usually compensated for their services. Since there are no exceptions for elected officials or appointed board members found within the guidance from the U.S. Citizenship and Immigration Services Handbook for Employers, it is best practice to collect an I-9 from each official who will receive compensation.

### 4. New Hire Reporting and Minnesota Wage Theft Prevention Act Notice

Minn. Stat. § 181.032(d). Minnesota Department of Human Services: [New Hire Reporting Center](#).

Federal and state law require employers to report newly hired and rehired employees to the Minnesota New Hire Reporting Center and to provide notice at the start of employment regarding status and terms of employment.

## RELEVANT LINKS:

Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry:  
[Employee Wage Notice](#).

Again, while elected officials and board or commission members are not hired employees, they can receive compensation. The Minnesota New Hire and Minnesota Department of Labor and Industry websites note that no one is exempt from these laws, so the safest course of action is to assume that elected officials and paid board and commission members should be reported as new hires and provided Minnesota Wage Theft Prevention Act notification.

## III. Mayor

Minn. Stat. § 412.191, subds. 1, 2. For more information about the office of mayor see the League of Minnesota Cities, [Minnesota Mayors Handbook](#).

As the head of the city, the mayor officially speaks for both the council and the community as a whole. In all statutory cities and in most charter cities, the mayor is the presiding officer and a regular member of the council. The mayor has all the powers and duties for the office of council member, in addition to those of mayor.

In a home rule charter city, the charter spells out the duties and responsibilities of the mayor. This chapter, however, deals with mayors of statutory cities.

Many mayors belong to the Minnesota Mayors Association (MMA), which is affiliated with the League and holds an annual conference on issues of interest to mayors. Contact the League for more information about the MMA.

### A. Official head of the city

As the official head of the city, the mayor has three important responsibilities.

First, the mayor usually serves as the city's representative before the Minnesota Legislature, federal agencies, and other local governments.

Second, the mayor performs ceremonial duties on behalf of the community. The mayor usually greets important visitors, gives formal and informal talks, and takes part in public events. Because local civic groups frequently ask the mayor to speak, the mayor must be prepared to explain and defend city problems and programs.

A third responsibility is to exert leadership in city affairs. Because the mayors of statutory cities lack significant individual authority, this responsibility frequently calls for tact rather than overt acts of direction or supervisory control.

## RELEVANT LINKS:

[Minn. Stat. § 412.191, subd. 4.](#) [Minn. Stat. § 412.201.](#)  
A.G. Op. 61-J (June 2, 1966).

[Minn. Stat. § 412.501.](#) (The council appoints the members of an advisory park board or commission created under [Minn. Stat. § 412.111](#)).

[Minn. Stat. § 134.09, subd. 1.](#) [Minn. Stat. § 134.195, subd. 2](#) (joint school and public library).

[Minn. Stat. § 412.221, subd. 16.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 44.04, subd. 1.](#) See [Minn. Stat. § 419.02, subd. 1](#) (authorizing the creation of a joint police and fire commission with members appointed by the council).

[Minn. Stat. § 469.003, subd. 6.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 469.095, subd. 2.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 450.20.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 12.25, subd. 1.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 412.02, subd. 2a.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 412.191, subd. 1.](#)

## B. Executing official documents

The mayor of a statutory city must sign ordinances, contracts authorized by the council, and written orders for payment of claims that have been audited and allowed by the council. These are ministerial duties, and the mayor cannot refuse to sign if the purpose, approval, and form are legally correct and complete.

## C. Power to make some appointments

The power to appoint usually resides in the council. The mayor has authority to make the following appointments subject to council approval:

- Park board members.
- Public library board members.
- Hospital board members.
- Some members of the police civil-service commission.
- HRA members.
- EDA members.

The mayor has authority to make the following appointments without needing council approval:

- City art commission members (First Class cities).
- Emergency management director.
- The mayor also appoints to fill vacancies in elective offices if the council's vote to fill the vacancy is tied.

## D. Presiding officer at council meetings

Plan A and Plan B statutory city councils are usually composed of five members consisting of the mayor and four council members.

## RELEVANT LINKS:

[Minn. Stat. § 412.02, subd. 6.](#)

In a Standard Plan city, the council consists of the mayor, the clerk, and three council members.

[Minn. Stat. § 412.191, subd. 2.](#)

Any statutory city, however, can adopt a council size of seven following adoption of a council ordinance and voter approval at the next general city election.

[Minn. Stat. § 412.191, subd. 2.](#)

The mayor serves as the presiding officer at council meetings. The mayor generally recognizes speakers for debate and motions, and rules on questions of council procedure. The power to rule on council procedure is especially significant because once rulings are made, they are binding on the council, unless the council votes to challenge them.

A statutory city mayor can vote on all motions put before the council but does not have the right to veto council actions. The right of the mayor to make and second motions is implied from the mayor's privilege of voting and taking part in regular council deliberations. The mayor has an obligation to be impartial and objective in conducting the meeting. To maintain this objectivity, many mayors choose to minimize making or seconding motions, and to allow other members of the council to speak before expressing an opinion. Mayors can also call special meetings.

## E. Weed inspector

[Minn. Stat. § 18.80, subds. 2, 3.](#)

The mayor is the city weed inspector. The city can appoint one or more assistant weed inspectors. An assistant weed inspector has the same power, authority, and responsibility of the mayor in the capacity of weed inspector.

[Minn. Stat. § 18.81, subd. 2.](#)

Local weed inspectors examine all lands, including highways, roads, and alleys, to determine if the landowner has complied with the rules regarding the eradication of noxious weeds. Weed inspectors also issue permits for the transportation of materials infested with noxious, weed-propagating parts. A claim for the expenses of performing the weed inspector's duties is a legal charge against the city.

## F. Election duties

[Minn. Stat. § 204C.07, subds. 3, 4.](#)

Mayors of all cities have election duties. At elections where cities will vote on a question, the mayor, upon receiving a written petition signed by at least 25 eligible voters, must appoint one voter for each precinct to act as a challenger of voters in the polling place.

A challenger must be present in the polling place during voting hours and must remain until the votes are counted and the results are declared. Challengers cannot attempt to influence voting in any manner.

**RELEVANT LINKS:**

[Minn. Stat. § 204C.31, subd. 1.](#)

Mayors or chairs of the town board from the most populous municipality in each county serve as members of the county-canvassing board. Any member of the canvassing board can appoint a designee to appear at a meeting of the board.

## **G. Investigating fires**

[Minn. Stat. § 299F.04.](#)

In cities without fire departments, the mayor must investigate or have investigated the cause, origin, and circumstances of any fire where damages exceed \$100. The investigation must begin within two days of the fire. The mayor must report the fire to the state fire marshal. Within one week of the fire, the mayor must furnish a written statement to the state fire marshal.

## **H. Declaring local emergencies**

[Minn. Stat. § 12.29, subd. 1.](#)

Only the mayor can declare a local emergency. A local emergency cannot last for more than three days except with the council's consent. A local emergency must receive prompt and general publicity. The clerk must promptly file any order or proclamation declaring, continuing, or terminating the emergency.

[Minn. Stat. § 12.29, subds. 2, 3.](#)

A declaration of a local emergency invokes the response and recovery aspects of any local or inter-jurisdictional disaster plans and may authorize aid and assistance. No inter-jurisdictional agency or official can declare a local emergency unless expressly authorized by an agreement. An inter-jurisdictional disaster agency must provide aid and services in accordance with the agreement.

# **IV. Clerk and treasurer**

This section gives an overview of the positions of clerk and treasurer.

See Handbook, [City Administrative Staff](#), for more information regarding the clerk position.

## **A. Clerk**

[Minn. Stat. § 412.191, subd. 1.](#) [Minn. Stat. § 412.02.](#) [Minn. Stat. § 412.151.](#) See discussion of Section I-F, *Filling vacancies*.

See Handbook, [City Administrative Staff](#).

The clerk position in a Standard Plan statutory city is an elected office. The clerk serves as a member of the council, as well as fulfilling the other duties of a city clerk prescribed by state law or by the council. Vacancies in the elected clerk position are handled in the same manner as council vacancies.

The clerk position in Plan A and Plan B cities is an appointed office. The clerk does not serve on the council but is responsible for the duties prescribed by state law and by the council.

## RELEVANT LINKS:

Minn. Stat. § 412.141. Minn. Stat. § 412.02. See discussion of Section I-F, *Filling vacancies*.

See Handbook, *City Administrative Staff*.

Minn. Stat. § 412.02, subd. 3. Minn. Stat. § 412.541, subd. 1. Minn. Stat. § 412.591, subd. 2.

Minn. Stat. § 412.02, subd. 3. Minn. Stat. § 412.591, subd. 2.

Minn. Stat. § 412.591, subd. 3. Minn. Stat. § 412.02, subd. 3. (In 2025, the threshold amount for requiring an audit is a base of \$1,000,000, which is adjusted for inflation using the annual implicit price deflator for state and local expenditures as published by the United States Department of Commerce.)

Minn. Stat. § 471.697. See, Office of the State Auditor: *Current Audit Revenue Thresholds*. Office of the State Auditor: *Agreed Upon Procedures Guide for Cities, Towns and Special Districts*.

## B. Treasurer

The treasurer in a Standard Plan statutory city is also an elected position, but the treasurer does not serve on the council. Vacancies in the elected treasurer position are handled the same as council vacancies.

The treasurer in Plan A and Plan B cities is not an elected office. All treasurers are responsible for those duties prescribed by state law or their city councils.

## C. Combination of clerk-treasurer

In statutory cities operating under either the Standard Plan or Plan A, the council can, by ordinance, combine the offices of clerk and treasurer into the office of clerk-treasurer.

In Standard Plan cities, the council must adopt the ordinance at least 60 days before the next regular city election. The ordinance does not go into effect until the expiration of the term of the incumbent treasurer, or when an earlier vacancy occurs.

In a Plan A city, the clerk-treasurer is an appointed official, and the ordinance generally goes into effect immediately. A Plan A city can abolish the position of treasurer even if an appointed person holds the position.

Under either the Standard Plan or Plan A, the council can reestablish separate offices of clerk and treasurer by ordinance.

If the offices of clerk and treasurer have been combined in a Standard Plan or a Plan A city, the council must provide for an audit of the city's financial affairs by the state auditor or a certified public accountant in accordance with minimum procedures prescribed by the state auditor.

According to the calculations of the Office of the State Auditor, a city with a population of 2,500 or less and a combined clerk and treasurer must have an annual audit if its annual revenue is greater than \$276,000 and must have an audit satisfying the OSA "Agreed-Upon Procedures" minimum requirements once every five years if its annual revenue is \$276,000 or less. A city with a population over 2,500 must have an annual audit performed.

**RELEVANT LINKS:**

## **V. Citizen boards and commissions**

One way to increase positive feelings about government is to promote citizen involvement. Citywide or neighborhood committees, special-project-review committees, and even block organizations are some of the committees cropping up in many cities. In many cases, the council has formed or encouraged these citizen committees. The committees have saved time and have made contributions that could only occur through citizen participation.

Council members have found that ignoring citizen concerns can result in their removal from office at the next election, or in the defeat of a program or activity as a result of citizen opposition.

Although city officials cannot, in most cases, delegate decision-making authority to citizen groups, they can use citizens in advisory roles. This technique only works, however, if the council listens to the advice. If the council does not follow the advice of the committee, it should give understandable reasons for taking other action.

When a council forms a citizen-advisory body, it should also establish ground rules for its activities. The council should also stress that in the absence of clear statutory authority to delegate responsibility, the council must, by law, make the final decisions. State law allows, and in some cases requires, city councils to delegate decision-making power to certain independent boards and commissions.

### **A. Independent citizen boards and commissions**

A.G. Op. 624a-3 (Nov. 2, 1998). A.G. Op. 1007 (July 8, 1977). A.G. Op. 1001-a (Sept. 15, 1950). A.G. Op. 1001-a (Aug. 27, 1957). See *Muehring v. School Dist. No. 31 of Stearns Cnty.*, 28 N.W.2d 655 (Minn. 1947). *Minneapolis Gas-Light Co. v. City of Minneapolis*, 30 N.W. 450 (Minn. 1886).

[Minn. Stat. § 412.621](#).

The amount of discretionary power the council can give to independent citizen boards and commissions varies. Absent specific statutory or charter authority, local governing bodies cannot delegate their discretionary powers and duties to other persons or bodies, including independent citizen boards and commissions.

In Plan B cities, with the exception of civil-service boards, there cannot be an independent administrative board or commission, except for the purpose of administering a function jointly with another city or political subdivision. The council itself must perform the duties and exercise the powers of the board of health and must govern and administer the library, parks, and utilities as fully as any other municipal function.

## RELEVANT LINKS:

The council can, however, create boards or commissions to advise the council with respect to any municipal function or activity, or to investigate any subject of interest to the city.

State law specifically authorizes various independent boards and commissions in other statutory cities.

The following is a list of the most common independent boards and commissions.

### 1. Airport board

Minn. Stat. § 360.038, subd. 2.

The council can establish, by ordinance or resolution, an airport board. The board must be vested with authority for construction, enlargement, improvement, maintenance, equipment, operation, and regulation of the airport.

### 2. Civil service board and commission

See Minn. Stat. chs. [44](#), [419](#), and [420](#).

Civil service commissions can take several different forms depending on the state law under which the council establishes them.

### 3. Hospital board

Minn. Stat. § 412.221, subd. 16.

The council has the power to provide hospitals and, by ordinance, to establish a hospital board. Hospital boards can exercise any hospital-management powers conferred by the council. The council can abolish the board by a vote of all five members of the council. The board must consist of five members appointed by the mayor with council approval for overlapping five-year terms. The council can remove members for cause.

### 4. Housing and redevelopment authority

Minn. Stat. § 469.003, subds. 1, 2.

A housing and redevelopment authority (HRA) has been created in each city by the Legislature. The HRA cannot transact any business or exercise any powers until the city council, by resolution, finds that the city has substandard, slum, or blighted areas that cannot be redeveloped without government assistance or has a shortage of decent, safe, and sanitary low-income dwellings. The council can consider such a resolution only after holding a public hearing and meeting publication requirements.

Minn. Stat. § 469.003, subds. 5, 6.

An HRA consists of up to seven members who can be officers and employees of the city. The mayor appoints members with the approval of the council for overlapping five-year terms. In many cities, council members appoint themselves to serve on the HRA, so the council becomes the HRA.

## RELEVANT LINKS:

### 5. Intergovernmental boards and commissions

[Minn. Stat. § 471.59.](#)

Handbook,  
*Intergovernmental  
Cooperation.*

### 6. Library board

[Minn. Stat. § 134.09.](#)

When a public library is established, except in first class cities operating under a home rule charter, the mayor of the city, with council approval, must appoint a board of five, seven, or nine members from among the residents of the city. The number of members must be determined by resolution or ordinance. The board members must serve staggered, three-year terms and can be removed for misconduct or neglect.

[Minn. Stat. § 134.10.](#)

Library board members serve without pay but can be reimbursed for actual and necessary travel expenses.

[Minn. Stat. § 134.11, subd. 2.](#)  
[Minn. Stat. § 134.13.](#)

Once established, the board prescribes its rules of procedure, selects its officers, and controls the library fund. Besides appointing new members to the board, the council has approval of all purchases of land and proposals for the erection of buildings. The board must file an annual report each year with the city council and the Department of Education.

### 7. Park board

[Minn. Stat. § 412.501.](#)  
(Cities can also create advisory park boards and commissions under [Minn. Stat. § 412.111](#)).

The council of any city with a population of more than 1,000 can, by ordinance, establish a park board. The board must consist of three, five, seven, or nine members as determined by resolution or ordinance. The mayor, with council approval, appoints the board members. Members serve three-year overlapping terms and can be removed by the mayor, with the council's consent, for cause after a hearing. Board members receive no compensation, unless the council authorizes it. The board can be dissolved by a unanimous vote of the council.

[Minn. Stat. § 412.501.](#) [Minn. Stat. § 412.521.](#)

The park board must maintain, beautify, and care for park property and perform all other acts necessary to carry out its statutory powers. The board must make quarterly reports of its activities to the council and file an annual statement of receipts and disbursements with the city clerk.

### 8. Recreation board

[Minn. Stat. § 471.15.](#)

Recreation is usually a function that is administered by the city council, the park board, or the local school board.

**RELEVANT LINKS:**

Any city can operate and expend funds for a public recreation program and playgrounds, and acquire, equip, and maintain land, buildings, or other recreational facilities, including swimming pools.

[Minn. Stat. § 471.16.](#)

Generally, a recreation board refers to an independent commission that is established cooperatively by the city council, school board, and park board. State law specifically authorizes the formation of an intergovernmental commission with representatives from all three bodies.

## **9. Utilities commission**

[Minn. Stat. § 412.321, subds. 1, 2.](#)

Any statutory city may own and operate facilities for supplying utility service. No gas, light, power, or heat utility may operate until approval by five-eighths of the voters voting on the proposition at a regular or special election.

[Minn. Stat. § 412.331. Minn. Stat. § 412.341, subd. 1.](#)

By ordinance, a city may establish a public utilities commission. Utility commissions must have three, five, or seven council-appointed members. For a three-member commission, the council cannot appoint more than one council member to the commission. For a five- or seven-member commission, the council cannot appoint more than two council members to the commission.

Each member must serve a term of three years and must serve until a qualified successor is appointed. There are specific terms for members appointed to the initial commission, which are as follows:

- If the initial commission consists of three members, one member must serve a term of one year, one member must serve a term of two years, and one member must serve a term of three years.
- If the initial commission consists of five members, one member must serve a term of one year, two members must serve a term of two years, and two members must serve a term of three years.
- If the initial commission consists of seven members, two members must serve a term of one year, two members must serve a term of two years, and three members must serve a term of three years.

City residence is not a qualification for membership on the commission unless required by the council.

[Minn. Stat. § 412.341, subd. 2. Minn. Stat. § 412.351. Minn. Stat. § 412.361.](#)

The commission must adopt rules for its proceedings but must hold at least one regular meeting each month. The commission can exercise all of the discretionary administrative authority necessary for the management of the utilities.

**RELEVANT LINKS:**

The council can prescribe a salary for the commissioners and decide, by ordinance, which of the following municipally owned public utilities shall be within the commission's jurisdiction:

- Water.
- Light and power, including any system for the production and distribution of steam heat.
- Gas.
- Sanitary or storm sewer, or both.
- Public buildings owned or leased by the city.
- District heating systems.

[2025 Minn. Laws, ch. 39, art. 6, § 12](#), to be codified at Minn. Stat. § 412.341, subd. 3.

The number of commission members can be increased or decreased by ordinance, as long as the number of members provided by state law is followed. The ordinance changing the number of members must include a provision for maintaining staggered terms for commission members, provided that if the number of members is reduced, the reduction must allow all incumbent members to serve out their full terms. An ordinance adopted under this law cannot be effective until at least 45 days after its adoption.

An ordinance reducing the size of the commission cannot take effect and the question of whether to reduce the size of the commission must be placed on the ballot at the next general or special election if:

- Within 45 days of the ordinance's adoption by the city council, a petition is filed with the city clerk requesting that a referendum be held on reducing the size of the commission.
- The petition is signed by a number of eligible voters equal to at least 15% of the number of electors voting at the most recent general election.

The ballot question must state: "Shall the size of the public utilities commission be reduced from ..... members to ..... members?" and must be followed by the words "Yes" and "No" with an appropriate oval or similar target shape where a voter can record their choice. If a majority of the votes cast on the question are in favor of reducing the size of the commission, the ordinance must be considered approved and must be effective immediately. If a majority of votes cast on the question are against reducing the size of the commission, the ordinance cannot take effect.

[Minn. Stat. § 465.70](#).

Additionally, some third class and fourth class cities can own and operate a television signal distribution system that must be considered a public utility.

## RELEVANT LINKS:

### 10. Municipal power agencies

[Minn. Stat. §§ 453.51-62.](#)

Any two or more cities can form a municipal power agency if each city passes a resolution authorizing an agreement. The purpose of the agency is to secure an adequate, economical, and reliable supply of energy for cities that own and operate a utility for the distribution of electric energy. All agency powers lie with its board of directors and include constructing and acquiring generating and transmission facilities, the power of eminent domain, and the authority to issue bonds and notes. Any city council can, by resolution, exercise any of these powers as if it were a municipal power agency.

### 11. Municipal gas agencies

[Minn. Stat. §§ 453A.01-12.](#)

Any two or more cities owning or operating a utility for the local distribution of gas can form a municipal gas agency if each passes a resolution authorizing the agreement. The purpose is to secure an adequate, economical, and reliable supply of gas for utility customers.

The board of directors exercises all agency powers. Any city can, by resolution, exercise any of the powers of a municipal gas agency as if it were an agency.

### 12. Special board of review

[Minn. Stat. § 274.01, subd. 2.](#)

The governing body of any city can appoint a special board of review. This special board of review serves at the direction and discretion of the city council. The council determines the number of members, the compensation and expenses to be paid, and the term of office of each member. At least one member of the special board must be an appraiser, realtor, or someone familiar with property valuations in the assessment district.

## B. Advisory citizen boards and commissions

[Minn. Stat. § 412.111.](#)

[Minn. Stat. § 462.354, subd. 1.](#)

Another important link in city governing activities is the work of advisory boards and commissions. These entities are much like the independent or administrative boards and commissions. The city council can create and dissolve them by resolution, appoint people to serve on them, and exercise other powers of general supervision. The council must, however, pass an ordinance to create a planning commission.

There are several differences between independent boards and advisory boards. State law establishes most independent boards and commissions and gives them some discretionary powers.

## RELEVANT LINKS:

Advisory boards conduct studies and investigations on behalf of the council and submit reports and recommendations for council consideration. An advisory board's recommendation does not take effect unless the council accepts it by passing an ordinance or resolution.

The council can organize advisory groups in any way it deems appropriate. The council may find it wise to appoint people who represent various special-interest groups in the city.

An advisory commission can be created by the council for a special purpose, such as for conducting an investigation, and will cease to exist once the purpose of the commission has been achieved.

### **1. Planning commissions**

[Minn. Stat. §§ 462.351-364.](#)  
LMC information memo,  
[Planning Commission Guide](#).

Cities can establish planning commissions by passing an ordinance describing their organization and powers. City officials, such as the mayor, attorney, and engineer, frequently serve as advisory members.

### **2. Other advisory boards and commissions**

Other advisory boards and commissions commonly established by city councils include industrial commissions, which have power to study the ways and means of attracting more commercial and industrial development to the city, safety councils that advise the council on safety programs, and intergovernmental agencies like a joint-planning commission, which the city sponsors in cooperation with other units of government.

As government has become increasingly complex, cities have used fewer independent or administrative citizen boards and commissions. Instead of diffusing authority for government administration over a number of different agencies, many cities place all authority in the city council. This decision centralizes responsibility for the proper direction of local government affairs and increases voter understanding of government.

Frequently, this trend leads to pressures for greater simplification and centralization in administration as well. The council-manager form of government (Plan B) is an answer to this pressure. Administrators, whose duties and functions lie somewhere between those of a manager and those of a clerk, may also help to centralize government.

## **VI. How chapter 6 applies to home rule charter cities**

Several sections of this chapter may be useful to charter cities.

See Handbook, [City Administrative Staff](#) for more information about the manager and administrator positions.

**RELEVANT LINKS:**

[Minn. Stat. § 410.20. Minn. Const. art. VIII, § 5.](#)  
A.G. Op. 59a-30 (July 24, 1996).

In the section concerning elected officials, the discussion of statutory city officers does not apply to charter cities, but the portions on eligibility, removal, resignations, and vacancies generally do apply. It may be possible that a charter could specify the particular conduct that would result in removal of a council member for nonfeasance of office. The attorney general, however, has advised that a charter provision providing that a council vacancy occurs if a council member does not attend a specified number of meetings would not be valid. A charter can provide for the recall of any elective municipal officer and for removal of the officer by the electors of the city.

If the mayor of a charter city presides at the council meeting, most of the section concerning the mayor applies to charter cities. Otherwise, only the portions dealing with weed inspection, election duties, and other duties apply.

The section concerning the statutory city council and its powers might prove interesting to charter city council members, since many of their powers are similar to those of statutory city councils. The laws relating to conflicts of interest and prohibiting gifts to local officials also apply to members of charter city councils, but many charter cities have more restrictive provisions concerning both issues in their charters.