

Running for Municipal Office: Council-Manager

Mississippi communities hold elections for mayor and board of aldermen on a regular four-year cycle. These elections are vital in selecting the leaders who will guide the success of their communities for four years. Deciding to run for office is a decision that citizens should thoughtfully consider. Potential candidates are encouraged to learn about the qualifications for each office, the duties and responsibilities involved, and the overall commitment required to serve in local government.

In Mississippi, there are four forms of municipal government:

1. **mayor-board of aldermen form** (also known as the “code charter” form; used by approximately 93 percent of municipalities.)
2. **strong mayor-council form** (known in Mississippi as the mayor-council form)
3. **commission form**
4. **council-manager form**

The information in this publication is based on the **council-manager form**. For more information on the other forms of government, consult the book *Municipal Government in Mississippi* book found on the Mississippi State University Extension [Center for Government and Community Development \(GCD\) website](#).

If you are unsure of your municipality’s form of government, refer to Appendix V in the book mentioned above to locate your municipality.

General Duties of Mayor

The mayor serves as the titular head of the city for ceremonial purposes and for all processes of law. In addition to being the titular head of the city, the mayor is president of the council and has a voice and vote in all its proceedings. The mayor, however, has neither veto power nor administrative powers. Moreover, the mayor is not required to maintain an office or to keep office hours.

General Duties of Council

The council performs the legislative duties of municipal government, but none of the administrative duties. It is responsible for appointing a city manager, as well as the city

attorney, the auditor, and the municipal judge, if any. At its discretion, the council also may appoint the city clerk and treasurer. All other municipal employees are appointed by the city manager, and both the council and the mayor are specifically prohibited from directing or dictating either their appointment or removal.

Except for seeking information or advice, all contact between the council and administrative services must be through the manager. While neither the council nor the mayor may give orders to any subordinate of the municipality, **the council is empowered to investigate any part of municipal government and may compel the attendance of witnesses and the production of evidence.**

On the recommendation of the manager, the council may create new departments, fix their duties and powers, and set compensation. The council fixes the hours of service of all officers and employees and sets its own compensation, as well as the compensation of the mayor and manager. It may appoint one of its members to act in case of the absence or disability of the mayor, and it also may appoint a qualified person to temporarily perform the duties of city manager in the case of absence or disability. It is required to appoint “without delay” an acting manager should the office become vacant.

Like the mayor, members of the council are not required to maintain an office or to keep office hours. Except as otherwise provided by law, council members are specifically prohibited from serving on any board or commission appointed by the council or under its jurisdiction.

The council is responsible for adopting an annual budget, securing an annual financial examination of the municipality (like all municipalities, council-manager municipalities are subject to the provisions of the Municipal Budget Law), and requiring a surety bond for all municipal officers and employees handling public funds. Under the statute authorizing council-manager government, the council is given special privileges with respect to bond and tax rate limitations.

Requirements to Qualify for Office

The candidate must be a qualified, registered voter of the municipality and of the ward, if the office sought is elected from a ward.

The candidate must meet all residency requirements. A candidate for any municipal office must be a resident of the municipality, county, county district, or other territory that they seek to represent in such office for 2 years immediately after the day of election. The provisions of this section do not apply to any municipality with less than 1,000 residents based on the latest federal decennial census.

The candidate must not have been convicted of a disqualifying crime.

Steps to Consider Before Running for Office

1. Consider why you desire to run for office. What motivates you to serve?
2. Discuss the idea with immediate and trusted family and a close circle of friends. Seek their honest feedback about the election process and your ability to serve in the office.
3. Make sure you meet the qualifications for the office.
4. Thoroughly review resources to understand municipal government rules and regulations. Start by reviewing *Municipal Government in Mississippi*.
5. Review [ethical considerations for serving in public office](#).
6. Will you have to leave your current employment?
7. Will serving in this office affect a business owned by you or a close family member?
8. Do you currently serve in an elected or appointed capacity that would require you to vacate your seat?
9. Consider the amount of time and money needed to run a successful campaign. Consult others who have run for local office for an idea of what is involved.

10. Assemble a group of trusted family members and friends to help develop your campaign team and map out a plan.
11. [Complete and file qualifying paperwork](#).
12. State law requires all candidates for elected office to [file a Statement of Economic Interest](#) with the Mississippi Ethics Commission within 15 days after the deadline for qualification for that public office.
13. [File necessary campaign finance forms](#) with the Mississippi Secretary of State's office.

Important Deadlines

- Qualifying Deadline
- Absentee Voting for Primary Begins
- Primary Election
- Primary Runoff Election
- Absentee Voting for General Election
- General Election

For More Information

The GCD staff designs and delivers educational programs, training activities, information, and technical assistance in response to the high-priority economic and community development needs of Mississippi communities and their citizens. Participants in GCD programs include local government leaders, community-based organizations, state and local agencies, and business enterprises. To learn more, visit gcd.extension.msstate.edu.

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