

Running for Municipal Office: Mayor-Council

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 **strong mayor-council form**. For information on the other forms of government, consult the book *Municipal Government in Mississippi* 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

Possessing the executive power of the municipality, the mayor is charged with enforcing the charter and ordinances of the municipality, as well as all applicable general laws. They are responsible for supervising all departments of municipal government and requiring them to make an annual report and other relevant reports as necessary. Subject to confirmation by a majority of the council members present and voting, the mayor appoints department heads (directors) and members of any municipal board, authority, or commission.

Although department heads are protected by any civil service provisions in effect at the time a city changes to the

mayor-council form, all directors appointed subsequently are excluded from civil service protection and may be removed at the mayor’s discretion. (Subordinate officers and employees of the municipality are appointed by the department heads and, with the approval of the mayor, may be dismissed by them, subject to any civil service provisions.)

Where the council has made provision for a “chief administrative officer” to coordinate and direct the operations of the various departments and functions of municipal government, the officer will be appointed by the mayor (with the advice and consent of the council), answer solely to the mayor, and serve at the mayor’s pleasure.

The mayor may attend all council meetings, take part in discussions, and make recommendations for actions they consider to be in the public interest; but the mayor may not vote except in case of a tie in the question of filling a vacancy in the council. The mayor must review ordinances, resolutions, orders, and other official actions of the council (excluding procedural actions governing the conduct of council meetings, appointing a clerk of the council, and exercising the council’s investigative functions). The mayor may veto ordinances of the council, but the veto may be overridden by two-thirds of the council present and voting. The mayor is required to maintain an office at city hall.

Whenever the mayor is prevented from carrying out their duties of office, they are required to appoint a member of the council to assume the mayoral duties. (The appointed person retains the right to vote in the council.) *Code*, § 21-8-19, details specific procedures for filling a vacancy in the mayor’s office.

General Duties of Council

In mayor-council municipalities, the council is the legislative body. It elects one of its members to serve as its president and another to serve as vice president. (The president, or in their absence the vice president, presides over council meetings and may vote even when presiding.)

In addition, the council appoints a “clerk of the council” and any necessary deputy clerks to compile the minutes and records of its proceedings, ordinances, and resolutions, and to perform these duties as required by law. Whenever the

mayor is unable to appoint a councilmember to serve as acting mayor, the council may do so.

The council may establish an administration department and other departments, as necessary, and allocate and assign all administrative powers, functions, and duties (except assigned clerk duties) in the departments. While the mayor appoints department heads and directors, they are confirmed by the council. The council is specifically authorized to adopt an ordinance creating and setting the qualifications for a chief administrative officer, which will be appointed by the mayor and confirmed by the council.

Other specific powers and duties of the council include the following:

- setting the compensation for the mayor and councilmembers (Where the salary is increased, it does not become effective until the next elected mayor and council take office.)
- setting the salary of all municipal officers and employees
- redistricting the municipality after every decennial census and after an annexation
- requiring any municipal officer to prepare and submit sworn statements regarding their official duties
- causing a full and complete audit of the municipality's finances to be made at the end of the fiscal year
- investigating the conduct of any municipal department, office, or agency
- appropriating money for the operation of government
- overriding vetoes of council actions
- appointing a councilmember to serve as acting mayor in the event the mayor is incapacitated
- calling a special election to fill a mayor's unexpired term
- requiring all officers and employees handling public funds to give surety bond

Councilmembers do not maintain individual offices at the city hall; however, in a municipality having a population of 100,000 and above based on the latest federal decennial census, councilmembers may have individual offices in the city hall. (The clerical work of members of the council are performed by municipal employees at municipal expense.) Legislation authorizing mayor-council government prohibits the council from seeking to dictate or require either the appointment or removal of any employee of the municipality. Except for seeking information or advice, the council must communicate with departments and employees through the mayor.

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 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. Get 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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