

Elected Officials' Duties & Responsibilities

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

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 lawsuits, 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.

Role of the individual councilmember

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

Councilmembers should devote their official time to problems of basic policy and act as liaisons between the city and the general public. Councilmembers 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 councilmember, including the mayor, has full authority to make and second motions, participate in discussions, and vote on every matter before the council.

In a statutory city, any two councilmembers of a five-member council or any three members of a seven-member council may call a special meeting. Care should be exercised to give proper notice, however.

Role of the council

As individuals, council members have no administrative authority. They cannot give orders 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 manager.

The major areas of council authority and responsibility are:

- Judging the qualification and election of its own members
- Setting and interpreting rules governing its own proceedings
- Exercising all the powers of cities that the law does not delegate to others
- Legislating for the city
- Directing the enforcement of city ordinances
- Appointing administrative personnel
- Transacting city business
- Managing the city's financial operations
- Appointing members of the boards
- Conducting the city's intergovernmental affairs
- Protecting the welfare of the city and its inhabitants
- Providing community leadership

Other specific powers