

So Now You are on your City Council / Village Board

So Now What Do You Do?

Being elected to a City Council or Village is an honor and a duty. You make important decisions that will effect the well being of your community for years to come.



The duties of a City Council member, County Board member, and Village Board member are similar, and this chapter covers all of their functions and Board member duties. Serving on a City Council is not easy but it can be one of the most rewarding experiences of a person's life. This article summarizes the basic functions of the City Council and the responsibilities of the City Council member. Duties of the city council are outlined in State Statutes. The following are the duties outlined in Illinois.

(65 ILCS 5/6-4-6) (from Ch. 24, par. 6-4-6)

Sec. 6-4-6. Powers of council.

The powers of the council shall be purely legislative, except as may be otherwise specifically provided by any other act or by any article of this Code. The council shall approve for payment of all expenses and liabilities of the municipality.

(Source: P. A. 76-746.)

(65 ILCS 5/6-4-7) (from Ch. 24, par. 6-4-7)

Sec. 6-4-7. Mayor - Powers and duties.

The powers and duties of the mayor shall be:

- (1) To enforce the laws and ordinances within the municipality;
- (2) To appoint and remove his administrative assistants, budget and finance director, heads of all departments, and to appoint and remove all other officers of the municipality, commissions, boards and agencies,

except those covered by the civil service act in municipalities which have adopted said act and except as provided in Section 6-4-14. No appointment shall be made upon any basis other than that of merit and fitness and in compliance with provisions of this act and with qualifications established by the city council.

(3) To exercise control of all departments and divisions thereof created in this Article 6, or that may be created by the council;

(4) To attend all meetings of the council with the right to take part in the discussions, but with no right to vote, except as authorized in Section 6-4-5;

(5) To recommend to the council for adoption such measures as he may deem necessary or expedient;

(6) To perform such other duties as may be prescribed by this Article 6 or may be required of him by ordinance.

(Source: P. A. 76-746.)

(65 ILCS 5/6-4-8) (from Ch. 24, par. 6-4-8)

Sec. 6-4-8. Departments and officers.

Under the general supervision and administrative control of the mayor, there shall be such departments as the council may prescribe by ordinance.

All officers of any city or village shall take and subscribe the oath required by Section 6-4-9.

(Source: P. A. 76-746.)

(65 ILCS 5/6-4-9) (from Ch. 24, par. 6-4-9)

Sec. 6-4-9. Oaths.

Before entering upon the duties of their respective offices all officers, whether elected or appointed, shall take and subscribe the following oath:

I do solemnly swear that I will support the Constitution of the United States, and the Constitution of the State of Illinois, and that I will faithfully discharge the duties of the office of according to the best of my ability.

This oath, so subscribed, shall be filed in the office of the city or village clerk.

(Source: P. A. 76-746.)

(65 ILCS 5/6-4-10) (from Ch. 24, par. 6-4-10)

Sec. 6-4-10. First council-General ordinance.

At the first meeting of the council after this Article 6 becomes effective in any city or village, it shall pass a general ordinance (1) amplifying the powers and duties of the mayor in conformity with this Article 6, (2) defining the scope of each department and of each division thereunder, (3) defining and prescribing the qualifications, powers and duties of appointive officers and employees, (4) fixing the salaries of all appointive officers and employees, (5) providing for independent audits of all accounts of the city or village, which audits shall be conducted independently of the mayor by some person selected by the council, (6) repealing all city ordinances in conflict with the provisions of this statute. Full reports of such audits shall be filed in the public records of the city or village. The power with respect to such audits shall not be construed to limit the responsibility of the mayor for the proper expenditure of city or village funds.

(Source: P.A. 76-746.)

Responsibilities Of A City Council Member

The process for becoming an effective City Council Member is not found in any study course but is typically learned “on the job,” in six easy (or not so easy) lessons.

Lesson #1 - Attendance At Every Meeting This is probably the most important lesson. The City Council represents a cross section of the community and each member’s viewpoint is important to the decision making process. When a Member is absent, this portion of the community viewpoint may not be fully represented.

Lesson #2 - Study City Plans, Codes and Budgets. This is an obvious statement, but one often ignored. Esch Board Member should have an understanding of the major development goals, policies and objectives detailed in the Comprehensive Plan. He/she should have a casual working knowledge of the provisions of the zoning ordinance. Detailed and specific

knowledge is not a prerequisite, but the ability to find information within the comprehensive plan and zoning ordinance is necessary to evaluate development proposals and make recommendations. It's obvious some amount of home work is required to gain a casual working knowledge of the documents. And the City Council Member must understand the needs of the community compared to available revenues, and vote on an affordable budget.

Lesson #3 - Rely on Staff. Most Villages and Cities hire competent City Managers, Attorneys, Finance Directors, Planners, Engineers, and Economic Development professionals. These people are experts and the City relies on them to properly perform their duties. But the Council has the right to expect open and honest communication from staff on a timely manner.

Lesson #4 - Know your Community

Board Members routinely tour the community in order to be familiar with every portion of the community. When a specific geographic area is to be considered it is best to visit the site in question a day or two before the meeting. Many Councils operate under districts where a member represents a district. In this case the Member can focus on his or her district.

Lesson #5 - Prepare Questions And Personal Opinions While “home work” is important, Board Members should not hastily form final opinions and recommendations before the meeting. Testimony from the applicant, staff reports, comments from the public and comments from fellow Board Members should be taken into account in forming personal opinions and recommendations. It is important for Board Members to “speak out” and ask questions to clarify issues. It's the duty of each Board Member to express an informed opinion and respond to specific inquiries by fellow Board Member.

Lesson #6 - Training, Training and More Training The one certainty in government is change. As a result, each Board Member should be committed to a long-ranged program of continual education. There are a number of excellent publications which can be reviewed. Additionally, universities and municipal organizations sponsor seminars which can be attended for education and training.

Lesson @7 -Meeting Preparation. It is especially helpful for Board Members to read the agenda and any supporting documentation to familiarize themselves with the specific issues to be considered prior to the meeting. Some City Council Members actually write out specific questions they want answered prior to the meeting. This personal preparation time makes the meeting proceed smoothly and efficiently and prevents endlessly long drawn-out meetings where little seems to be accomplished.

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