

H. OVERVIEW OF COUNTY GOVERNMENT

As a county employee, you are ultimately responsible to an elected official, who in turn is responsible to the voters. The following information will help you understand the interrelationships between the county's nine elected officials and their various responsibilities. All elected officials serve 4-year terms, except county commissioners, who alternate 2-year and 4-year terms.

Assessor. The county assessor determines equitable values on both real and personal property for tax purposes. The assessor also acts for the Idaho Department of Transportation to title and license motor vehicles. If the governor should call up the militia, the assessor may be ordered to register all county residents liable for such service.

Clerk-Recorder-Auditor. This one elective county officer holds five distinct titles: clerk of the district court, auditor, recorder, clerk of the Board of County Commissioners, and chief elections officer.

Commissioners. A three-member Board of County Commissioners is the governing body in every Idaho county. Two commissioners are elected every two years: one for a two-year term and one for a four-year term. Commissioners may appoint an administrative assistant and hire other personnel.

Coroner. The county coroner plays an important role in law enforcement by investigating and holding inquests to determine the cause of violent or suspicious deaths.

Prosecuting Attorney. The county prosecutor is required to be a licensed and practicing attorney of law in the state of Idaho. He/she prosecutes all criminal cases and provides legal counsel concerning civil matters affecting the various county offices.

Sheriff. The sheriff enforces all penal provisions of the law within the County. He/she supervises the county's emergency 911 dispatch system and is responsible for detaining prisoners in the county jail. The sheriff is also responsible for issuance of driver's licenses and may have contracts with cities or school districts to provide additional law enforcement services.

Treasurer. The county treasurer must collect and account for all property taxes. He/she is responsible for investing idle or surplus monies and manages estates when no heir or other qualified person is available.

County elected officials are concerned with the following issues:

County Finances & Budgeting. The budgeting and financial process of the county involves every elected and appointed county official. All county officials prepare budget requests and thus play a part in the county financial process. The county commissioners are ultimately responsible for adopting the budget and approving all payments, which are processed through the clerk's office.

Courts. Counties are required to provide magistrate and district court facilities and support staff. Idaho's Supreme Court provides judges, technical expertise and oversight to the local courts. The county provides misdemeanor probation services for adults and juveniles.

Elections. The county clerk conducts elections for all taxing districts within the county, except irrigation districts, and maintains and updates voter registration lists.

Emergency Management. Counties must be prepared in case of emergency and Teton County has an emergency management coordinator who is responsible for disaster prevention, preparedness, response and recovery.

Employment Practices. The responsibilities of a public employer are different from those in the private sector. Employees are accorded different rights and many Federal standards not applicable to small, private employers apply to the public sector. County officials must ensure compliance with all applicable state and federal employment laws.

Ethics/Conflicts of Interest. State laws govern circumstances where personal interests may conflict with public responsibilities and mandate disclosure and nonparticipation in certain circumstances. The governing process requires adherence to high ethical standards and disclosure of public information to friend and foe alike. Strong opinions must be balanced by respect for the procedural rights of others.

Health Care/Indigent Assistance. Basic preventative health care services are provided by Idaho's seven public health districts, which are governed by the counties. The county serves as the "last resource" for individuals unable to pay medical bills or in need of emergency, non-medical assistance.

Roads. Teton County maintains about 350 miles of roads and associated bridges. All road construction, maintenance and snow removal occurs under the direction of the county's road & bridge supervisor, who reports to the public works director, who is supervised by the county commissioners. The county has no responsibility or authority for any state highways.

Law Enforcement. The sheriff and prosecuting attorney are the county's primary law enforcement personnel. The sheriff is also responsible for detaining prisoners in the county jail, which is accomplished by leasing space in the Madison County jail.

Open Meetings/Public Records. The public's business is expected to be conducted in public, which means that all government meetings, including any sub-agency or commission created by the county commissioners, must be open to the public, unless the law specifically permits an executive session to be held. All records maintained by the government are public, except those specifically exempted by state statute.

Planning, Zoning and Building. Comprehensive planning, zoning and subdivision regulations are used by counties and cities to provide for orderly change and growth, as well as to stabilize and protect property values. The county issues building permits to ensure that structures are built according to standards set forth in the International Building Code.

Property Taxes. County government works with the State Tax Commission to administer the property tax system for all taxing districts (school, cemeteries, ambulance, fire, library). All county officials have responsibilities within the tax system.

Board of Equalization. The tax administration process starts in the county assessor's office where property values are set. The goal is to achieve equity in values for different property types by assessing all properties at market value. The county commissioners sit as a Board of Equalization to review appeals of property tax valuations and determine whether assessments are equitable. Once values and levies are set, it is the responsibility of the county treasurer to collect taxes.

Purchasing Contracts. Public officials must purchase public property in accordance with specific state statutes designed to provide openness and fairness in the process. The need for public business to be accountable requires that contractual relationships be carried out by written agreement, rather than mere oral promises, and that a competitive bid process is followed.

Risk Management/Liability. Counties have developed programs to manage liability risks to avoid public costs while allowing local government to function. Certain immunities may apply to governmental actions and officials must know these important laws.

Solid Waste Management. Counties are responsible for operating solid waste disposal systems and county commissioners have authority to acquire, establish and operate such systems. Operations at the county transfer station are managed by the county's solid waste supervisor, who reports to the public works director.