

Duties of a County Commissioner

A publication of the Association of Minnesota Counties

County commissioners are elected officials who oversee county activities and work to ensure that citizen concerns are met, federal and state requirements are fulfilled, and county operations run smoothly.

County commissioners spend a lot of time working with and representing people. They attend regular meetings of the county board as well as meetings of board sub-committees and county-related boards and commissions. They represent county concerns before local, state and national boards and commissions, including school boards, city councils, township boards, and state and federal offices. County commissioners work with constituents and respond to constituent concerns.

While no minimum education or prior experience is required for becoming a county commissioner, individual backgrounds and personalities can enhance the effectiveness of county commissioners. Useful experiences include having operated a business; service on a township, school board or city council; involvement in community activities; and management experience. Personal traits that can benefit county commissioners include a sense of humor, an open mind, a vision of where county government should go, an ability to compromise, and an ability to delegate. Effective communication and negotiation skills are also important, since county commissioners spend a lot of time communicating and negotiating.

Commissioners' terms are four years and are staggered among the board (not all elected at the same time). Newly elected commissioners take office the first Monday in January following their election. County board chairs are elected at the board's first meeting in early January. County commissioners' salaries vary, since they are set by individual county boards at the beginning of each year. According to the most recent data collected in the Minnesota Local Government Salary & Benefits Survey, county commissioner salaries range approximately from \$12,000 to \$90,000.*

County commissioners have administrative duties, as well as financial and legislative responsibilities. The following is a partial list of these duties and responsibilities:

County Management

Administration

- Establish policies and procedures for central administration and county departments to meet county goals.
- Coordinate activities of the county board, central administration and county departments with those of the independently elected officers, including auditor, treasurer, recorder, attorney and sheriff. Many counties have a variation of these offices.
- Oversee the county personnel system: authorize the number of county employees, establish salaries and conditions of employment, approve a county benefit schedule, negotiate and approve labor agreements, supervise appointed county department heads, participate in and approve the recruitment and employment of key county employees, and oversee the implementation of the county pay equity plan and the county affirmative action/equal opportunity plan.
- Review liability issues and take appropriate measures to protect county employees and entities.
- Adopt and oversee the process for purchase of equipment and supplies for use by the county.
- Establish a plan for the review and evaluation of county services and programs.

Taxation/Finance

- Review, adjust and adopt the annual county budget and program as presented by the central administration or county departments.
- Authorize the levy and collection of county-wide property taxes.
- Serve as a board of equalization on disputes regarding appraised property values for taxing purposes.
- Authorize the application for and/or receipt of funds from federal and state governments and their use within the county budget.
- Adopt and participate in the implementation of fiscal management policies for the county in areas such as investments, reserve policy, short-term borrowing, use of bonds and risk management/insurance.
- Monitor the overall fiscal health of the county through regular reports of the auditor, treasurer and finance departments.
- Establish a process for approving the payment of expenses incurred by the county.
- Develop and adopt a capital improvement program/budget covering major county expenditures over a series of years.

FOR YOUR INFORMATION

*Ramsey County is Minnesota's only charter county and subsequently the duties outlined here may be slightly different.

Other Functions

- Adopt appropriate ordinances for the enforcement of county-wide actions.
- Ratify, modify or deny the actions of commissions and boards which are advisory to the county board.
- Approve county participation in joint powers agreements with other governmental units.
- Represent the county on administrative/advisory boards and commissions which provide direct and indirect county or county related services. These include airports, libraries, community corrections, local public health boards, community action agencies, mental health centers, day care centers, nursing homes, developmental achievement centers, extension services, regional development commissions, hospitals, social services, joint solid waste commissions, and planning commissions.
- Make decisions regarding participation in optional federal or state programs.
- Communicate county actions and concerns to the public through school groups, business groups, civic organizations, the press and other public forums.
- Participate in both district and statewide meetings of the Association of Minnesota Counties (AMC), including the annual meeting and the legislative conference.
- Participate in activities of the National Association of Counties (NACo).
- Attend conferences, meetings, training and other education programs, as approved by the board, which relate to county activities.
- Other duties and responsibilities that may be enacted by the federal government, state legislature and governor.
- Represent county issues to state and/or federal legislative bodies.

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Salary data cited in this document is based on the most current data available through the Minnesota Local Government Salary & Benefits Survey



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