

# Duties of a County Commissioner

*A publication of the Association of Minnesota Counties.*

County commissioners are a county's key policymakers, overseeing the operation and administration of the county. Commissioners are the elected officials of a county's legislative branch, the County Board of Commissioners, serving in a similar role as a city councilmember or a state representative or senator. Commissioners are responsible for overseeing the county's management and administration, representing county interests at the state and federal level, participating in long-range planning, and managing the county budget and finances.

## Constituent and County Representative

Similar to other legislative bodies, the members of the County Board of Commissioners are elected by specific geographic districts in their home county. Your commissioner is responsible for representing the interests of your community during regular meetings of the county board and at state and federal events.

Commissioners meet regularly in policy-specific sub-committees to thoroughly examine county issues. The number and topics of sub-committees are unique to each county, but most counties include committees related to the topics of parks, public health, public safety, etc. Commissioners can choose to serve on their county's board of appeal and equalization to respond to disputes regarding appraised property values.

Much of a commissioner's time is spent serving on advisory boards or commissions that provide direct and indirect county services. These include: airports, libraries, community corrections, local public health boards, day care centers, nursing homes, hospitals, and joint solid waste commissions.

Commissioners serve as county representatives at public and private industry events at the state and federal level. Commissioners communicate their home county's concerns to state legislators and federal policymakers, and promote economic development in the county at events for business groups and civic organizations.

**Most county boards meet on Tuesdays, three times per month. Commissioners determine the meeting schedule at the start of each year.**

## County Management

State law defines the roles and responsibilities of commissioners including what commissioners can regulate through ordinances and resolutions. Commissioners develop and adopt county laws on a wide variety of topics such as public health, parks, solid waste management, roads and highways, zoning and land use.

One of the central roles commissioners perform in county management is overseeing the personnel system. Commissioners authorize personnel rules that affect county employee recruitment, classification, compensation, and termination. In many counties, they hire the administrative head of the county who is responsible for the day-to-day management of county services. Commissioners are also responsible for filling mid-term vacancies for the elected county offices of auditor, treasurer, sheriff, recorder, attorney, and coroner.

**County boards have five commissioners, unless the county has 100,000+ residents and decides to increase to a seven-member board.**

Commissioners also participate in activities that shape the future of their county through long-range planning initiatives, such as:

- **Lake improvement districts:** A program that preserves and protects an identified lake area.
- **Capital improvement plan:** A timeline for improvements to county assets such as administrative buildings, roads and bridges, public works facilities.
- **Comprehensive plan:** A guide for the future development of the county or any portion of the county including the development of policies, statements, goals, and interrelated plans; only for counties with fewer than 300,000 residents.

**In Minnesota, the average salary for a commissioner is \$26,845 per year.**

## **Interested in becoming a commissioner?**

*To be eligible, you must be:*

- **A district resident for 30+ days.**
- **21+ years of age.**
- **Eligible to vote.**
- **A citizen of the United States.**

## **County Budgets and Finances**

Commissioners have the difficult tasks of approving the annual county budget and determining the county's tax levy. Commissioners have to balance the needs of the county with the ability to raise revenues and pay for mandated state and federal programs. In their budget decisions, commissioners consult with county departments and their constituents to decide the funding for programs and projects in transportation, human services, public safety, public health, and energy and environment.

Mandated state programs are a major cost driver for counties and are often under-funded by the state. Commissioners authorize the receipt of and/or application for state and federal grants to pay for these programs, in addition to using local property tax dollars to supplement costs.

Commissioners also develop and approve the county's capital improvement budget, which includes projects that usually last multiple years and require a significant public funding investment. Commissioners may adopt a capital improvement plan spanning at least five years and covering a wide variety of county needs from new highway maintenance vehicles to remodeling a historic courthouse.

Once commissioners know the total expenditures of the county budget, they determine the property tax levy. Outside of raising the levy, commissioners may explore other revenue sources such as new taxes and fees to cover the costs of the operating and capital budgets. For example, commissioners may decide to instate a wheelage tax or local option sales tax to support highway and other transportation projects.

In addition to the budget approval process, commissioners are responsible for the ongoing financial concerns of the county. Commissioners can direct the treasurer to invest public funds into governmental bonds, notes, bills, mortgages, and other securities. They also settle receipts and expenses of the county and monitor its overall fiscal health through reports from county officials and staff. ■

### **Did you know?**

**AMC is here to help county officials better serve their communities.**

Visit **[www.mncounties.org](http://www.mncounties.org)** for more information on issues that matter most to counties.



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