



Running for Municipal Office: Mayor-Board of Aldermen

Mississippi communities hold elections for mayor and board of aldermen on a regular four-year cycle. These elections are vital in selecting the leaders who will guide the success of their communities for four years. Deciding to run for office is a decision that citizens should thoughtfully consider. Potential candidates are encouraged to learn about the qualifications for each office, the duties and responsibilities involved, and the overall commitment required to serve in local government.

In Mississippi, there are four forms of municipal government:

1. **mayor-board of aldermen form** (also known as the “code charter” form; used by approximately 93 percent of municipalities.)
2. **strong mayor-council form** (known in Mississippi as the mayor-council form)
3. **commission form**
4. **council-manager form**

The information in this publication is based on the **mayor-board of aldermen (code charter) form**. For more information on the other forms of government, consult the book *Municipal Government in Mississippi* found on the Mississippi State University Extension [Center for Government and Community Development \(GCD\) website](#).

If you are unsure of your municipality’s form of government, refer to Appendix V in the book mentioned above to locate your municipality.

General Duties of Mayor

The mayor is vested with the “superintending control” of all officers and affairs of the municipality and is charged with seeing that the laws and ordinances are executed. The mayor oversees the daily operation of the municipal government and makes recommendations to the board. The mayor presides over all meetings of the board of aldermen (and thus recognizes its members for the purpose of making motions, speaking to motions, and so on) but is allowed to vote only if there is a tie. The mayor has the power to veto any ordinance, resolution, or order adopted by the board of aldermen by returning the measure to the board, together with a written statement of his objections to all or any part of it, within ten days of receipt.

The mayor is required to sign all commissions and appointments of officers chosen by the mayor and board of aldermen. While the in-office hours of a mayor depend on the size and complexity of the municipality, serving as an elected official is considered a full-time job by many. The position of mayor is truly a “weak” one in the mayor-board of aldermen form of municipal government, since the mayor is given responsibility to oversee all officers and affairs and see that the laws and ordinances are executed without receiving sufficient power to do so.

General Duties of Alderman

Depending on the municipality’s population, aldermen are elected to represent the community as a whole or are elected to represent geographical wards. They are to serve as the legislative body of the city. Aldermen must attend at a minimum one to two regularly scheduled board meetings. At these meetings, they conduct the business of the municipality by making motions and casting votes on public policy (ordinances, resolutions, and orders).

Aldermen “may not become involved in the day-to-day operation of municipal government or in the direction of a department head,” MS AG Op., Baker (March 8, 1995), and they do not have the individual authority to “direct daily activities of employees.” The board of aldermen hires and fires municipal employees subject to the mayor’s veto. While not considered a full-time job or having required office hours, the position of alderman can be time-consuming. Potential candidates should consider the meeting requirements as well as the time required to represent, in some cases, several thousand constituents.

Shared Duties of the Mayor and Board

One of the most significant areas of shared power in municipal government is the authority to appoint and dismiss officials and employees. The mayor and board of aldermen jointly share this responsibility, which includes appointing municipal officers such as the municipal clerk, municipal judge, marshal or chief of police, and other necessary officials. They also have the authority to define their duties, set compensation, and require surety bonds for officers and employees handling public funds.

Notably, the positions of municipal judge and marshal or chief of police may be either appointed or elected. In practice, the board of aldermen handles hiring and firing decisions, subject to the mayor's veto, while the mayor oversees the daily operations of the municipal government and provides recommendations to the board. Since 1976, the mayor and aldermen have also had the authority to create the position of a chief administrative officer, but this requires a two-thirds vote of the aldermen to pass the necessary ordinance.

Requirements to Qualify for Office

1. The candidate must be a qualified, registered voter of the municipality and of the ward, if the office sought is elected from a ward.
2. The candidate must meet all residency requirements. A candidate for any municipal office must be a resident of the municipality, county, county district, or other territory that they seek to represent in such office for 2 years immediately preceding the day of election. The provisions of this section do not apply to any municipality with less than 1,000 residents based on the latest federal decennial census.
3. The candidate must not have been convicted of a disqualifying crime.

Steps to Consider Before Running for Office

1. Consider why you desire to run for office. What motivates you to serve?
2. Discuss the idea with immediate and trusted family and a close circle of friends. Seek their honest feedback about the election process and your ability to serve in the office.
3. Make sure you meet the qualifications for the office.
4. Thoroughly review resources to understand municipal government rules and regulations. Start with reviewing *Municipal Government in Mississippi*.
5. Review [ethical considerations for serving in public office](#).
6. Will you have to leave your current employment?

7. Will serving in this office affect a business owned by you or a close family member?
8. Do you currently serve in an elected or appointed capacity that would require you to vacate your seat?
9. Consider the amount of time and money needed to run a successful campaign. Consult others who have run for local office for an idea of what is involved.
10. Assemble a group of trusted family members and friends to help develop your campaign team and map out a plan.
11. [Complete and file qualifying paperwork](#).
12. State law requires all candidates for elected office to [file a Statement of Economic Interest](#) with the Mississippi Ethics Commission within 15 days after the deadline for qualification for that public office.
13. [File necessary campaign finance forms](#) with the Mississippi Secretary of State's office.

Important Deadlines

- Qualifying Deadline
- Absentee Voting for Primary Begins
- Primary Election
- Primary Runoff Election
- Absentee Voting for General Election
- General Election

For More Information

GCD staff designs and delivers educational programs, training activities, information, and technical assistance in response to the high-priority economic and community development needs of Mississippi communities and their citizens. Participants in GCD programs include local government leaders, community-based organizations, state and local agencies, and business enterprises. To learn more, visit gcd.extension.msstate.edu.

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