

# City Government 101

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## **1. What type of government does the City of Burlington have?**

Burlington has a Mayor-Council form of government. With this form of local government the Mayor must work with City Council, and citizens, to make decisions affecting the city.

Burlington is fortunate to have many active citizens that keep the city running smoothly by serving on City Council, city commissions, various steering committees, and Neighborhood Planning Assemblies. Without these volunteers Burlington city government would not function as well.

## **2. What does the Mayor do?**

The Mayor is the chief executive of administration and is responsible for the overall planning of the city and answering to citizens' concerns. The Mayor is elected every three years.

## **3. What does city council do?**

City Council serves as the legislative body in city government. The Council has the authority to make decisions that affect the city by voting on resolutions. Resolutions are written documents that outline a decision or action that the city wishes to take. The Mayor is not part of City Council but does have veto power, meaning he can block proposed actions. However, the Mayor's veto can be overturned if two-thirds of City Council votes in favor of overturning it.

There are fourteen City Councilors, two from each ward in the city. City Councilors serve two-year terms. New Councilors are elected every two years but the elections are staggered so that not all City Council seats come up for election in the same year. Only citizens who live in the ward the Councilor is from vote in the election.

## **4. What do city commissions do?**

City commissions oversee the operations of city departments and deal with the department's current issues, general operations, budget, and personnel matters. Commission chairs must report to the mayor before making any final decisions.

## **5. What are some examples of city boards and commissions?**

**The Conservation Board** is comprised of nine Burlington residents appointed by the City Council. The duty of the board is to assist the Planning Commission and Zoning Board of Adjustment by providing advisory environmental evaluations where pertinent to applications for development permits. The Board also provides comments and recommendations to the District Environmental Commission. In addition, the Conservation Board helps review projects, which potentially affect the environmental quality of the City.

**The Planning Commission** is comprised of seven volunteers appointed by City Council. The Commission has the responsibility of developing, and recommending to the City Council, land use and development policy for the City. This typically takes two forms - first, the development of plans and capacity studies (including the City Master Plan and Capital Improvement Plan), and second, the development of land use regulations (subdivision bylaws, zoning regulations, etc). Any plans, policies, and regulations developed by the Commission is taken to the City Council for consideration. The board has three standing committees: Executive, Long Range Planning, and Ordinance. The Board meets twice a month and one of these sessions is typically a work session.

**The School Board** is a 14-member board with two members from each ward in the city. The board is responsible for the governing the operations of the school district. This includes decisions relating to the budget, curriculum, and school policies. The Board has three committees: Finance, Technology and Curriculum/Policy.

## **6. How can citizens get involved?**

Commissions are sounding boards for public opinion. Each commission meeting begins with a public forum where citizens can come and voice their concerns directly. Citizens can also talk to a city councilor about their concerns.

Citizens can also run for City Council or city commissions themselves. The term “citizen” is defined here as a legal resident of the City of Burlington who is 18 years or older.