

small city

RESOURCE MANUAL



A guide for Washington's small cities and towns



Table of contents

	Introduction	1
Chapter 1	Overview of a city	4
Chapter 2	Leadership and management	6
Chapter 3	Successful city councils	11
Chapter 4	Planning your city's future	15
Chapter 5	Ethics, open government, and fairness: Staying on the right side of the law	19
Chapter 6	Municipal budgeting and fiscal management	28
Chapter 7	Human resources and labor relations	36
Chapter 8	Public safety and emergency management	42
Chapter 9	Public works and infrastructure	47
Chapter 10	Comprehensive planning, growth management, and environmental protection	55
	Resources	62

Introduction

Small cities are different from their larger counterparts not just in size, but in nature. In these communities, elected officials often know nearly everyone in town. At city hall, staff and residents don't have to deal with a big bureaucracy — but they do have to get along with people with whom they may have long-standing, complex relationships: business competitors, neighbors, and friends.

Indeed, it's the personal, close-knit nature of small communities that makes them the historical and cultural bedrock of American life. But governing a small town isn't easy. In fact, the challenges are sometimes greater for leaders in small communities, because they must deal with the ever-more-complex laws and regulations of the 21st century without the specialized staff of larger cities. In small cities, the clerk might be a part-time employee, the mayor the chief grant writer, and the public works director in charge of animal control (if there even is a public works director). Despite limited resources in small cities, residents often expect services to be quick and tailored to their personal needs, and they may blame local officials when the complex requirements of state or federal law get in the way of their wishes.

This resource manual is meant to make life a little easier around city hall. It can be used to help orient newly elected officials and city staff and serve as a reference when questions arise. This resource manual is not meant to provide legal advice or all needed information on a particular topic. Instead, it provides a brief overview of key topics, outlining the most important considerations. A comprehensive listing of resources, state agencies, and other partners can be found on the Association of Washington Cities website at wacities.org.

Throughout this publication, both small cities and towns are referred to as cities. This manual is intended for officials in cities with a population of less than 5,000. We understand that each small city — from Albion to Zillah — is unique, and that the operations at a city of 500 can differ significantly from a city of 5,000.

Association of Washington Cities

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Founded in 1933, the Association of Washington Cities (AWC) is a private, nonprofit, nonpartisan corporation that represents Washington's cities and towns before the state legislature, the state executive branch, and with regulatory agencies. Membership is voluntary. However, AWC consistently maintains 100% participation from Washington's 281 cities and towns. A 25-member Board of Directors oversees the association's activities.

Mission

The Association of Washington Cities builds connections between our state's diverse cities and towns, while providing our members with the support needed to thrive through delivery of data-driven education, nationally recognized pooling programs, and nonpartisan advocacy.

What does AWC do?

Headquartered in Olympia, AWC's staff offers assistance to cities in four areas:

- **Advocacy:** AWC is committed to representing the interests of Washington's diverse cities and towns. One united voice, speaking for cities large and small, has a significant impact on lawmakers and other interest groups in Olympia and Washington, D.C. We listen to what matters most to you during city visits, regional discussions, and conferences, then advocate on your behalf. Our advocacy tools include timely updates, in-depth analysis, and trainings for a stronger grassroots effort.
- **Education:** AWC targets education for municipal leadership, offering trainings and resources that are relevant in today's fast-paced, dynamic world. From conferences and issue-driven forums to webinars and on-demand courses, we tailor our trainings to meet your schedule and budget. AWC's Certificate of Municipal Leadership program gives elected officials options and recognition for expanding their knowledge and skills.

AWC offers Small City Scholarships to help city leaders attend in-person AWC trainings. The scholarships cover the cost of registration, and cities can use the scholarship up to four times per year.

- **Data and resources:** AWC's wealth of resources and research tools helps city leaders make decisions, identify trends, and explore new ways to approach issues. Valuable data is made available through data collection efforts such as the annual Salary and Benefit Survey and biannual Tax and User Fee Survey. Resources range from practical handbooks to topical publications, including the award-winning *Cityvision* magazine.
- **Member Pooling Programs:** AWC member employers have the option to join any of AWC's Member Pooling Programs. Programs are member-driven, with a particular focus on cost savings, prevention, and excellent customer service. AWC's programs were created especially for cities and towns that need quality benefits and services at a reasonable cost. The pooling of similar employers keeps overall costs lower and more predictable. Our programs include the Employee Benefit Trust, Risk Management Service Agency, Workers' Compensation Retrospective Rating Program, Drug & Alcohol Consortium, and GIS Consortium.

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The Municipal Research and Services Center (MRSC) is a nonprofit organization that helps local governments across Washington state better serve their communities by providing legal and policy guidance on a broad range of topics. MRSC serves all cities, counties, and state agencies, as well as hundreds of special purpose districts through contract partnerships.

MRSC's trusted staff attorneys and policy consultants answer thousands of questions every year, helping staff and elected officials research policies, comply with state and federal laws, and improve day-to-day operations.

MRSC has been serving local governments in Washington for 90 years. Originally established in 1934 as the University of Washington Bureau of Governmental Research, MRSC has operated as a private nonprofit since 1969.

Below is a summary of the services MRSC provides to local government staff and officials:

- **Have a question? Ask MRSC!** With one call or click you can get a free personalized answer from one of MRSC's trusted attorneys or policy consultants. Learn more and submit questions at mrsc.org/askmrsc.
- **E-newsletters & blog:** MRSC staff regularly write about a wide variety of local government topics, including new legislation and court decisions, emerging issues, policy guidance, and management tips. To get the latest news, MRSC policy analysis, and training opportunities, sign up for MRSC e-newsletters at mrsc.org/e-news or visit MRSC's blog at mrsc.org/stay-informed/mrsc-insight.
- **Explore topics and research tools:** At mrsc.org, you can access legal and policy guidance on hundreds of local government topics, including helpful explanations, relevant statutes and court decisions, examples of different policy approaches, recommended resources for further information, and more.
- **Training opportunities:** MRSC provides webinars and in-person trainings on a wide variety of local government topics including public records, open public meetings, procurement, finance, ethics, and more. Many of these trainings are eligible for continuing education or professional development credits. To see the latest offerings, visit MRSC's training page at mrsc.org/training.
- **MRSC Rosters & MRSC Electronic Bidding:** MRSC Rosters is a shared state-wide small public works and consultant roster service that, for a nominal annual fee, Washington cities, counties, and special purpose districts can use to obtain services as an affordable and convenient alternative to maintaining their own rosters. MRSC also provides an electronic bidding service, offered in partnership with Bonfire. To learn more about these two services and how to register for one or both, visit the MRSC Rosters website at www.mrscrosters.org.

Overview of a city

How cities and towns came to be

It's easy to think of a city as a stand-alone entity. They have their own borders and unique laws and ordinances. But cities operate within a larger government framework. They were created under the state constitution and general laws as "municipal corporations." In essence, cities are creatures of the state, exercising local powers within the limitation of state law. However, cities have the broadest powers of any local government.

Cities can do many of the same things as an everyday private business: provide services, collect revenue, sue (and be sued), contract with other entities, etc. But unlike other businesses, city functions are wholly public.

Cities versus towns: What's the difference?

The difference between cities and towns is more than just semantics. All Washington cities, except for Waitsburg, incorporate under one of four classifications:

- First class cities (population 10,000 or more)
- Second class cities (population 1,500 or more)
- Towns (population 1,500 or less)
- Optional municipal code (no population threshold)

While all cities and towns possess the same basic authority to perform general government functions, there are several distinctions. For example, code cities and first class cities exercise a broader degree of self-government or "home rule" than do towns or second class cities.

Waitsburg remains the last city in Washington to operate under a territorial charter, as revised in 1886.

The creation of code cities

For many years, smaller cities tried to win changes in state law to give them the same flexibility and autonomy that first class cities (originally those with populations of 20,000 or more) were granted by the state constitution.

After much debate, a 1967 law created a new category called "code cities" that gives smaller cities much more local autonomy and flexibility over matters ranging from employee benefits to annexations. Since the law was passed, many small cities have chosen to become "code cities" to take advantage of the increased autonomy this status provides. MRSC's Code City Handbook contains a detailed summary of the differences between code and charter municipal governments. It also contains information about how to become a code city.

No more new towns

The 1994 Legislature made some significant changes to the state laws governing incorporations. Due to these changes, the minimum population now required to incorporate as a city is 1,500. Since a new city cannot be formed unless it has at least 1,500 inhabitants, incorporation as a town is no longer an option (i.e., new cities must incorporate as either first or second class cities or as optional municipal code cities).

Know the law

- [Washington State Constitution](#)
- [RCW 35 – Cities and towns](#)
- [RCW 35A – Optional municipal code](#)
- [RCW 35.02.010 – Authority for incorporation](#)

Leadership & management

What's my role?

It's an honor to be an elected leader of a community. It means your fellow community members respect you and your good judgment and trust you to be a wise steward of their tax dollars and their city. Community leadership and the ability to proactively address the needs of a city are key elements of successful governance.

Serving as staff for a city is also something special: It is an opportunity to participate in shaping the future and serving the public good. But staff and elected officials can only contribute fully when each person is clear about their duties and respects the roles and responsibilities of others.

Forms of city government

To achieve the goals of city leaders or staff, and to understand each position's unique role, it's important to understand the city's form of government and the specific role of elected officials.

Washington cities operate under two principal forms of government, and the duties of elected and appointed officials are determined by these two types of organization:

1. Mayor-council
2. Council-manager

The biggest difference between these two forms of city government is the role of elected officials, particularly the mayor.

Mayor-council form of government

In the mayor-council form of government (also known as 'strong mayor'), an elected mayor (elected at-large, by the city's voters) serves as the city's chief administrative officer. A city council (elected either at-large or from districts within the city) serves as the city's legislative body. The council has the authority to create and adopt city policies, and the mayor is responsible for carrying them out. The mayor attends and presides over council meetings, but does not vote, except to break a tie.

Veto authority of the mayor is specified in the state laws relating to each city classification or is determined by local charter. In first class cities, the mayor's veto authority is in the city charter. In second class cities, the mayor may veto an ordinance, but the mayor's veto can be overridden by five members of the council. In code cities, the mayor may veto ordinances, but the mayor's veto can be overridden by a majority plus one of the entire council. Town mayors do not have veto power.

Many larger mayor-council cities have a professional city administrator to serve under the mayor and help with administrative and policy-related duties. These cities get the benefits of professional management, allowing the mayor to focus greater attention on policy development and political leadership. Read more about hiring a professional city administrator later in this chapter.

Council-manager form of government

In the council-manager government, the city council is responsible for policymaking, and a professional city manager (appointed by the council) is responsible for administration. The city manager provides policy advice, directs the daily operations of city government, handles personnel functions (including the power to hire and fire employees), and is responsible for preparing the city budget.

Under the council-manager statutes, the city council hires the city manager and can fire the city manager. However, the council is not allowed to interfere with the city manager's administrative duties. There is a difference between making policy (the council's job) and implementing policy (the city manager's job). To be effective, a city manager must have the council's support.

The mayor in council-manager cities is usually chosen by their fellow city councilmembers. In code cities or first class cities, the mayor may be directly elected by the people. The mayor presides at council meetings and is recognized as the head of the city for ceremonial purposes but has no veto power or regular administrative duties.

Roles & responsibilities

Many of the conflicts at city hall and in council chambers are the result of confusion about roles and responsibilities. Conflict tends to arise when someone oversteps boundaries. As unclear as those boundaries may sometimes seem, there is a basic structure to city government, and respecting it can prevent a lot of problems.

Because the city council is the "legislative body," it has the power to make laws and policy. The council also makes rules that govern its procedures, including public meetings and hearings. If the city uses the council-manager form of government, the mayor has essentially the same role as other councilmembers.

For example, the council will:

- Vote to enact the city budget;
- Define the powers, function, and duties of city officers and employees;
- Set employee wages and salaries; and
- Enter into contracts.

The mayor of a mayor-council city, or the city manager in a council-manager city, is the city's chief executive officer (CEO). This person oversees the day-to-day administration and will be responsible for duties such as:

- Monitoring operations and enforcing contracts to make sure that work is done well and within budget;
- Preparing a proposed city budget and presenting it to the council; and
- Reporting to the council on the city's financial well-being and needs.

Typical small city departments

Although some small cities may only have a few people carrying out multiple responsibilities, the following are common departments in a small city.

Administration

Depending on the city's form of government, the mayor or the city manager is the head of this department. Some key administrative tasks include carrying out the council's policies, preparing the city budget, directing the city's daily operations, coordinating the various departments, and keeping the council informed. Some mayors of small cities delegate day-to-day tasks and responsibilities to a city administrator.

Legal

The city attorney provides legal counsel to city officials, departments, commissions, and boards. The city attorney also prepares legal documents, ordinances, and resolutions pertaining to city business and represents the city in litigation. This position may be in-house or contracted.

City clerk

The clerk typically maintains the council minutes and records, catalogs and maintains all official city files and records, publishes all required notices, and prepares council agendas. In many small cities, the clerk and treasurer positions are combined.

Finance/Treasurer

The finance department plans and directs the fiscal operations of city government. The department keeps the city administration informed of the financial picture relating to revenues, investments, and expenditures. The department oversees accounting, purchasing, and licensing; prepares payroll; and often manages data processing functions.

Public safety services

These services include the police department, fire department (which may include emergency medical services), and building department, which enforces state and local building codes and issues building permits. These services may be provided in-house or contracted.

Planning

This department acts as technical staff advisor to the city council, the planning commission, and the city administration. The planner may be involved with decisions involving zoning changes, variances, subdivision applications, conditional use permits, etc. These services may be provided in-house or contracted.

Public works

This department manages the city's infrastructure services. This may include parks, city buildings, street construction and maintenance, water, sewer, and stormwater management. These services may be provided in-house or contracted.

Working with other entities

A city may be its own entity, but it must work closely with other governments and organizations. Particularly for small cities, partnering to provide services, borrow equipment, or rely on others' expertise can be a great way to meet service demands while being a good steward of limited public resources.

Municipal partnerships can be forged among a wide variety of entities: other cities, counties, schools, fire districts, other special districts, states, tribes, federal agencies (in any combination), as well as with private companies or nonprofit organizations. Small cities commonly partner with each other or with a county government for services like law enforcement, jails, courts, animal control, street maintenance, permitting, or information technology. Common contracts with private firms include solid waste, legal, planning, engineering, and other consulting services.

Service agreements

The most common partnership is in the form of a service agreement, involving one agency providing a service for another. In this agreement, the provider agency is responsible for delivering the service as well as exercising administrative and managerial controls over the resources employed in the process.

Service exchange

Sometimes jurisdictions discover that they have complementary resources or expertise and simply exchange services of approximately equal value. There is a certain equity and practical appeal to these exchanges and the added costs are avoided.

Joint service arrangement

In this arrangement, two or more entities share governance of the organization delivering services. Partner jurisdictions have joint responsibility for managing the enterprise for their mutual benefit.

Consolidation of jurisdictions

In this partnership, service functions are permanently transferred to another jurisdiction. For example, a city can be annexed into a fire district and relieved of providing those services. Virtually any transfer of a service must be accompanied by some direct or indirect revenues to offset the costs of service delivery by the jurisdiction accepting the transfer.

Property and liability insurance

If one thing is certain, it's that accidents happen. It's important that a city is covered when unforeseeable incidents occur, whether it's someone tripping on a sidewalk, a disgruntled employee filing suit, or damage to city property.

Most cities are covered by one of three insurance pools that provide property and liability insurance. Depending on the pool, they offer a wide variety of resources.

City leaders should consider potential risks before making decisions and contact the city's risk pool or attorney before acting. Risk managers can provide invaluable advice, legal resources, sample policies, and training resources that will protect a city's assets.

For more information on liability, see the following sections:

- Volunteer strategies for involving your community (Chapter 4)
- Public Records Act (Chapter 5)
- The Fair Labor Standards Act and Washington State Overtime Law (Chapter 7)
- Police and law enforcement service (Chapter 8)
- Streets and transportation (Chapter 9)
- Land use (Chapter 10)

When to consider a professional administrator

The responsibilities of a small city mayor can seem overwhelming, especially to a new mayor who is not trained in management or city administration. Some small cities have resolved this by hiring a professional city administrator to carry out the administrative responsibilities of the mayor.

Why would a city consider hiring a professional city administrator?

- Running a city has become much more complex in the past 30 years. State and federal mandates, complicated human resource issues, liability and risk management, growth management laws, complex contracts and agreements, difficult budgets, and many other tough issues face cities today. It is increasingly difficult for a small city mayor and city clerk to deal effectively with all these issues.
- In mayor-council cities, the mayor often serves as the chief executive officer. However, even though a mayor may be a very effective and visionary leader, they may not have administrative skills or deep expertise in the federal, state, and county laws and rules that city government operates under.

In many smaller cities, the reality is that the clerk-treasurer position has evolved into the “de facto” city administrator. In many places, this has worked well. However, many long-serving clerk-treasurers are nearing retirement, and with their departure a great deal of institutional knowledge and skill will be lost. Many cities have not planned for this loss and will find themselves suddenly in need of knowledgeable new administrators.

Advantages of professional management

A professional city administrator is trained to administer a government. Many colleges and universities offer special degrees in public administration to prepare people for exactly this kind of work. A full-time city administrator also has more opportunities to network with their peers and learn from their experiences. In a time when state, federal, and local laws are becoming more layered and complex, this depth of knowledge can be extremely important.

Disadvantages of professional management

The major obstacle to hiring a city administrator is usually the cost, which may be well beyond the ability of the city to pay without budget cuts in other areas.

Professional administrators are a rarity in cities of less than 2,500 in population. However, in the long run they may be the best investment that a city can make.

It's important to note that in some cases, voters may feel that the mayor is the only person accountable for city operations, regardless of whether there is a hired city administrator.

Know the law

- [RCW 35.18 – Council-manager plan form of government for non-code cities](#)
- [RCW 35.17 – Commission form of government](#)
- [RCW 35A.12 – Mayor-council plan of government for code cities](#)
- [RCW 35A.13 – Council-manager plan of government for code cities](#)
- [RCW 39.34 – Interlocal Cooperation Act](#)

Successful city councils

chapter 3

City councils make laws that impact every community member. That's a very important authority — one that requires sound judgment and the willingness to learn a great deal about issues, opportunities, and the larger legal framework in which city councils operate. A good orientation for new councilmembers — and ongoing training that keeps councilmembers up to date — can help people work together as a team and achieve the goals that inspired them to run for office.

Orientation for newly elected officials

Many newly elected officials are overwhelmed by everything they need to learn and are surprised by the amount of time it takes to perform the duties of a councilmember or mayor. Some may also be surprised to discover the limits of their role in making decisions and setting city policy. That's why a thorough orientation is essential. It should include clear information on what councilmembers can and cannot do, and about the larger framework in which city governments operate.

In addition to a thorough orientation at city hall, newly elected city officials are strongly encouraged to attend AWC's Elected Official Essentials Workshop and stay connected through AWC's trainings throughout their career. Additionally, AWC offers a wide variety of eLearning resources that are available on-demand on our website.

The following are some ideas about what an orientation for newly elected officials should cover.

Learn the basics of city government

Newly elected councilmembers need a broad overview of city functions, including finance, public works, public safety, and other departments. It's a good idea for the mayor, city manager, or city administrator to arrange a tour of the physical facilities and set up meetings with department heads. If this is not done as a matter of routine, newly elected councilmembers can suggest it.

Review the long-range plan

If the city has a long-range plan, the next step is to review the plan, its goals, and future projects with newly elected councilmembers.

Review important documents

The mayor or other city staff could compile the following documents (if the city produces them) for newly elected officials to review:

- Current operating budget and capital budget
- Comprehensive annual financial report
- Information on key programs and services
- Organization chart, staff roster, and contact list
- Primary planning documents
- Map showing city boundaries, buildings, and facilities
- Mission statement and goals
- Council rules/meeting procedures

- Meeting minutes for the last twelve months
- Local municipal codes
- Work program and significant staff reports from the last twelve months
- Personnel policies and other administrative policies
- Facts about the city: population, form of government, incorporation date, number of employees, total budget, total debt, etc.
- List of governmental agencies providing services or affecting the city through regulatory or other powers
- Calendar of important events

Types of council meetings

Under Washington’s Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA) there are two types of council meetings:

- **Regular council meetings:** These meetings are regularly scheduled for general and routine business, including the enactment of ordinances.
- **Special meetings:** These meetings have a more limited agenda than regular meetings—usually business that cannot be postponed. Written 24-hour notice must be given to the press and other councilmembers.

In conjunction with regular or special meetings, the city may hold:

- **Public hearings:** A chance for residents to express their opinions, usually on a single topic.
- **Executive sessions:** Closed meetings limited, by state law or local ordinance, to a few items, including personnel, legal issues, or property acquisition.
- **Work sessions:** Intended to provide opportunities for councilmembers to study issues, gather and analyze information, and clarify problems.

Every city councilmember needs to know and understand Washington’s open meeting law. Read more about this in Chapter 5 and visit MRSC’s website for practical guidance on the Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA) and the Public Records Act (PRA). Under the Open Government Trainings Act, all elected officials and certain appointed officials must complete training on the OPMA, PRA, and records retention within 90 days of taking office and every four years thereafter.

Ordinances, resolutions, orders, and motions

A city council has a variety of options available for taking legislative action, including ordinances, resolutions, orders, or motions. Here’s what those terms mean:

Ordinances

An ordinance is a local law of a city, prescribing general rules of conduct. Ordinances may be used for a variety of purposes, including administrative actions such as establishing new offices in the city, or they may be used for actions that control the conduct of the public. An ordinance usually deals with matters that are permanent and general in nature. For example, when a city is enacting a zoning code, an ordinance must be used.

Resolutions

A resolution is less formal than an ordinance and generally is an expression of the opinion or intent of the official body concerning some particular item of business. Usually, a resolution deals with matters that are temporary or special in character. An example is a resolution of intent to establish a local improvement district (LID).

Orders

An order is used to direct a specific action to be taken on behalf of the city. For example, an order could be used to authorize the mayor to sign a contract. Orders still require a vote and are recorded in the minutes. Once an order has been complied with, it no longer has effect.

Motions

A motion is a proposal made at a city council meeting by a member asking that the council take a particular action. The proposed action may be substantive or it may express a certain view or direct a particular action be taken, such as an investigation. A motion, once approved and entered into the record, is the equivalent of a resolution.

When to use an ordinance and when to use a resolution

If a state statute requires that an ordinance must be used to take some type of action, then of course an ordinance must be used. If no particular form of enactment is specified, then either an ordinance or resolution will be sufficient.

Making public policy

Legislative bodies are elected to make day-to-day and long-term decisions that impact the city's direction. This happens through the making of public policy.

City councils are asked to make policy about a variety of issues including, but not limited to:

- The level and array of services to be provided;
- Which taxes should be imposed and at what level;
- Determination of land use; and
- The community's vision and what policies should be adopted to achieve that future vision.

Day-to-day decisions are an ongoing policymaking process and are how the city council responds to the community's immediate needs. This short-term policymaking process occurs through adoption of ordinances and resolutions.

City councils work towards achieving the community's vision for the future through long-term policymaking and strategic planning. More information about planning for the future can be found in Chapter 4.

Public policy decisions should be the result of a deliberative process.

Good public policy should:

1. Reflect the desires of the community
2. Be fair
3. Be based on good research
4. Be achievable
5. Have identified and measurable outcomes

A poorly planned process or an unthinking reaction in response to a particular issue can result in policies that lead the city down an unintended path. To help avoid this, councilmembers should listen to the arguments both in favor of and in opposition to proposals in order to fully address an issue and discuss alternatives before making a decision.

Codification

Codification means the editing, rearrangement, and grouping of ordinances under appropriate titles, parts, chapters, and sections in a municipal code book. It can be helpful to consolidate various ordinances of the city's code in a single chapter or section arranged by subject matter to make them easy to find.

Parliamentary procedure

Parliamentary procedure provides for an orderly, predictable process for proposing, amending, approving, or defeating legislative motions. RCW 35A.12.120 provides that a city may adopt, by ordinance or resolution, its own set of rules governing the conduct of council meetings, or it may adopt formalized rules such as Robert's Rules of Order. Many cities have adopted Robert's Rules, along with additional rules on issues such as abstentions and motions for reconsideration. Having clear parliamentary rules — and following them consistently—reduces the chances of a council action being challenged or declared illegal.

Using council committees & citizen advisory groups

Committees are a great way for a council to divide and conquer tough issues that require a lot of time.

The most common city council committees are:

- Budget and finance
- Public safety
- Community development
- Public works
- Parks and recreation

While these are typical committees, the choice of whether and which type of council committees to have is up to the local council.

Cities can also appoint citizen boards, commissions, and task forces on a broad range of issues. Some of these boards are designated by statute for a specific purpose, such as a building code board of appeals. However, councils can create citizen commissions or advisory groups on any topic.

Citizen commissions and advisory groups can provide a broad range of ideas and expertise on an issue and, equally important, a communication channel between elected officials and the community.

Know the law

- [RCW 35.21.500 - 35.21.570](#)—Codification

Planning your city's future

chapter 4

One of the key qualities of a leader is the ability to see the big picture and plan for the long term. What should a city look like for future generations? What trends—both positive and negative—does the city need to address? These questions can get lost in the day-to-day challenges of keeping city services afloat and balancing the budget—but it's the city council's job to see that they don't.

Long-term planning is essential not just because conditions are constantly changing, but also because it's the way a community defines itself and commits to working towards a common goal. That's why it's so important to involve residents—including people from all walks of life—in creating a clear vision for the future and a plan to achieve it.

Strategic planning

A strategic plan is a big-picture document that lays out a city's future and specifies the actions needed to achieve that vision. A good strategic plan also includes benchmarks or mileposts along the way that mark the city's progress towards achieving its vision. Having such a plan brings focus and accountability to the work of the city government. It creates a way to measure progress and to quickly identify obstacles and overcome them. Most important, the process of creating a strategic plan involves everyone—councilmembers, staff, and residents—in shaping a shared vision that can unify and energize the community.

Strategic planning can help the city develop a vision, identify long-term goals and annual objectives, and provide detailed strategies to address community needs and organizational performance.

The development and implementation of a strategic plan is time-consuming and requires the sustained attention and work of city staff, elected officials, and community members. Objectives defined by a strategic plan often require a long-term commitment of staff resources and funding to make effective change.

Areas often addressed as part of this process include economic development, improving municipal services, diversifying the tax base, and improving the infrastructure within a community.

While there are many ways to approach strategic planning, here are a few key elements to keep in mind:

- Agree on a clear vision of the future.
- Put together a mission statement—why are we here?
- Involve people—elected officials, city staff, and community members.
- Create a strategy that defines what success means.
- Establish clear priorities.
- Create action plans that carry out your strategy—the what, who, when, and how to measure.
- Get buy-in for the action plans.
- Integrate your action plans into all aspects of city hall operations.
- Decide how you will monitor and measure your action plans—and follow through.
- Stay focused and keep communicating.

Strategic planning retreats

Many cities schedule annual planning retreats for councilmembers and city staff. A retreat is an opportunity to get away from the daily routine and focus on long-term, big-picture issues. Retreats also provide valuable opportunities to address problems in working relationships and forge a more productive, collegial team. Retreats don't have to be expensive resort getaways but should be in a relaxed environment. A library, community center, or any public meeting space can work well. A city retreat is subject to the Open Public Meetings Act.

The most important part of a retreat is that it provides the opportunity for the council and key staff to take a moment out of busy schedules and look at the city's direction from a holistic perspective. Encouraging the group to gather in a new location is important. This gives the group an opportunity to truly "retreat" from daily business and explore new ideas about the city's vision and strategic direction.

Having a facilitator who is not a member of the city council or staff is also important. This allows everyone to participate more freely. If your city can't afford a professional facilitator, consider choosing a facilitator who has some local standing, such as a school superintendent, a chamber of commerce director, or a service club president. Cities can even ask another city's manager or administrator to act as the facilitator. The most important qualities in a facilitator are impartiality, fairness, and respect for all those who wish to be heard.

Community involvement

It's difficult to determine the collective community vision without involving residents first. Ways to involve the community in long-term visioning include:

- Focus groups
- Resident surveys
- Analysis of political and demographic moods (e.g., anti-growth feelings versus low-income housing concerns).

For more ideas about how to gather resident input, see the last section of this chapter.

Other long-range planning tools

Cities must make long-range decisions based on good, current information. Economic and population forecasts can help cities plan for changes down the road. See the long-range financing planning section in Chapter 6 and the comprehensive planning section of Chapter 10 for more information.

Economic development

Many of Washington's small cities are skilled and successful in promoting economic development. Whether its tourism promotion in Leavenworth, high-speed telecommunications investments in Forks, or historic building preservation in Rosalia, small city governments undertake various activities that bring economic vitality to their communities. But these things don't just happen overnight. They require specific, deliberative steps on behalf of residents and the city council.

Small city economic development can involve:

- Working with the business community to attract, retain, and expand businesses
- Revitalizing downtown areas
- Revising land use policies to invite particular investments (e.g., housing, industrial, commercial)
- Building infrastructure to support various enterprises
- Partnering with other governments and organizations to support job creation and training programs

Washington's economic development toolbox is more limited than other states. The state constitution contains provisions that strictly limit the lending of state credit and gifting of public funds. Therefore, a city does not have authority to construct and operate industrial and commercial facilities or to use city funds to attract private industrial development. The most important economic development tool a city can offer is a well-developed infrastructure system, and partners such as the Infrastructure Assistance Coordinating Council, USDA Rural Development, and Washington State University Extension can help small cities leverage limited resources and expertise in this area.

Legislative advocacy

Many small cities don't realize just how much influence they can have on changes at the state level. When a city council adopts an official position and lets legislators know about it, it can make a difference in how they craft a piece of legislation and how they vote. The Legislature and state agencies listen to the concerns of cities, so it's important for elected leaders to educate their residents and representatives about city challenges and to be aware of AWC's legislative work and priorities.

Although the Legislature only meets for a portion of the year, involvement with the legislative process is a year-round activity. There's no substitute for having a close relationship with state representatives and senators. Staying in touch with them throughout the year helps city officials gain access to busy legislators when they're in session.

Volunteer strategies for involving your community

Every city official knows that residents are a city's greatest asset. Having enough staff for city hall to function on a daily basis, much less complete a large project, can be a major challenge.

That's one reason many cities recognize the advantage of putting the skills of their community members to use in volunteer programs. Such programs can increase the quality and quantity of public services at a minimal cost and provide an opportunity for residents to contribute to the betterment of their community. An even bigger dividend is that volunteering creates a sense of ownership and civic pride and sets a good example for the next generation. Volunteers also gain firsthand knowledge of the challenges facing the city, which may even motivate them to run for elective office.

Connecting with residents

Cities need to communicate with residents about the value of their government and the mutual responsibility of all residents to make it work. Many opinion polls, and a growing number of ballot initiatives, indicate that many residents feel disconnected from government and believe they have little influence on community decisions. If this trend isn't reversed, it will erode our ability to sustain our democracy. That is why it's important to consider using new ways to reach out to residents, understand what they need and want, and find ways for them to connect with their local government.

As Washington's demographics change and the state becomes more diverse, it becomes more important to find new ways to bring people together. And it takes empathy and skill to understand and fully include those of differing perspectives while keeping the city's focus on the common good. To do this, cities need to provide opportunities for resident feedback that go beyond public hearings.

Some approaches that can help improve public input:

- **Host community meetings** on a specific issue or topic where stakeholders have the opportunity for discussion.
- **Change the physical setting.** More informal settings can reduce feelings of separation and power differences between public officials and residents.
- **Involve interested parties** in the process of developing alternative solutions and approaches. Do this early in the process so that promising new alternatives can be fairly addressed.
- **Use small groups and committee work** to involve residents.
- **Schedule meetings** at times and places that are convenient to those who want to be involved.
- **Consider using a trained facilitator** to conduct meetings if issues are especially controversial. Someone who has no personal stake in the issue can be more fair and impartial, and skilled facilitators can help maintain an atmosphere of mutual respect even when people have passionate opinions. One way to gain confidence and trust is to choose a facilitator who has some local standing, such as a school superintendent, a chamber of commerce director, or a service club president. The most important qualities in a facilitator are impartiality, fairness, and respect for all those who wish to be heard.

Feedback collected from residents should be a focal point in creating a city's strategic plan and vision for the future.

Know the law

- [Article VIII, Washington State Constitution - State, County & Municipal Indebtedness](#)
- [Article XXXII, Section 1, Washington State Constitution - Special Revenue Financing](#)
- [RCW 35.21.703 - Authority to engage in economic development activities](#)
- [RCW 4.24.670 - Liability of volunteers of nonprofit or governmental entities](#)
- [RCW 51.12.035 - Volunteers \(Industrial Insurance\)](#)
- [RCW 43.101.200 - Law enforcement personnel exempts "volunteers" and "reserve officers" from the requirement that law enforcement personnel must complete basic law enforcement training](#)

Ethics, open government, and fairness: Staying on the right side of the law

Although governing a small city may seem casual and non-bureaucratic, city officials are still responsible for abiding by the same laws as larger cities regarding ethics, open government, elections, and conflicts of interest. There are some special provisions about conflicts of interest specifically for small cities that we will address later in this chapter. For many small cities, this means a significant amount of legal territory to navigate without a legal department to help you.

Ethics in government

We all think we know right from wrong, but humans do make mistakes. Doing a favor for a friend or relative, giving a job to someone who needs a break, or taking the city backhoe home for a weekend project may all seem harmless. But when public tax dollars are involved, each of these simple acts takes on a new meaning. As stewards of the public's tax dollars—and equally important, the public's trust—elected and appointed city officials must think beyond our usual bonds to friends, family, and neighbors.

State law dictates a list of “thou shalt nots” that every city official ought to study carefully. Some cities may enact local codes with additional guidelines.

Here are the specific state laws that all city officials must abide by:

- **No special privileges:** No city elected official or appointed officer may use their official position to receive a special privilege or exemption for themselves or others. For example, city officers must pay the same fees for permits and services, and they are not allowed to make exceptions to rules or give discounts to their friends or relatives.
- **No gifts or rewards from private sources:** No city elected official or appointed officer may receive any money, gift, or reward from any source other than their employing municipality for any matter connected with or related to the officer's services. City officers cannot accept free tickets to events or gifts from private individuals, businesses, or corporations for actions arising from their official duties. If the city fixes a sidewalk in front of someone's house, for instance, and that person expresses their appreciation by sending the city employee or the mayor tickets to a Seahawks game, the tickets must be returned.
- **No disclosure of confidential information:** No elected official or appointed officer may disclose any confidential information they learn in the course of their duties or use such information for their personal gain. No city official can accept a job or engage in business that the official might reasonably expect would require him or her to disclose confidential information learned in his or her position with the city.

Conflicts of interest

The laws that govern conflict of interest apply only to city elected officials, not employees. These laws govern contracts created by city elected officials, including contracts of employment, sales, leases, and purchases. In essence, city officials cannot have a financial interest in any public contract made with the city they serve. This applies to contracts both created by the city elected official and under their supervision.

The small city exception to the rule: Avoiding conflicts of interest can be difficult in a small city, because there aren't that many people and businesses, so it's harder to keep city matters separate. In cities with a population of less than 5,000, a business owned by an elected official can have a contract to perform services for the city if it does not exceed \$36,000 in any calendar year. However, this does not apply to the sale or lease of property by the city, so elected city officials cannot rent or lease facilities or land from the city.

Even when the small city exception applies, an elected city official may not vote on the authorization, approval, or ratification of a contract from which they will profit. The elected official whose business is involved in the vote must also publicly disclose their personal financial interest, and this must be recorded in the official minutes of the city council.

Remote interest

There is a legal definition of a "remote interest" that can affect city elected or appointed officials' judgements about city contracts, and where special efforts may be required to avoid conflict of interest so that the city may still be allowed to enter into a contract. "Remote interests" are particularly thorny, because they can involve voluntary, nonprofit, and charitable activities of city officials where favoritism wouldn't benefit you personally but would benefit a cause or person you're involved with.

A "remote interest" includes a city contract with an entity when a city official is:

- A non-salaried officer of a nonprofit corporation (for example, on the Board of Directors) of the contracted party;
- Employed with a business (with entirely fixed salary or wages) of the contracted party;
- A landlord or tenant of the contracted party;
- Holding less than 1% of the corporate shares of the contracted party; or
- A member of a cooperative of the contracted party.

In the event of such a remote interest in a contract, the city elected official or appointed officer must disclose the extent of their interest prior to making the contract. That person may not authorize, approve, or ratify the contract. They also may not influence or try to influence those who will be voting on the contract.

Violation penalties

The penalty for violating any of these prohibitions voids the contract, and anyone who violates these rules must pay the city a \$500 fine. Violators may also be required to leave an elected office or lose their city jobs.

Although this law does not impose criminal penalties for a violation of its provisions, criminal penalties from other laws may apply, and they can be severe.

Open Public Meetings Act

The Open Public Meetings Act (OPMA) requires that all city council meetings be open to the public, except as specifically authorized under the Act. Also, all “actions” or votes by city councils and other governing bodies must be taken at meetings that are open to the public. Any meeting under the OPMA at which “final action” occurs must include the opportunity for public comment. “Final action” means a collective positive or negative decision, or an actual vote by a majority of the members of a governing body when sitting as a body or entity, upon a motion, proposal, resolution, order, or ordinance.

The Act applies to all meetings of the city council, as well as many commissions and boards, such as the planning commission, park board, or library board. A meeting generally includes any situation in which a majority (a quorum) of the council or other governing body meets and discusses business. Even if no votes are taken, the meeting must be open to the public if public business is discussed. Members of the governing bodies subject to the OPMA must complete open government training within 90 days of taking office and every four years thereafter. Open government training can be completed through AWC or the Washington Attorney General’s Office.

Executive sessions not open to public

An “executive session” is a meeting or a portion of a meeting during which a governing body may exclude the public. Before the council or other body meets in executive session, both the length and purpose of the executive session must be announced publicly. Importantly, decisions may be made in executive sessions; votes on issues discussed in executive session must occur when the governing body returns to the meeting open to public.

The following is a nonexclusive list of reasons cities typically hold an executive session:

- To consider a real estate acquisition or sale;
- To receive and evaluate complaints brought against a public employee (before meeting in executive session under this exception, the person who is the subject of the complaint must be notified of the complaint and given the option of meeting in open session);
- To evaluate qualifications of a candidate for public employment or review performance of a public employee;
- To discuss with legal counsel matters related to litigation or potential litigation. (Note that under this exception, legal counsel must be present at the executive session.)

Selected proceedings not subject to the Act

The following proceedings are not subject to the OPMA:

- The portion of a meeting of a quasi-judicial body relating to a quasi-judicial matter between named parties (such as a request for a site-specific rezone permit or conditional use permit). Read more about quasi-judicial matters later in this chapter;
- Collective bargaining sessions, including contract negotiations, grievance meetings, and discussions in which the city council or other body is planning or adopting the strategy to be taken during collective bargaining.

Penalties, costs, and attorney fees for violations

- Individual liability: A civil penalty of \$500 for a first violation and \$1000 for a subsequent violation for members of a governing body found to have knowingly violated the OPMA;
- City liability: The city is liable for all costs, including reasonable attorney fees, if someone successfully challenges a decision to hold a closed meeting. (However, if there is an unsuccessful challenge and the court declares it frivolous, the city may recover reasonable expenses and attorney fees); and
- Annulment of action: Actions taken in a closed meeting that was in violation of the Open Public Meetings Act are null and void.

Public Records Act

In 1972, Washington adopted Initiative 276, which requires that most records maintained by state, county, and city governments be made available to the public. The public disclosure statutes have been frequently revised over the past three decades, and they are now referred to as the Public Records Act (PRA). The purpose of the PRA is to provide the public full access to information about the conduct of government, except where doing so would violate individual privacy rights and the efficient administration of government.

What is a public record?

Public records include any writing that contains information about the conduct of government. This includes papers, photos, maps, videos, and electronic records, including emails, text messages, and social media posts that relate to public business. It includes information not just produced by city government, but also produced for city government, such as reports prepared by contractors.

Cities are required to make all public records available for public inspection and copying, unless the record falls within one of the specific exemptions in the PRA or is exempt from disclosure under another law.

Here is what every city must do:

- **Complete training** on the Public Records Act within 90 days of taking office and every four years thereafter. Training can be completed through AWC or the Attorney General's Office.
- **Appoint a public records officer:** Every city must appoint a public records officer, so the public knows who to contact when they want to request public records. This appointment must be made known to the public. Listing the person's name and title and contact information on the city website or in city hall are two ways to do this.
- **Create and publish an index of public records:** Cities must create and publish an index of their public records, unless the city council declares by formal order that to do so would be unduly burdensome. This is a difficult task, and many city councils adopt an order indicating that to do this would be unduly burdensome.
- **Provide assistance locating public records:** Every city is required to provide the fullest assistance to the public in locating and accessing public records.
- **Respond to requests promptly:** Response to a request for a public record must be made within five business days of the request. The response can be to provide records, to provide the specific link where the requested records are located on the city website, to deny the request because the requested documents are exempt from disclosure requirements, or to state that additional time is required to complete additional steps.

These steps may include:

- Clarify the intent of the request
- Locate and assemble the information requested
- Notify third persons or agencies affected by the request
- Determine whether any of the information requested is exempt
- **Explain exemptions:** If a request is denied or any part of a document is redacted (blacked-out) because it is exempt, the specific exemption must be noted in the city's response to the requester along with sufficient description of how it applies. In most circumstances, once the exempt information has been blacked out, the remainder of the document must be disclosed.

What is not required:

- **Providing copies free of charge:** Cities may charge for making copies, including staff time and use of equipment. However, a city cannot charge for staff time to locate the records and make them available for public inspection. An agency cannot charge more than 15 cents per page unless the actual costs have been calculated and determined to be greater.
- **Creation of new records:** An agency is not required to create a record in response to a request.
- **Access and custody:** An agency is required to make records available for public inspection, but an agency is not required to allow access to, for example, employee computers for the public to peruse records, nor is an agency required to allow original records out of its custody.
- **Certain form of request:** A city may not require that people fill out a specific form to request public documents. Although a city can request its form be used, it cannot deny a request for a public record because someone doesn't use that form. Requests do not need to be in writing; they can be in email or even verbal.
- **Disclosure of purpose of request:** Requesters are not required to disclose why they are requesting public documents.

Judicial review

A local government may seek court protection to stop the release of a record that is not exempt under the PRA if the local government can show that:

- The requested information is "clearly not ... in the public interest"; and
- That disclosure will "irreparably damage any person, or would substantially and irreparably damage vital governmental functions."

If a person is denied an opportunity to inspect and copy a public record held by a local government, they may bring a motion in the superior court of the county where the record is maintained to require the local agency to explain, or show cause, why it has denied access to the record. The local agency has the burden of proving that the denial is consistent with a law that either exempts or prohibits disclosure. Also, if a person believes that the city is taking too long to fully respond to a disclosure request, they may file a motion requiring the city to explain why so much time is needed.

Liability

If city officials release records because they are making a good faith effort to comply with the PRA, they can't be liable for it, even if the release offends or harms someone.

However, good faith will not absolve a city if public records covered by the PRA are withheld. Good faith will be taken into consideration in determining the amount of penalty, but a minimum penalty of five dollars per day is mandatory regardless of good faith. A requesting party that prevails in court "... shall be

awarded all costs, including reasonable attorney fees, incurred in connection with such legal action. In addition, it shall be within the discretion of the court to award such person an amount not to exceed \$100 for each day that he was denied the right to inspect or copy said public record."The statute of limitations is one year.

Particular care should be taken in releasing personnel records, medical records, records subject to protection under the Criminal Records Privacy Act (CRPA), and records that could violate an individual's right to privacy. Certain records specifically exempted from release may lead to liability under laws other than the PRA. For example, the CRPA provides that release of records in violation of the law constitutes a misdemeanor.

Appearance of Fairness Doctrine

Appearance of fairness is a judicial policy that puts additional restrictions on local officials. It requires that decisions be both fair in fact and free from the appearance of unfairness when a city is acting in a court-like or "quasi-judicial" capacity. This law applies to specific actions that affect a single person or company, such as a specific zoning variance. It doesn't apply to enacting big-picture policies on zoning or adopting a land use plan.

The Appearance of Fairness Doctrine requires that a councilmember not participate in a decision when it's necessary to prevent the appearance of unfairness, bias, prejudice, or other potential conflict of interest.

This doctrine generally applies in land use hearings such as site-specific rezones, preliminary plat approvals, conditional use permits, variances, and shoreline substantial development permits. Failure to follow the procedures can result in invalidation of the land use or other quasi-judicial decision. Application of the procedures and use of the exceptions should be documented on the hearing record.

The main provisions of the doctrine include prohibiting "ex parte" (outside the hearing) communications between a decision-maker and a proponent or opponent of the matter being decided during the time the matter is pending is against the law, unless the decision-maker:

- Places on the record the substance of any spoken or written communications; and
- Makes a public announcement of the content of the communication, and of a party's right to rebut the substance of the communication. This announcement must be made at each hearing where action is taken or considered on the subject. (This does not prohibit correspondence between a resident and their elected official if the correspondence is made part of the record of the quasi-judicial proceeding to which it applies.)

How does the doctrine apply to my city?

The Appearance of Fairness Act applies when "quasi-judicial" proceedings determine the legal rights, duties, or privileges of specific parties in a hearing, or other contested case proceeding. The doctrine does not apply to legislative policymaking decisions, such as adopting, amending, or revising comprehensive plans or other land use planning documents, plans, or zoning decisions of area-wide significance. It also doesn't apply to statements made while campaigning for elective office.

The gist of the Appearance of Fairness Act is that elected officials should be impartial in hearings that will lead to city decisions that affect specific people

or companies. They should not, for instance, announce how they plan to vote on a conditional use permit before the hearing is held.

Challenges to a councilmember’s participation

A fellow councilmember or a resident can challenge a councilmember’s right to participate in a decision if they believe there is an appearance of conflict of interest. Challenges must be raised as soon as the basis for disqualification is made known or reasonably should have been known prior to the issuance of the decision. If the challenge is not timely, the doctrine may not be relied on to invalidate the decision.

Exception: The rule of necessity

If more than one member of a decision-making body is challenged as being in violation of the doctrine, so that there are not enough members to legally make a decision, the “rule of necessity” allows challenged members to participate and vote. Before voting, however, the challenged officials must publicly state why they would or might have been disqualified.

Fair hearings have precedence

Even though some conduct might not violate the statutory provisions of the fairness doctrine, a challenge could still be made if an unfair hearing results. For instance, certain conduct otherwise permitted by the statutes may be challenged if it would actually result in an unfair hearing (e.g., where a campaign statement reflects an attitude or bias that continues after a candidate’s election and into the hearing process).

Elections

Elections for city offices are held in odd-numbered years in Washington. The first step to take when seeking election to local office is to file a Declaration of Candidacy with the county auditor, not more than 60 days nor less than 45 days prior to the primary election.

The qualifications for office depend somewhat on the classification of the city or town.

Qualifications to hold elective office

Towns	Second class cities	First class cities	Code cities
No person is eligible to hold an elective office unless they are a resident and a registered voter of the town.	No person is eligible to hold an elective office unless the person is a resident and a registered voter in the city.	Qualifications for elected officials are established by the individual city’s charter.	No person is eligible to hold elective office under either the mayor-council or the council-manager form of government unless the person is a registered voter of the city at the time of filing their declaration of candidacy and has been a resident of the city for a period of at least one year preceding their election.

Oath of office

The oath of office is the last step that must be taken before a candidate who wins election takes office. The new term of office typically begins on the first day of January following the election. The oath of office may be taken up to ten days before taking office, or at the last regular meeting held before an elected person assumes office.

The oath may be given by a variety of persons, including any notary public, mayor or mayor pro tem, clerk, judge or court clerk. The oath should be filed with the county auditor.

A commonly used oath is: I, [NAME] , do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support the Constitution of the United States and the Constitution and laws of the State of Washington, and all local ordinances, and that I will faithfully and impartially perform and discharge the duties of the office of [NAME OF OFFICE], according to law and the best of my ability.

Improper use of public facilities in campaigns

It is against the law to use any city facilities to support or oppose a ballot proposition or to assist any campaign for election to any public office. This includes the use of stationery, postage, machines and equipment, use of office employees, office publications, clientele lists, and even paper clips. Careful regard for this law is very important to keeping — and deserving — the public's trust.

There are, however, exceptions to this prohibition:

- An elected city council may collectively endorse or oppose a ballot proposition if the council meets the procedural requirements of the law. The requirements are that:
 - Any required notice of the meeting includes the title and number of the ballot proposition; and
 - Members of the legislative body or members of the public are afforded an approximately equal opportunity for the expression of an opposing view.
- An elected official may make a statement in support of or in opposition to any ballot proposition at an open press conference or in response to a specific inquiry; and
- Cities may take part in activities that are a part of the normal and regular conduct of the office or agency. For example:
 - A city may prepare and distribute a neutral fact sheet concerning a ballot proposition;
 - A city may conduct research into the likely effects of a ballot proposition; and
 - A city may allow the use of public facilities to host a neutral forum on a ballot issue.

These restrictions do not prevent an elected official or city employee from participating fully in campaigns on their own time when public facilities are not used.

The law also restricts certain use of public service announcements by incumbent candidates in election years.

Salary increases during term of office

Members of a governing body who set their own compensation may not, during the terms of office for which they are elected, receive any pay increase enacted by that body. However, this doesn't apply to a mayor's compensation in cities operating under the mayor-council form of government if the vote of the mayor is not necessary to enact the increase. A city may establish a citizen's salary commission and salaries established by that commission are not subject to this prohibition. Note also that these provisions prohibit a salary decrease for elected officials during their term of office.

Know the law

- [RCW 42.23 - Code of Ethics for Municipal Officers](#)
- [RCW 42.23.070 - Prohibited acts](#)
- [RCW 42.30 - Open Public Meetings Act](#)
- [RCW 42.30.110 - Executive sessions](#)
- [RCW 42.30.120 - Violations of the Open Public Meetings Act](#)
- [RCW 42.30.140 - Meetings not subject to the Open Public Meetings Act](#)
- [RCW 10.97 - Criminal Records Privacy Act](#)
- [RCW 42.56 - Public Records Act](#)
- [RCW 42.56.060 - Immunity from liability](#)
- [RCW 42.56.230-480 - Exemptions to public records](#)
- [RCW 42.56.540 - Local government-initiated court action to prevent disclosure](#)
- [RCW 42.56.550 - Judicial review of agency actions](#)
- [WAC 44-14 - Public Records Act - Model rules](#)
- [RCW 42.36 - Appearance of Fairness Doctrine - Limitations](#)
- [RCW 42.17A.555 - Use of public office or facilities in campaigns](#)
- [RCW 42.17A.575 - Public service announcements](#) (Note: Effective until January 1, 2026)
- [RCW 29B.45.050 - Public service announcements](#) (Note: Effective January 1, 2026)
- [RCW 35.21.015 - Salary commissions](#)

Municipal budgeting and fiscal management

Many people choose to run for political office because they want to make positive change in their community. It quickly becomes apparent that nearly all changes to city policy require changes in the city budget. So to be effective, an elected official must understand the budget process.

The city budget

The city's operating budget is a city's road map throughout the year and one of the main policy actions of the council. The budget serves as:

- A reflection of the city's priorities and policies;
- Legal authority for city officials to incur and pay expenses;
- A system for allocation of funds to different areas; and
- A document that establishes control over how much money may be spent.

In many cities, the budget has evolved from a document composed of a bunch of numbers to one that reflects the city's overall direction. Budgets can include mission statements, goals, and objectives that convey the city's vision to residents. In the budget, elected officials can explain their reasons for allocating resources in the manner they do. It can also be an evaluation tool, comparing commitments made in the previous year's budget with actual accomplishments.

State law dictates some of the major steps in the budget preparation process and in the timing of budget decisions. Be sure you pay attention to these important steps.

MRSC sample budget calendar – Cities and towns

The annual budget preparation procedures and deadlines for cities are found in [chapter 35A.33 RCW](#) (code cities) and [chapter 35.33 RCW](#) (all other cities and towns except Seattle) and outlined below.

Most of the pre-budget items listed below are recommendations only and are not required by statute. The rest of the items are based on statutory deadlines; cities and towns can take these steps earlier than listed or adopt different deadlines for some of these steps by ordinance or charter. It is recommended that each city and town develop a timeline that best meets its needs, ensures compliance with the statutes, and provides sufficient time to prepare this vital financial plan.

For examples of budget preparation calendars adopted by cities and towns, see MRSC's [City and Town Budget Calendars](#). For a detailed explanation of the budget requirements, as well as some helpful practice tips, see MRSC's [City and Town Budget Procedures](#).

<p>Pre-budget Items</p> <p>Hold council retreat.</p> <p>Update and/or adopt financial policies.</p> <p>Conduct public hearings for capital facility plan updates.</p> <p>Public forums or community outreach (community priorities). Mayor/Manager communicates budget objectives to staff.</p>	<p>March - August</p>
<p>Sept 9: Budget request to all department heads.</p> <p>Sept 9–22: Department heads prepare estimates of revenues and expenditures. Clerk prepares estimates for debt service and all other estimates.</p> <p>Sept 23: Budget estimates from department heads filed with clerk.</p> <p>Sept 25: Implicit price deflator calculated (only applies to cities of 10,000+ population)</p>	<p>September</p>
<p>Oct 1: Clerk provides estimates filed by department heads to mayor/manager showing complete financial program.</p> <p>Oct 7: Mayor/Manager provides council with estimates of revenues from all sources, including estimates prepared by clerk for consideration of setting property tax levy.</p> <p>Mid-Oct to Mid-Nov (suggested): Required public hearing on revenue sources including possible increases in property tax.</p>	<p>October</p>
<p>Nov 2: Mayor/Manager prepares preliminary budget and budget message. Files with clerk and council.</p> <p>Nov 1–18: Publication notice of preliminary budget and final hearing.</p> <p>Nov 1–25: Public hearing(s) on preliminary budget. Public hearing on revenue sources for levy setting.</p> <p>Nov 21: Copies of budget available to public.</p> <p>Nov 30: Property tax levies set by ordinance and filed with the county</p>	<p>November</p>
<p>Dec 2: Final budget hearing.</p> <p>Dec 31: Budget adoption deadline.</p>	<p>December</p>

Staying up to date

Most cities set their budget on an annual basis (or every other year for cities using a biennial budget). Budgets can be affected by new state or federal legislation, voter-approved initiatives, and/or court rulings. *MRSC's Budget Suggestions* publication is released annually to help cities understand legal changes that could affect the city budget. *AWC's Legislative Bulletin* provides ongoing updates about proposed legislation that could also affect city budgets.

Budgeting guidelines for elected officials

1. Adopting the annual budget is generally the most important issue to be addressed. Each city must adopt an annual (or biennial) budget; without doing so, the city cannot expend resources.
2. The budget should reflect the community's priorities, and elected officials should recognize that those priorities change over time.
3. Virtually all small cities engage in "incremental" budgeting. The base tends to be fixed, and annual budgets generally only add or subtract programs and levels of expenditures at the margin.
4. City officials should recognize the interdependence between capital, operations, and maintenance expenditures. New capital expenditures can reduce ongoing expenditures, and failure to properly invest in capital assets can increase ongoing expenditures. Failure of a city to repave thoroughfares can result in increased expenditures for patching and other related costs. It can be dangerous to continually defer necessary capital expenditures.
5. The budget process can be contentious and combative, and in an environment of shrinking revenues, few city officials are fully satisfied with the outcome.
6. Elected officials should avoid using the budget to drive public policy determinations. Such determinations should be established outside of the budgetary process, subject to an open public process, and then implemented in the budget.
7. City resources will never be sufficient to address all of the demands and expectations of residents. Budgeting is about making choices and establishing priorities in an environment of limited fiscal resources.
8. Finally, city officials need to openly communicate with their residents the fiscal limitations of their city and why they're unable to satisfy everyone's expectations.

Financial management

Cities are fiscally accountable to their local taxpayers. Accounting and financial reporting standards ensure consistency among government entities in providing information to residents.

The State Auditor enforces accounting requirements and prescribed reporting. Cities can choose whether to prepare and report financial statements and notes using generally accepted accounting principles (GAAP) or with an other comprehensive basis of accounting (OCBOA) also known as "cash basis," which is further outlined in the State Auditor's *Budgeting, Accounting, and Reporting System (BARS) Manual*. Local governments can choose which method best meets their needs.

The General Accounting Office (GAO) is the federal body that oversees and prescribes the generally accepted accounting practices (GAAP) used by all governmental entities.

Fund accounting, which is unique to government, earmarks revenues and assets, requiring separate recordkeeping for different pots of money. The emphasis is to show a segregation of resources by specific activities.

Funds are independent accounts that represent a portion of a city's activities that cannot be commingled with other accounts. For example, user fees charged to water customers are segregated into a utility fund to clearly illustrate that resources developed by these user fees have not inappropriately subsidized another city function.

Fund types

There are three basic categories of funds. Within each of these categories there are different fund types and revenues.

Reporting requirements

The receipt of timely and accurate financial information is a key component in the financial management system. Several statutes within the RCW (Revised Code of Washington) address the reporting of financial information for local governments. These statutes ensure the accountability of public monies and ensure that financial reports are published to provide all the details of the financial administration of public affairs.

At the end of every fiscal year, the city clerk, treasurer, or other assignee must make a full and detailed statement of receipts and expenditures for the preceding year and a full statement of the city's financial condition. The staff member must also submit a report showing the expenditures against each separate budget appropriation, no less than quarterly, to the council and chief administrative officer (which may be the mayor, the city manager, or the city administrator). The report must also show the receipts from all sources.

The annual financial report provides a summary of all the revenues and expenditures of the city for the fiscal year (January 1 through December 31). The report also includes pertinent financial data regarding the city's outstanding debt, grant expenditures, budget appropriations, and other relevant financial information.

Appropriate oversight and management of these reports is a key component of good financial management. In smaller cities, elected officials can play a key role in ensuring adequate internal controls. Auditing standards reinforce the responsibility of management for oversight and review of the financial reporting process and must be considered during the audit process.

State audit process

In Washington, governmental audits are done by the State Auditor. The audit process assures taxpayers that cities are following accounting rules, standards, and laws. It also provides an opportunity for city officials to evaluate internal controls and make changes in systems as needed.

By law, the State Auditor prescribes a uniform system of accounting and reporting for all cities. Every city is required to submit financial reports covering each fiscal year. The reports must contain:

1. Accurate statements of collections or receipts, all accounts due to the public treasury, and all expenditures;
2. An income and costs statement of public service enterprises owned and operated by a local government;
3. A schedule of the city's debt; and
4. A detailed statement of all revenues and expenditures.

Audits generally consist of several phases:

Entrance conference: This is the first in a series of opportunities to communicate with the audit liaison.

Audit progress meetings and pre-exit conference: These meetings are scheduled as determined by both the city and the auditor. The idea is for the city to be fully aware of all significant matters before the audit report is drafted.

Exit conference: This conference is often attended by the auditor, mayor, city administrator/manager, and elected officials. The conference is held before the final report is issued. Some items that are not significant enough to report will be provided in a management letter or as an exit item (e.g., a recommendation for stronger internal controls). Items such as the audit objectives, areas of improvement, findings, conclusions, and recommendations are all addressed during this meeting.

Final notification of audit report: Once the final audit report is issued, a city is expected to provide a formal response to any findings, conclusions, or recommendations in seven to 30 business days. Elected officials should be aware of all findings and any conclusions or recommendations made.

Plan ahead! Audits can be expensive. They can also involve a lot of staff time in preparing for and working with the auditors. City officials should be aware of their audit schedule and remember to budget for this.

Performance audits

In 2005, Washington voters approved Initiative 900. This initiative mandated that “the State Auditor shall conduct independent, comprehensive performance audits of state government and each of its agencies, accounts, and programs...” These audits include local governments; however, smaller jurisdictions typically do not need to complete a performance audit. This mandate was accompanied by a redirection of a small portion of the state sales tax to defray the added costs of state and local performance audits.

Long-range financial planning

Although city budgets must be completed annually (or every two years if your city has adopted a biennial budget process by ordinance), there is considerable value in longer-range financial planning. It is important to plan for multiyear projects and forecast revenues for a longer period than the coming year.

A strategic plan can help the city council and staff identify future needs. It allows the city to begin preparing for a project before funds are needed. Capital improvement plans are often completed over a five-year period or longer. Since projects such as streets, new utility systems, and city halls often require a great deal of capital spending, it can be helpful to plan for these projects on a long-range basis. Read more about strategic plans in Chapter 4.

Similarly, a strategic plan can help estimate revenues over future years and help to understand the city’s tax base. An understanding of revenue trends can help policymakers avoid future disruptions, such as hiring staff in one fiscal year, then laying them off two years later due to declining revenues. It can also help city officials understand and plan for shifting revenue trends, such as an increasing sales tax base or a declining property tax base. Having a realistic outlook of these tax bases and incorporating that understanding into the budget early can help avoid crisis in years to come.

Items that can be helpful in making these long-term financial estimates are:

- City revenue trends over the past ten years
- Construction activity (residential and commercial)
- Property valuation

- Inflation rates
- Utility rates
- School enrollment
- Tourism activity

Planning for major projects

The state's Growth Management Act (GMA) requires communities to plan ahead for infrastructure needs. Planning for capital facilities is a key part of the comprehensive planning process. This required six-year plan allows cities to define acceptable service level standards for residents and businesses, as well as how they plan to pay for these services. Exploring these options together often helps cities in their long-range financial planning efforts. Read more about the GMA in Chapter 10.

General taxing authority

The authority for cities to levy various taxes comes from state law. These laws determine the taxing limits, restrictions, exemptions, and collections. Below are some of the primary revenue sources for cities.

Regular property tax levy

The maximum levy for most cities is \$3.375 per thousand dollars of assessed value (AV). Cities with a pre-LEOFF fire pension system can levy an additional \$0.225 per thousand dollars AV, resulting in a maximum levy of \$3.60 per thousand dollars AV. Cities annexed to fire or library districts have a maximum rate up to \$3.60 minus the library and/or fire district/regional fire authority's rate. If a city has a firefighter's pension fund and is annexed to a fire and/or library district, the maximum is \$3.825 minus the fire and/or library district rate. Library districts can levy up to \$0.50 per thousand dollars AV, and fire districts/regional fire authorities can levy up to \$1.50 per thousand dollars AV.

Retail sales and use tax

- Cities are authorized to levy a basic 0.5% sales and use tax plus an optional tax at rates ranging from 0.1% to 0.5%.
- For each portion of the sales and use tax (the basic or optional), the county receives 0.015%. Therefore, the maximum effective rate a city can levy is 0.850%. Other local sales taxes apply with different distribution formulas (e.g., criminal justice).
- Cities that don't levy the optional 0.5% sales tax (that are located within counties that also do not levy the optional 0.5% sales tax) are authorized to levy an additional 0.5% real estate excise tax for general purposes.
- Cities may also levy sales taxes for specific purposes, some by council action and others voter-approved, such as the public safety sales tax or the sales tax for transportation benefit districts.

Business and occupation (B&O) taxes and business licenses

B&O taxes come in three forms:

- Excise taxes levied on different classes of business to raise revenue (general B&O taxes) limited to 0.002% of gross receipts unless grandfathered or voter-approved
- Business license fees with a flat fee
- Business license fees based on the number of employees, type of business, square footage, or some combination thereof

Utility taxes

Taxes can be levied on the gross operating revenues earned by private and public utilities from operations within the boundaries of a city, and by a city's own municipal utilities. Telephone (including cellular and pager services), electric, and natural gas are limited to 6%. Cities may ask voters to approve a rate higher than 6%. There are no restrictions on the tax rates for cable, garbage, water, sewer, and stormwater utilities. Cities cannot, however, tax water and/or sewer services provided by another city or water or sewer district. Cable franchise fees are limited by federal law to 5%.

Other taxes cities have the authority to impose include emergency medical services, real estate excise taxes, hotel-motel taxes, and a gambling tax.

Managing city debt

When city officials decide to build capital projects, they face a number of financing options, including different ways to borrow. Going into debt to finance a large project can make sense and spread the project's financial burden out over many years so future users help pay for the project.

Borrowing can also prevent depletion of a city's reserves. Projects can be built as they are needed, and the benefits can be received sooner without waiting for funds to accumulate.

Long-term borrowing

General obligation bonds are backed by the full faith and credit of the city. There are two types:

- **Councilmanic bonds** are issued by a vote of the city council, backed by general fund revenues when voters have not been asked to pay increased property taxes. These may be used for any city purpose; they do not have to be for capital projects.
- **Unlimited general obligation bonds** must be approved by a 60% majority of voters. This option raises property taxes to pay for projects and is only used for capital purposes.

Revenue bonds finance projects for any city enterprise that is self-supporting (e.g., water/wastewater/golf courses). Payment comes from user fees, so the debt is not backed by the full faith and credit of the city. Investors consider these somewhat less secure than general obligation bonds.

Debt capacity

The amount a city can borrow using general obligation debt and the purposes for which a city can borrow are governed by state laws and the state constitution. A city's debt limitations or debt capacity are subject to two sets of restrictions. First, debt limits set the maximum amount of general obligation debt that a city can have outstanding at any one time. Second, debt limits restrict how much of this capacity can be used for various purposes. There are no debt limits for revenue bonds.

City debt can be used for three purposes:

- General government (both voted and councilmanic capacity)
- Municipally owned water, sewer, or electric facilities (voted debt capacity)
- Providing open space and parks (voted debt capacity)

In certain circumstances, the state will allow cities to access debt through state programs such as the Treasurer's Local Option Capital Asset Lending (LOCAL) program or the Public Works Assistance Account.

Cities can borrow up to 2.5% of assessed property valuation, minus the amount of debt already issued, plus certain net assets available for debt service funds. But just because your city is allowed to borrow a certain amount doesn't always mean those limits should be used to their maximum extent.

Grants and loan opportunities

Many cities seek funding from grants and low-interest loans to augment infrastructure, capital improvement, and economic development activities. Many state agencies offer grant opportunities on a regular basis to cities. However, funding is limited, and competition is great. Foundation and federal grants and loans are another source of potential project revenue for cities.

However, there is no such thing as "free" money. Grant awards require the commitment of human, technical, and often financial resources for successful project management and grant administration. It is important to consider the capacity to effectively manage the activities and requirements of a grant or award before applying, and budget for audit costs and staff time to administer the grant. There are also long-term costs associated with grant-funded projects. Is there existing or new revenue adequate to maintain a program or service once grant funds expire?

Capacity may be enhanced by partnering with other organizations or by contracting out grant management. It can be helpful for a community to have an interlocal agreement that promotes a multi-jurisdictional grant-funded project and fund development for work that crosses municipal boundaries (e.g., telecommunications, floodplain management, open space). Such collaboration may increase the competitiveness of a proposal, the efficiency of program management, and the success of project outcomes.

Know the law

- [RCW 35.33 - Budgets in second and third class cities, towns, and first class cities under 300,000](#)
- [RCW 35.34 - Biennial budgets](#)
- [RCW 35A.33 - Budgets in code cities](#)
- [RCW 35A.34 - Biennial budgets for code cities](#)
- [RCW 35.27.220 - Annual statement of receipts and expenditures](#)
- [RCW 35.33.141 - Quarterly financial statements to council](#)
- [RCW 43.09.230 - Local government accounting - Annual reports](#)
- [RCW 84.52.043 - Property tax](#)
- [RCW 82.14.030\(1\) - Basic local sales and use tax](#)
- [RCW 82.14.030\(2\) - Optional sales and use tax](#)
- [RCW 35A.82.020, RCW 35A.82.050, RCW 35.21.710 - B&O taxes](#)
- [RCW 35.21.870 - Utility taxes](#)
- [RCW 39.36.020 - Limitation of indebtedness prescribed](#)
- [Article VIII, Section 6, Washington State Constitution - Limitations upon municipal indebtedness](#)

Human resources and labor relations

Cities need competent, enthusiastic, and hardworking employees. Recruiting and hiring the best employees, treating them fairly, and training them to do the job is central to a city's success. Personnel costs make up the lion's share of a city's operating budget—typically, about 60% of a city budget—so recruiting, training, and retaining good employees is time well spent.

It may be tempting to think that in a small town or city, relations with employees can be kept informal, and that it's okay to be casual about hiring, work rules, or other job-related practices. But this is a big mistake. Employee relations can be a source of real legal and financial liability if not handled properly. It only takes one disgruntled employee or one untrained supervisor to disrupt city hall and derail the ability of city officials to focus on making the city a great place to live.

It is difficult to keep up to date on important personnel issues, because laws and regulations keep changing, and small cities can rarely afford a professional personnel manager with expertise in human resources and labor relations. But having clear, consistent rules and personnel practices can prevent a lot of trouble. And it can provide an orderly way to resolve problems when they do arise, before they spin out of control.

Here are just a few components of a good system of human resources management. While most of these may be more common in larger cities, they also have applications for smaller municipalities:

- A recruitment process that tests for, hires, and promotes applicants based on merit and the ability to perform the essential functions of the position
- Personnel policies that outline work rules, employee benefits, overtime, paid and unpaid leave, employee conduct, and discipline
- A classification and compensation plan that includes job descriptions for all positions and identifies the method for re-evaluating and setting salaries
- An orientation program for new and newly promoted employees
- A performance evaluation process
- A training program for employees, especially supervisors, on key federal and state laws such as the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA), Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA), Washington Paid Family & Medical Leave (PFML), Washington Paid Sick Leave, and on workers' compensation, discipline, or grievance procedures
- A trained person to coordinate labor relations and negotiate with employees regarding wages, hours, and working conditions
- A grievance process to address employee concerns and serious complaints

For cities that may be lacking in some of these areas, many resources are available to help improve their human resources systems.

Hiring the best employee

Few employers can say that every employee working in their organization is the ideal person for the job. But with a little effort, the chances of attracting and retaining high-quality employees can be greatly increased.

Except for police and fire personnel (see the Civil Service section of this chapter) there are no specific legal requirements that a city must follow to recruit and select new employees. However, employees must be hired fairly. Many cities have established their own hiring policies, which usually include procedures for attracting enough qualified candidates to compete for job openings, screening those applicants, and selecting the most qualified individual for the available position. It is essential that this process does not discriminate against protected classes of employees, either by intent or impact. Therefore, selection decisions must be based on job-related criteria that measure knowledge, skills, abilities, and attributes that relate directly to successful job performance.

Many organizations, including cities, are also re-evaluating formal requirements in many of their job descriptions and eliminating unnecessary educational or credentialing requirements that have little bearing on a job candidate's ability to perform the required work. For example, some cities are eliminating requirements for a bachelor's degree for positions whose required duties do not really require a bachelor-level education and focusing more on necessary skills (which candidates can demonstrate with or without formal education). This makes the opportunity to apply to a city job more equitable for a wider range of residents, and also has the benefit of growing the pool of potential qualified applicants that small cities can draw on by not artificially limiting who can apply in the first place. Some positions will still require certain levels of formal education or credentials, but some cities are finding that many positions do not.

Under the Washington Law Against Discrimination (WLAD), employers may not refuse to hire someone, fire an employee, or discriminate against an employee in pay or other terms or conditions of employment, because of the person's race, creed, color, national origin, sex, marital status, age, disability, retaliation, sexual orientation/gender identity, honorably discharged veteran or military status, or use of a trained dog guide or service animal by a person with a disability. Current law exempts employers with fewer than eight employees.

The Washington Equal Pay & Opportunities Act (EPOA) also requires that when recruiting for a job, employers with 15 or more employees must provide a starting salary or wage range in the job posting, as well as a general description of benefits and other compensation for the position. The EPOA also prohibits unequal pay or career advancement opportunities based on gender.

Civil service for police and fire

Most police and fire employees are covered by state civil service law, which governs hiring and provides a process for hearing appeals to disciplinary actions. Cities with more than two full-time police officers (including the chief) or with any full-time firefighters are required to establish a three-member civil service commission. Appointments to the commission are usually made by the mayor, city manager, or city administrator. The commission must establish rules for the operation of the city's civil service system that are consistent with state law, administer tests to determine the relative qualifications of candidates, and hear appeals or complaints.

Volunteer firefighters and reserve officers

The Board for Volunteer Firefighters and Reserve Officers (Board) provides workers' compensation benefits and a small retirement pension for volunteer firefighters and reserve police officers in Washington. All volunteer firefighters must be covered for workers' comp; coverage for reserve police officers is optional. Cities must report volunteers to the Board, remit the appropriate fees,

and form a local board of trustees with the responsibility to approve retirement forms, remittance forms, and claims for payment, and to administer claims due to injuries.

Labor relations

It's not surprising that most small city councils and staff struggle with labor relations issues. The state law, the Public Employees Collective Bargaining Act (RCW 41.56), is complex and technical for those unfamiliar with it. It also differs significantly in some key areas from labor law that applies to private sector jobs. And unlike private sector employers, most cities have a large percentage of their personnel covered by union contracts.

Almost all public employees in Washington have a legal right to form unions or associations and collectively bargain with their employers. A city cannot change wages, hours, or working conditions for union members without bargaining these issues with them. Collective bargaining is the mutual obligation of employees and their employers to meet at reasonable times and to bargain in good faith. However, this obligation does not compel either party to agree to a proposal.

It is an unfair labor practice for an employer to interfere with, restrain, or coerce public employees in the exercise of their right to unionize. A state agency, the Public Employment Relations Commission (PERC), regulates the relationships between public employers and their employees concerning issues like union representation and unfair labor practices. City officials with questions about union issues should contact PERC for guidance.

All paid fire departments, and all police departments in cities over 2,500 in population, have access to interest arbitration. This means that when an impasse in bargaining occurs, the issues in dispute are turned over to an outside arbitrator to make the decisions on wages, benefits, and other contract language. This can create a unique dynamic in police and fire negotiations. The arbitrator has the power to set the terms of the contract—obligating the city to provide wages or benefits to police or fire employees that other employees don't get, and that perhaps the city can't afford.

Because of the complexity of labor negotiations and the impact of wages and benefits on city budgets, some cities hire professional consultants to bargain on behalf of management. For smaller cities with limited resources, this may not be affordable.

Employee salaries and benefits

To attract, retain, and motivate qualified employees, cities try to establish and maintain compensation and benefit levels that are competitive within their labor markets and that are internally fair.

It's hard to decide how much to pay employees, and it's made harder when cities just can't afford to pay the wages they would like to.

AWC produces an annual Salary and Benefit Survey that allows city officials to see what comparably sized or nearby cities and counties pay their employees, what benefits they provide, and how much the employer and the employee each pay for those benefits.

Most cities offer a variety of benefits—paid vacation, sick leave, pensions, insurance benefits (health, dental, vision, disability, life, etc.). Benefits are important to employees and can be costly for the employer. Therefore, the total cost of compensation (including both salary and benefits) should be carefully reviewed.

Public employee pensions

Washington’s public pension systems are among the most complex in the nation. They are also among the most financially sound. While the Department of Retirement Systems (DRS) administers eight different systems, most city and town employees are members of either the Public Employees’ Retirement System (PERS) or the Law Enforcement Officers’ and Fire Fighters’ Retirement System (LEOFF).

In most cases, employers and employees contribute a percentage of employee wages into the appropriate system each month. The rules governing eligibility for membership, when an employee can retire, and how retirement benefits are calculated are extremely complicated and vary widely.

- **PERS Plan 1** is a defined benefit plan that provides full pension benefits based on years of service—members are eligible after 30 years of employment. This plan has been closed to new members since 1977.
- **PERS Plan 2** is a defined benefit plan that provides full pension benefits after the member reaches age 65.
- **PERS Plan 3** is a defined benefit plan that includes a member-funded defined contribution component. Full pension benefits are provided after the member reaches age 65.
- **LEOFF Plans 1 and 2** are defined benefit plans that provide full pension benefits based on the member’s age at retirement. (Employers of LEOFF Plan 1 retirees are also responsible for their lifetime medical costs.)

Cities and towns also need to be aware that strict rules govern the ability to hire employees (or independent contractors) who have retired from one of the state systems. Employers should be cautious and make sure they are following DRS rules and established common law regarding hiring independent contractors, or they could be on the hook for significant financial penalties.

Personnel policies

Personnel policies and procedures constitute the basic “rules of the game” for employer-employee relations. They help to ensure that employees are treated in an equitable and consistent manner and in compliance with legal requirements. Personnel policies and procedures should be regularly reviewed and updated to reflect new legislation and organizational changes.

Current, clearly written personnel policies help avoid lawsuits, promote consistency, and contribute to employee morale. A city’s failure to follow its own personnel policies is one of the most potentially expensive liability exposures a city can have.

Leave laws

Employers in Washington have a complex (and often confusing) web of federal and state leave laws to navigate, including the federal Family and Medical Leave Act (FMLA), Washington Paid Family and Medical Leave (PFML) Act, Washington Paid Sick Leave Act, and pregnancy disability protections, among others. These laws create entitlements for employees that must be respected and managed by employers and can result in penalties and back pay for violations.

Family and Medical Leave Act

The federal FMLA applies to all public employers and guarantees most employees up to 12 weeks of unpaid leave every 12 months for certain qualifying events, like childbirth or adoption, care for a family member's or the employee's own serious medical condition, and certain military-related leave. The only required compensation under FMLA is the maintenance of the employee's medical benefits.

Paid Family and Medical Leave Act

The state PFML Act is a similar (yet completely separate) entitlement program that provides partial wage replacement to qualifying employees on leave for certain qualifying events (similar to the FMLA list) for 12-18 weeks, depending on the employee's circumstances. A second part of PFML is job protections—employers with 50 or more employees are required to keep an employee's job (or an equivalent position) open for a qualifying employee on leave. In another twist, if an employee's PFML leave runs concurrently with any FMLA leave, the employer is required to maintain the employee's health benefits for the entire duration of the employee's FMLA and PFML leave.

Paid Sick Leave Act

Washington also has a mandatory Paid Sick Leave Act that requires employers to provide non-exempt employees paid sick leave time, accruing at least one hour of sick leave for every 40 hours worked. Paid sick leave can be used for the employee's own health condition or medical appointment, caring for a family member with a health condition or medical appointment, certain times when the employer or the employee's children's school/childcare facility is closed, or for absences covered by the Domestic Violence Leave Act.

Additional state laws also protect employees' leave needs, including for pregnancy/childbirth disability and family care. These add to the complexity of managing various types of employee leave. The various leave law entitlements often overlap, and cities and towns need to be aware of how each of these laws works on its own, as well as in conjunction with each other.

The Fair Labor Standards Act (FLSA) and Washington state overtime law

The laws governing overtime pay are very complicated, and even veteran human resources professionals and payroll staff have a hard time sorting through the various federal and state rules and regulations. Complex, often contradictory, court decisions add to the confusion, exposing cities to tremendous liability for back overtime wages.

Generally, the FLSA requires that overtime pay must be paid at a rate of not less than one and one-half times an employee's regular rate of pay for each hour worked in excess of 40 hours in a week, although there are exceptions. Some employees at certain salary levels are exempt from the overtime provisions of the law, in some cases compensatory time may be granted instead of overtime pay, and there are different rules for when overtime is required for police and fire employees. The thresholds for determining if an employee is exempt from overtime is based on a multiplier of the state minimum wage.

While many of the provisions of the state overtime law and the FLSA are identical, there are some differences. When there is a difference, the city must comply with the law that is most beneficial to the employee. In addition to

overtime, local, state, and federal laws set the minimum hourly wage that employees must be paid. Although the federal minimum wage is \$7.25, the minimum wage in Washington is significantly higher—\$16.66 per hour as of January 1, 2025. The state minimum wage is indexed to increase every January based on an increase in the Consumer Price Index (CPI). The Washington State Department of Labor & Industries announces changes to the state minimum wage annually on September 30. In years when the CPI decreases, the state minimum wage may remain the same. The overtime exempt threshold in 2025 is \$1,332.80 per week (\$69,305.60 per year) for employers with up to 50 employees, and \$1,499.40 per week (\$77,968.80 per year) for employers with 51 or more employees..

It's very important to keep up to date on this ever-changing area of law.

Laws that protect employees from discrimination and unfair practices

A wide range of federal and state laws and regulations govern employment decisions, protect employees from discrimination and other unfair practices, and ensure the safety of employees at work. These laws have become increasingly complex, and there are ever more inconsistencies between state and federal regulations. Because city officials generally need more information on this issue than this brief chapter can provide, they should take advantage of the resources listed and attend training when it is offered.

Know the law

- [WAC 162-12-140 - Pre-employment Inquiries, Human Rights Commission](#)
- [RCW 41.08 - Civil service for firefighters](#)
- [RCW 41.12 - Civil service for police](#)
- [RCW 41.56 - Public Employees Collective Bargaining Act](#)
- [RCW 49.46 - Washington State Minimum Wage Act](#)
- [RCW 49.46.200 - Paid sick leave](#)
- [RCW 49.46.210 - Paid sick leave – Authorized purposes - Limitations](#)
- [RCW 49.60 - Washington Law Against Discrimination](#)
- [RCW 50A – Family and Medical Leave](#)
- [The Americans with Disabilities Act, U.S. Equal Employment Opportunity Commission](#)
- [Federal Family & Medical Leave Act, U.S. Dept. of Labor](#)
- [Fair Labor Standards Act, U.S. Department of Labor](#)

Public safety & emergency management

Public safety is a core responsibility of city government. Washington's cities are made safer places to live, learn, work, and play thanks to high-quality police, court, prosecution, public defense, and jail services delivered by municipal staff. Some cities are direct providers of some or all of these services, and cities without their own services partner with neighboring cities or their county to provide public safety services. On average, nearly half of a city's operating budget is spent on police officer and firefighter salaries, emergency medical services, courts, and jails. The majority of those expenses include costs for vital public safety personnel.

Fire and emergency medical services

Service delivery options

A city can provide fire protection and emergency medical services (EMS) in several different ways:

- Establish a municipal fire department under the direction of an appointed fire chief. (See Chapter 7 for civil service requirements related to firefighters.)
- Establish a volunteer fire department under the direction of an appointed fire chief. (See Chapter 7 for workers' compensation and pensions for volunteer firefighters.)
- Annex into a fire district and transfer a portion of the city's property tax authority and control over service levels to the fire district.
- Annex into a regional fire service authority, which is created through the merger of fire departments or fire districts and, like a fire district, has its own property tax authority.
- Enter into a contractual arrangement with another jurisdiction to provide for all or a portion of fire protection or EMS services:
 - Some cities and towns contract with the fire district (rather than annexing to the district or operating their own department). This option allows cities to maintain control of service levels and budgetary impacts but may relieve the city of issues such as liability, personnel supervision, and direct costs such as equipment.
 - A city or town can also contract through an interlocal agreement with a neighboring city or town for fire protection, EMS services, or both.
- Participate in an emergency medical services district, which has its own property tax authority.
- Create an ambulance utility (specific requirements apply).

Mutual aid agreements

Washington's Interlocal Cooperation Act authorizes fire departments to contract with other departments to provide mutual fire suppression assistance. Many municipalities enter into such contracts with other cities or fire districts to provide backup assistance in emergency situations.

For more information on partnership options and interlocal agreements, see Chapter 2.

Cities with one or more full-time paid firefighters must establish a civil service commission to oversee hiring and hear appeals. For information on civil service requirements, see Chapter 7.

Police and law enforcement services

Cities are required to provide police and law enforcement services, but state law gives cities flexibility in how they fulfill that duty. Neither the state constitution nor state law requires a specific number of law enforcement officers, or a specific level of services provided; this is a matter of policy for the city council to decide. Once a city determines how it will provide law enforcement services, specific laws on how such services are delivered apply.

Service delivery options

A city can provide law enforcement protection in a number of different ways:

- Establish a municipal police department under the direction of an appointed police chief or marshal.
- Enter into a contractual arrangement with another jurisdiction—the county, a neighboring city, or Washington State Patrol—to provide for all or a portion of law enforcement services.

The level of service and cost must be negotiated between the jurisdictions.

Cities with more than two full-time police officers must establish a police civil service commission to govern hiring and hear appeals. For information on civil service requirements, see Chapter 7.

Mutual aid agreements

The Interlocal Cooperation Act and the Washington Mutual Aid Peace Officers Powers Act authorize a law enforcement agency to contract with any other law enforcement agency to provide mutual assistance. Many small cities enter into such contracts with other cities, the county, or the state patrol to provide backup assistance in emergency situations.

For more information on interlocal agreements see “Working with other entities,” Chapter 2.

Risk management and liability

Risk management and liability issues related to law enforcement are a significant concern for cities. To reduce liability, many city insurance programs have training programs and specific requirements, such as procedures for hiring police chiefs.

Courts, prosecution, and jails

Each county, city, and town is responsible for the prosecution, adjudication, sentencing, and incarceration of misdemeanor and gross misdemeanor offenses committed by adults in their respective jurisdictions. They can use their own courts, staff, and facilities, or create contracts or interlocal agreements to provide these services.

More than 100 cities run their own courts with elected or appointed judges. Although the city council may appoint the court’s judge and determine the court’s budget, the judge is responsible for running the court, including supervising court staff, and is not subject to council or executive oversight.

Once a city establishes its own criminal code or municipal court, it may not terminate the municipal court or repeal the criminal code without first entering into an agreement for payment of criminal justice costs with the county or another city.

Washington courts

<p>Washington Supreme Court</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appeals from the Court of Appeals • Administers the state court system
<p>Courts of Appeal (Division I – Seattle; Division II – Tacoma; Division III – Spokane)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Appeals from lower courts
<p>Superior Courts (serve the county, or cluster of counties, in which they are located)</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Civil matters • Domestic relations • Felony criminal cases • Juvenile matters • Appeals from courts of limited jurisdiction
<p>Courts of Limited Jurisdiction</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Municipal courts, therapeutic or community courts, district courts, municipal departments, traffic violations bureaus (TVBs) • Misdemeanor criminal cases, including driving under the influence, reckless driving, and fourth-degree assault • Traffic, nontraffic, and parking infractions • For municipal courts: violations of municipal or city ordinances • Domestic violence protection orders • Civil actions of \$75,000 or less • Small claims up to \$10,000

Emergency management planning

Local governments have the responsibility to protect the health, safety, and welfare of their residents, to protect the economic base of the community, and to preserve the environment. The middle of an emergency is the worst time to think about what processes you need to have in place. Instead, proactive mitigation policies and actions can be an investment in the future, creating a safer, more disaster-resilient communities by:

- Protecting public safety and prevent loss of life and injury
- Reducing harm to existing and future development
- Preventing damage to a community's unique economic, cultural, and environmental assets
- Minimizing operational downtime and accelerating recovery of government and business after disasters
- Reducing the costs of disaster response and recovery, and reducing risk-exposure for first responders
- Helping to accomplish other community objectives, such as leveraging capital improvements, infrastructure protection, open space preservation, and economic resiliency

Valuable assistance is available from state and federal government agencies, but cities must be aware of guidelines and restrictions in place for accessing that support. To comply with the state comprehensive emergency management plan and program, cities must establish a local organization or join a joint local organization for emergency management. There are also specific federal planning, reporting, and training requirements that must be met before cities can qualify for certain federal grants or assistance.

Immediately before, during, and after an emergency, all available resources will be tapped. When local resources aren't enough, a city can use its previously established mutual aid or interlocal agreements with adjoining local jurisdictions and/or seek help from the State Emergency Management Division.

Declaration of state of emergency

A city's mayor or manager, following the recommendation of the emergency management agency and/or the city emergency management coordinator, can declare a "State of Emergency." Such a declaration provides for extraordinary local powers such as expenditures for emergency assistance to residents and measures to protect public health, safety, and property, and is generally a preliminary step in the process of asking for county/state/federal assistance.

National Flood Insurance Program

Among FEMA's many resources, the National Flood Insurance Program aims to reduce the impact of flooding on private and public structures. It does so by providing affordable insurance to property owners and by encouraging communities to adopt and enforce floodplain management regulations.

Know the law

- [RCW 52.04.061 - City annexation to fire district](#)
- [RCW 52.26.100 - City annexation to regional fire service authority - transfer of civil service employees](#)
- [RCW 35.23.440 \(21\) - Service levels for second class cities](#)
- [RCW 35.27.370 \(6\) - Service levels for towns](#)
- [RCW 35A.11.020 - Service levels for code cities](#)
- [RCW 35.21.775 - Cities and towns - Provision of fire protection services to state-owned facilities](#)
- [RCW 35.21.779 - Fire protection services for state-owned facilities - Contracts with Department of Commerce](#)
- [RCW 41.08 - Civil service firefighters](#)
- [RCW 35.103 & 35A.92 - Fire department performance measures](#)
- [Article XI Section 11, Washington State Constitution - Police and sanitary regulations](#)
- [RCW 10.93 - Washington Mutual Aid Peace Officers Powers Act](#)
- [RCW 41.12 - Civil service for city police](#)
- [RCW 35A.12.020 - Chief law enforcement officer \(code cities\)](#)
- [RCW 35.23.021 - Police chief \(second class cities\)](#)
- [RCW 35.27.070 – Town marshal](#)
- [RCW 38.52 - Emergency management](#)
- [RCW 35.33.081 - Emergency expenditures - Non-debatable emergencies](#)
- [WAC 118-30-040 - Responsibilities of political subdivisions](#)
- [WAC 118-30-060 - Plan requirements](#)

Public works and infrastructure

chapter 9

Public works—such as streets, water and sewer systems, and parks—are so fundamental to daily life that most people take them for granted. When turning on the shower, driving to the store, or emptying the trash, we rarely think about who provides the service. Yet it's the availability and reliability of such services that often attracts residents and businesses to cities. City infrastructure underpins the economy and our quality of life, while protecting the environment.

Utility services

Many small cities own and operate utility systems, which can include drinking water, sewer, and stormwater management. Some collect garbage, recycle, and compost. A few even operate electric and natural gas utilities, cable television, or broadband services.

Utilities operate as enterprise funds. This means the revenues collected from that service (such as hookup fees and user fees), must be accounted for within that fund and cannot be commingled with other funds. See Chapter 6 for more information and resources.

Public works partnerships

Cities can choose to provide utility services themselves or through a partnership via contract. Partnerships often provide innovative services, more effective service delivery, cost savings, and greater efficiency. Cities can contract with their county, another city, a special purpose district, or a private company.

Utility maintenance and infrastructure development

Keeping up with the development and maintenance of your city utilities can be an overwhelming task, but several state agencies and nonprofit organizations are available to help. They provide training, technical assistance, and funding to support small cities with rate-setting, capital facilities planning, budgeting, grant writing, and small system management plans.

Setting the right rates for your users

The goal of every public utility is to provide customers with uninterrupted, safe, affordable service while balancing the books at the break-even point or better. Setting rates is crucial, as are periodic reviews and adjustments to those rates.

Cities have broad authority to establish rules and regulations for the operation of utility systems, including the ability to establish rates and classify different types of customers (business, residential, etc.) who will pay different rates. Cities rely heavily on user rates, hookup fees, and system development charges as the primary funding sources for utility infrastructure improvements.

Infrastructure costs have long been rising faster than inflation. This can have devastating effects on cities that don't index utility rates to an inflator or

don't raise rates every year. Cities should also establish a reserve account for unforeseen emergencies.

Utility billing and collection

If a city has established utilities, the city must bill and collect for services. There are many potential headaches associated with utility billing and collection practices, such as delinquent accounts, utility liens, penalties, and interest. These topics and others should be spelled out in the city's policies and communicated clearly to those who use the services. State law regulates many of these processes and procedures.

Streets and transportation

State law requires cities to adopt uniform definitions and design standards for streets. Uniform design standards apply to all new construction on major arterial and secondary arterial streets, and to major reconstruction of old streets (as much as is practical).

The city revenues used for street construction, repair, and maintenance mostly come from a city's general fund. For major construction projects, there are several state grant and low-interest loan programs. However, depending on the type of project, to receive funding from these programs, projects must be included in the city's six-year transportation plan.

Transportation benefit districts

RCW 35.21.225 authorizes cities to form transportation benefit districts (TBDs). TBDs are quasi-municipal corporations and independent taxing districts that can raise revenue for specific transportation projects, usually through vehicle license fees or sales taxes. Over 100 cities and towns in Washington have established TBDs.

Transportation benefit district revenue may be used for transportation improvements included in a local, regional, or state transportation plan. Improvements can range from roads and transit service to sidewalks and transportation demand management. Construction, maintenance, and operation costs are eligible.

Sidewalks

When a city fails to keep its sidewalks in a reasonable state of repair, free of dangerous and unsafe conditions, the result can be costly injury claims. Many cities have ordinances based on state statute that impose the cost of sidewalk repair upon abutting property owners. If a sidewalk needs repairing, the city asks the abutting property owner to make the repair. If the repair is not made, the city may make the repair and bill the property owner. While these ordinances provide a way to repair and maintain sidewalks, they do not relieve the city from liability if someone is injured due to a dangerous sidewalk.

City and town sidewalk statute summary

Statute	RCW 35.68	RCW 35.69	RCW 35.70
Applicability	All cities or towns	Code cities, 1st & 2nd class cities, or charter cities of equal population	Code cities or 2nd class cities and towns
Improvement type	Construct, reconstruct & repair sidewalks, curbs, and gutters	Sidewalk construction & reconstruction less than a block long	Any form of sidewalk construction
Remarks	City may require improvements to be made or accomplish them through contract	City requires improvements to be made and, if not, then accomplishes them through contract	City requires improvements to be made and, if not, then accomplishes them through contract

All three statutes refer to limitations in RCW 35.69.020:

- An abutting property owner cannot be charged more than 50% of the valuation of his or her property, exclusive of improvements;
- An abutting property owner cannot be charged if action by the city caused deterioration or damage to the sidewalk, or if the deterioration or damage was caused by failure of the city to enforce its ordinances.

Sidewalks are pedestrian facilities that must meet the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act (ADA). When a city constructs new sidewalks or alters a sidewalk (“alter” includes repaving, but not pothole patching) the city must ensure that the sidewalks are built or upgraded to ADA standards.

Snow and ice removal

Cities have the responsibility for control of snow and ice on city streets and sidewalks. Emergency services and routine travel must remain possible, even in bad weather. Snow and ice control programs must consider safety, budget, personnel, and environmental factors. These tasks can be done by city employees and equipment, by private contractors, or through partnerships or service agreements with other local governments.

A city may decide to focus on traction control measures (such as sanding) for smaller amounts of snow or ice accumulation while reserving plowing roads for greater amounts of snow accumulation.

The intent of policies and procedures should be to provide for reasonably safe use and passage of vehicles using the city’s public street system, and to ensure that emergency service vehicles can travel on city streets and provide needed access to city facilities. Of course, such policies assume that motorists will drive in a cautious manner, and in a vehicle that is properly equipped, given the prevailing roadway conditions.

Many cities require that owners of each building or vacant property with adjoining sidewalks clean the sidewalk of snow or ice within a certain period of time after snow stops falling.

Transportation planning

Cities are required to prepare and adopt a six-year comprehensive transportation program. The plans are to be adopted after one or more public hearings and then filed with the Secretary of the Washington State Department of Transportation (WSDOT).

The Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP) should include:

- Proposed road and bridge construction work
- Other transportation facilities and programs
- New or improved bicycle or pedestrian facilities that promote non-motorized transit
- How the city will preserve railroad rights-of-way if a railroad ceases to operate in its jurisdiction.

A six-year TIP must set forth projects and programs of regional significance for inclusion in the transportation improvement program within that region.

State law requires that all cities and towns update their six-year TIPs annually. TIPs must also be consistent with the transportation element of the city's comprehensive plan, if the city is required to do comprehensive planning under the Growth Management Act. For more information on comprehensive planning, see Chapter 10.

Parks and recreation

Quality of life in cities is better when families and friends can enjoy a picnic in the park, a swim in a pool, a softball game, or a walk on a trail. City parks and recreation opportunities may also include public auditoriums, art museums, and golf courses.

Cities have several choices as to how they offer parks and recreation services. They can:

- Provide the services themselves
- Partner with another jurisdiction
- Create a park district

Park districts provide a way to finance park programs. This financing method is often used when the people who will use a city's recreational facilities live both inside and outside city limits.

Planning requirements

The Growth Management Act (GMA) requires the fastest-growing counties and the cities within them to conduct extensive planning to be consistent with state goals on open space and recreation. The state requirement includes retaining open space, enhancing recreational opportunities, conserving fish and wildlife habitat, increasing access to natural resource lands and water, and developing parks and recreation facilities. See Chapter 10 for more information on the GMA.

Bidding and purchasing

Although bidding and purchasing requirements may sometimes feel like bureaucratic barriers to completing a project, they were created for good reason. They ensure that public contracts are awarded fairly and performed efficiently, at the least cost to the public. The laws also protect the public from the costs of fraud and cronyism.

Every city should have a purchasing system established by council policy and/or ordinance that meets these criteria:

- Is uniform throughout the city;
- Complies with public works bid laws;
- Is used by all departments;
- Addresses the issue of ethical appearances;
- Meets public advertising requirements; and
- Meets public bid opening requirements.

	Prevailing wages apply	Bid limits apply
Services		
Purchased services	No	No
Personal services	No	No
Professional services	No	No
Ordinary maintenance (by agency forces)	No	No
Public works		
Public works	Yes	Yes
Maintenance when performed by contract	Yes	Yes

RCW 39.04.010 defines a public work project as “all work, construction, alteration, repair or improvement other than ordinary maintenance, executed at the cost of the state or of any municipality...” The implication is that maintenance activities that are not “ordinary” are subject to bid limits, and then, if contracted, to prevailing wages.

When to go out to bid

It is important to know when a city must have a competitive bidding process on a project and a uniform procurement system. Competitive bidding is determined by several factors—including the cost of the project or purchase, type of purchase, the city’s classification, and in some cases, the city’s population. A city doesn’t have to use a competitive bid process for everything, but must when it is required by statute, local charter provision, or local ordinance.

Public works and maintenance

RCW 39.04.010 defines the term “public work” for bidding purposes as “all work, construction, alteration, repair, or improvement other than ordinary maintenance, executed at the cost of the state or of any municipality, or which is by law a lien or charge on any property therein.” All public works, including maintenance when performed by contract, must comply with bid laws if the cost of the project exceeds a certain amount.

What is ordinary maintenance? Within the context of prevailing wages, it is defined as maintenance work performed by the regular employees of the state or any county, municipality, or political subdivision created by its laws.

When maintenance is performed by city staff, it is not public works and is therefore not subject to either bid laws or prevailing wages. Contracted ordinary maintenance is considered a public works project and is subject to both bid laws and prevailing wages.

Public works bid limits

When deciding whether a project is under or over bid limits, estimated project costs:

- Must include all construction-related work, but not engineering/architectural design fees;
- Must include all phases of the project;
- Should include applicable sales and use taxes (with some exemptions);
- Must not include donated labor, materials, supplies, etc.; and
- Must be based on competitive bid basis.

State statute on public works bid limits for cities and other public entities are subject to change over time. Make sure to stay up to date on the governing statutes for your class of city (RCW 35.22.620(5) and 35.22.630 for first class cities, and RCW 35.23.352(6) for second class cities, towns, and (via RCW 35A.40.200) code cities).

If the estimated project cost is below the relevant bid limit, the city can choose to construct the project through:

- Use of agency crews
- Interlocal agreement with another jurisdiction, or
- Contract with a private contractor

If a city wants to use these exemptions, council must adopt a resolution at the time of contracting or have written policies outlining the following exemptions:

- Purchases that are clearly and legitimately limited to a single source of supply
- Purchases involving special facilities or market conditions
- Purchases in the event of emergency
- Purchases of insurance or bonds
- Public works contracts in the event of an emergency

If written policies are used to waive competitive bidding requirements, the contract and a factual basis for the exception must be recorded and open to the public as soon as the contract is awarded.

Consulting services

Competitive bids are generally not required for services, including professional engineers, land surveyors, architects, etc. These services should be selected on the basis of qualifications. A city needs to recruit consultants through an announcement for each project or through a consultant roster.

Other services

Services such as ongoing computer support, landscaping, and janitorial contracts are not public works activities and do not require a city to follow competitive bid laws. This does not mean the city does not need to follow other

statutory provisions that may apply to a particular kind of service. For example, even though janitorial contracts are a service, prevailing wages apply to those contracts.

Equipment, materials, and supply purchases

This category includes supplies, materials, and equipment that are for general purposes only. Examples include office supplies, equipment, and vehicles. Phone system hardware is an example of an equipment purchase, but a telephone system that requires installation of cable, conduits, and other devices may fall within the definition of a public work.

Purchases of supplies, materials, and equipment below a minimum dollar amount are subject only to city policies. Above this threshold, a city must either use a vendor list procedure or seek open and competitive bids. Small cities can use a vendor list process to purchase equipment, materials, and supplies that are not for public work or improvement. The city must also advertise at least twice a year that the vendor list exists. If a city uses vendor lists, it must make a list of awarded contracts available to the public.

Technology equipment purchases

Cities may use “competitive negotiation” in lieu of a competitive bid process for telecommunications, computer equipment, or software. This alternate process requires that the city:

- Provide procedures for technical evaluation of the proposals, identification of qualified sources, and the selection process for awarding the contract; and
- Award the contract to the qualified bidder whose proposal is “most advantageous.”

Small works rosters

When the contract amount for a public works project is \$350,000 or less, a city may follow the small works roster process for a public work or improvement as an alternative to the standard competitive bidding requirements.

A city may create a single general small works roster, create a small works roster for different specialties or categories of anticipated work, and make distinctions between contractors based upon different geographic areas served by the contractor. The city must first pass a resolution or ordinance authorizing use of the small works roster process and establish procedures.

Advantages of a small works roster for a city include:

- Only contractors who meet mandatory bidder criteria are placed on the roster
- More manageable number of bidders
- Greater certainty of interested bidders
- Simpler solicitation
- Possibility for streamlined award and contract administration
- Opportunity to automate

A city needs to advertise at least once a year in an area newspaper for contractors to be included in the small works roster. The advertisement must contain notice of the existence of the roster, solicitation of contractors, and a note that responsible contractors are to be added at any time that they submit a written request and necessary records.

A city has the option of joining a roster service provider who will maintain their roster. For example, MRSC Rosters is a statewide small public works and consultant roster online database for Washington cities to join. MRSC posts the annual legal notice on behalf of all participating agencies and maintains the roster.

Funding for public works: Planning for the long term

Infrastructure projects are expensive. A city must think strategically about how to manage infrastructure costs over the long term. To do this, city officials shouldn't hesitate to ask for help and advice from those who have a deep knowledge of laws, best practices, available grants, and success stories from similar cities.

See Chapter 6 for information on grant and low-interest loan opportunities and long-range financial planning.

Know the law

- [RCW 35.67 - Sewerage systems - refuse collection and disposal](#)
- [RCW 35.91 - Municipal Water & Sewer Facilities Act](#)
- [RCW 35.92 - Municipal utilities - water, electricity, natural gas](#)
- [RCW 36.94 - Sewerage, water, and drainage systems \(counties\)](#)
- [RCW 57 - Water-sewer districts](#)
- [RCW 35.68 - Sidewalks, gutter, curbs, and driveways - all cities and towns](#)
- [RCW 35.69 - Construction, reconstruction in first and second class cities](#)
- [RCW 35.70 - Sidewalks, construction in second class cities and towns](#)
- [RCW 35.77.010 - Transportation Improvement Plan](#)
- [RCW 36.70A.070\(6\) - Comprehensive Transportation Plan - Growth Management Act](#)
- [RCW 35.21.020 - Power to acquire](#)
- [RCW 39.34 - Interlocal Cooperation Act](#)
- [RCW 36.70A.020 \(9\) and RCW 36.70A.070 \(8\) - Growth Management Act](#)
- [RCW 39 - Public contracts & indebtedness](#)
- [RCW 39.12 - Prevailing wages](#)
- [RCW 39.80 - Selection of professional engineers, land surveyors, architects, and landscape architects](#)
- [RCW 35.21.156 - Solid waste, contracts with vendors, vendor selection procedures](#)
- [RCW 35.23.352 - Bid law for code cities under 20,000 in population, second class cities and towns](#)
- [RCW 35A.40.210 - Cross-reference for code cities bidding requirements](#)
- [RCW 39.04.010 - Public works definitions](#)
- [RCW 39.04.280 - Competitive bidding requirements - exemptions](#)
- [WAC 296-127-010\(7\) - Definition of "public work"](#)
- [City and town sidewalk statutes: RCW 35.68, RCW 35.69, RCW 35.70](#)

Comprehensive planning, growth management, and environmental protection

The combination of comprehensive planning, growth management, and environmental protection are areas that can require not just one expert, but many. The level of complexity—and continual changes in the law—can be a leading cause of disconnect at city hall.

Nonetheless, the underlying ideas are simple: A city needs to plan for growth if it intends to leave healthy communities for their children and grandchildren. The planning process can be a powerful way to clarify community values, needs, and goals. A comprehensive plan expresses a community's vision and is the blueprint for all subsequent land use activity.

Developing, implementing, and updating a comprehensive plan are great opportunities to:

- Create a vision—know what the community should look and be like in the future.
- Develop a road map—guide growth and development toward the vision.
- Set goals—establish achievable tasks to move the community towards the desired future.

The goals of a comprehensive plan are implemented through regulatory ordinances. These are collectively known as “development regulations” and include zoning codes, subdivision codes, building and health codes, environmental codes, and others that make up the planning and regulatory framework of the community.

Local codes can include incentives that stimulate the kind of growth desired, including such options as local property tax incentives or density bonuses for projects that carry out habitat restoration or provide affordable housing, such as conservation district property tax exemptions or multifamily housing tax exemptions.

Assistance from state agencies and other experts is available to help a city and its residents understand the process and meet state requirements.

The Growth Management Act

In 1990, the Washington State Legislature declared that “uncoordinated and unplanned growth, together with a lack of common goals ... pose a threat to the environment, sustainable economic development, and the health, safety, and high quality of life enjoyed by residents of this state” and that “it is in the public interest that citizens, communities, local governments, and the private sector cooperate and coordinate with one another in comprehensive land use planning.” This is the foundation for the Growth Management Act (GMA).

The GMA requires most cities (and counties) in Washington to plan for future growth while protecting natural areas, and in doing so, to balance thirteen goals of the GMA (RCW 36.70A.020):

- Concentrate growth where facilities and services can be cost-effectively provided
- Reduce sprawl
- Encourage multimodal, regional transportation
- Plan for and promote affordable housing
- Encourage economic development
- Respect property rights
- Process permits in a predictable manner
- Maintain natural resource industries
- Retain open space and increase recreation
- Protect the environment
- Involve the public
- Provide adequate public facilities and services
- Identify and encourage historic preservation
- Adapt to and mitigate the impacts of climate change
- Manage shoreline use, access, and development

Who must plan?

Twenty-nine counties and the cities within them, comprising about 95% of the state’s population, are required (or have chosen) to plan under the GMA. The remaining ten counties, referred to as “partially planning counties,” are as follows: Adams, Asotin, Cowlitz, Grays Harbor, Klickitat, Ferry, Lincoln, Okanogan, Skamania, Wahkiakum, and Whitman. The cities in these counties must still designate and protect natural resource lands and critical areas, discussed further below.

Comprehensive planning requirements

While there are many requirements for cities in developing their comprehensive plans, cities should always keep in mind the following priorities:

- Comprehensive plans will be measured against the goals and requirements of the GMA.
- Comprehensive plans must comply with countywide planning policies.
- Development regulations must be consistent with comprehensive plans.
- Individual elements of comprehensive plans need to be consistent with each other.
- Comprehensive plans must be consistent with the comprehensive plans of adjacent jurisdictions.
- Development (both private and public) must be measured for consistency with the comprehensive plan.

City and county comprehensive plans must include the following elements: land use, housing, capital facilities, utilities, transportation, and climate change and resiliency. Counties must also include a plan to protect rural areas. Shoreline protection plans under the Shoreline Management Act are also considered an element of local comprehensive plans. Finally, although parks and recreation and economic development elements are not required until adequate state funding is provided, some jurisdictions have chosen to include them in their comprehensive plans.

The GMA also provides a framework for regional coordination. Counties that plan in conformance with the GMA are required to adopt countywide planning policies to coordinate with their cities as they create and adopt their comprehensive plans. Counties are also required to establish urban growth areas (UGAs), which delineate those areas that will eventually be annexed into cities.

Comprehensive plan updates

The GMA requires that each fully planning city and county periodically review and, if necessary, revise its comprehensive plan and development regulations to ensure that they comply with the GMA. In addition to comprehensive plan amendments that are adopted annually by many jurisdictions, communities must conduct a full review of the comprehensive plan and development regulations every ten years, according to a schedule set in statute.

In 2023, the Legislature passed a law that allows very small cities and towns to opt out of the full comprehensive plan update process. Those cities still must update critical areas regulations and the capital facilities and transportation elements. To opt out of the full update, a city or town must meet the following criteria:

- Fewer than 500 in population;
- Not located within 10 miles of a city with a population greater than 100,000;
- Experienced a population growth rate below 10% in the preceding 10 years; and
- Has provided the Department of Commerce with notice of its intent to participate in a partial review and revision of its comprehensive plan.

Critical areas

Counties and cities, including those not fully planning under the GMA, are required to review and, if necessary, amend their policies and development regulations regarding critical areas and natural resource lands. Cities of less than 25,000 people may adopt their county's critical area regulations by reference, instead.

Critical areas include:

- Wetlands
- Areas with critical recharging effect on aquifers used for potable water
- Fish and wildlife habitat conservation areas
- Frequently flooded areas
- Geologically hazardous areas

All jurisdictions must include the best available science in developing policies and regulations to protect the function and values of critical areas.

For small cities that choose to adopt their own critical areas ordinances instead of the county's, the Department of Commerce developed a technical assistance tool called the Small Communities Critical Areas Ordinance Implementation Guidebook (2007). This document recommends simple procedures and includes references to sources of information, descriptions of permitting processes, examples of common permitting scenarios, and some useful checklists and public information brochures that can be customized for use in small communities.

Development regulations and regulatory reform

Local plans and development regulations must also conform to such environmental laws as the State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA) and the Shoreline Management Act (SMA).

The Land Use Regulatory Reform Act was passed in 1995 and made significant changes to three of the state's core land use laws: the GMA, SEPA, and SMA. The primary goal was to establish comprehensive plans and development regulations as the foundation from which subsequent land use decisions are made. The Act also introduced new state requirements for more coordinated and streamlined project review, known as the Local Project Review Act. Cities and counties fully planning under the GMA must have an integrated and consolidated project permit process that includes meeting time limits for permit processing.

More information about GMA comprehensive planning, including infill development for small cities, can be found on the Department of Commerce's Growth Management website, under the Short Course on Local Planning page.

State Environmental Policy Act

The State Environmental Policy Act (SEPA), enacted in 1971, requires that a city identify possible environmental impacts that may result from governmental decisions such as issuing permits for private projects; constructing public facilities; or adopting regulations, policies, or plans. SEPA was designed so that the environment is considered by government prior to decisions.

Information provided during the SEPA review process helps agency decision-makers, applicants, and the public understand how a proposal will affect the environment. This information can be used to change a proposal to reduce likely impacts, or to condition or deny a proposal when adverse environmental impacts are identified.

SEPA applies to decisions by every state and local government agency within Washington. One agency is usually identified as the "lead agency" for a specific proposal. The lead agency for most private projects will be the city or county where the project is located. For public projects, the lead agency will be the agency proposing the project.

A SEPA environmental review is usually initiated when:

- An application is submitted to an agency for a license to construct a private project, such as an office building or a grocery store;
- An agency is considering construction of a public project, such as a new school, a highway, or a water pipeline; or
- An agency is developing a regulation, policy, or plan, such as a county or city comprehensive plan, a critical area ordinance, or a state water quality regulation.

SEPA review applies to all decisions unless they are categorically exempt. For example, residential housing is exempt if the proposed project is consistent with the comprehensive plan and local development regulations and an environmental analysis has occurred that considered the impacts.

Stormwater

Stormwater is rain and snow melt that runs off surfaces such as rooftops, paved streets, highways, and parking lots. As stormwater runs off these surfaces, it picks up pollution such as oil, fertilizers, pesticides, pet waste, and trash and carries this pollution into our lakes, streams, rivers, and bays. Polluted runoff that goes into a storm drain is usually not treated and winds up in our downstream waters.

Under federal and state laws, cities across the state are required to manage stormwater as required by municipal stormwater permits administered by the Department of Ecology (Ecology). The requirements vary between the east and west sides of the state.

In simple terms, the municipal stormwater permits require operators of municipal separate storm sewer systems (MS4s) to develop and implement a stormwater management program that:

- Reduces the discharge of pollutants to the “maximum extent practicable;”
- Protects water quality; and
- Involves planning, public education and involvement, illicit discharge detection programs, and passing appropriate ordinances to reduce stormwater pollution.

Shoreline Management Act

Washington’s Shoreline Management Act (SMA) applies to all 39 counties and more than 230 cities having shorelines of the state. The goal of the SMA is “to prevent the inherent harm in an uncoordinated and piecemeal development of the state’s shorelines.” The Act establishes a broad policy giving preference to uses that:

- Protect the quality of water and the natural environment;
- Depend on proximity to the shoreline, called “water-dependent uses”; and
- Preserve and enhance public access or increase recreational opportunities for the public along shorelines.

The SMA is administered through a partnership between local governments and Ecology. The partnership provides that:

- Cities and counties develop shoreline master programs (SMPs) that regulate development along larger streams, lakes, and marine waters; and
- Ecology provides technical assistance and reviews local programs and permitting decisions.

The Act places a strong emphasis on public participation in developing local shoreline programs and in the local permit process.

Ecology's adoption of new SMP guidelines in 2003 initiated a new generation of shoreline planning in Washington, establishing a new schedule for updating SMPs and a biennial appropriation to help fund local SMP development. For fully planning cities under the GMA, SMP goals and policies are considered an element of the local comprehensive plan. Ecology provides a Shoreline Master Program Handbook on its website.

Endangered Species Act

The Endangered Species Act (ESA) is a federal statute designed to protect endangered and threatened fish, wildlife, and plant species and the ecosystems upon which they depend. The ESA is administered by the National Marine Fisheries Service (NOAA Fisheries) when the affected species are marine and anadromous (e.g., salmonid), and the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) when the affected species live on land or in freshwater.

The ESA provides a variety of mechanisms for saving species threatened with extinction. One widely used tool is the "Habitat Conservation Plan," which offers protection to landowners in exchange for an agreement to manage land in a way that minimizes impacts to listed species. Another mechanism is the adoption of protective regulations, commonly called the "4(d) rules," named after a section in the ESA. The June 2000 4(d) rule adopted by NOAA prohibits "take" of salmon and steelhead listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) except in cases where the take is associated with an approved program that comes under one of the limits in the 4(d) rule. One of those programs is for the restoration of salmon habitat, if done under an approved plan. Projects that implement the salmon recovery plans produced by salmon recovery regional organizations meet the criteria for coverage under the 4(d) rule. Many cities are members of such regional organizations and are developing recovery plans.

In Washington, the listings of salmon, steelhead, and bull trout have focused attention on the ESA, although many other species in the state, such as the northern spotted owl, pocket gopher, Canada lynx, and western pond turtle, also have been listed as "endangered" or "threatened" under either the ESA or state laws.

Know the law

- [RCW 35.63 - Planning commissions](#)
- [RCW 35A.63 - Planning and zoning in code cities](#)
- [RCW 36.70A - Growth Management Act](#)
- [RCW 36.70A.130\(4\),\(5\) & \(9\) - Comprehensive plans - Review procedures and schedules - Implementation progress report](#)
- [WAC 365-195 - Growth Management Act - Procedural criteria for adopting comprehensive plans and development regulations](#)
- [RCW 36.70B - Local project review](#)
- [RCW 36.70C - Judicial review of land use decisions](#)
- [RCW 90.58 - Shoreline Management Act of 1971](#)
- [RCW 90.58.080 - Timetable for local governments to develop or amend master programs - Review of master programs - Grants](#)
- [WAC 173-18 - Shoreline Management Act - Streams and rivers constituting shorelines of the state](#)
- [WAC 173-20 - Shoreline Management Act - Lakes constituting shorelines of the state](#)
- [WAC 173-22 - Adoption of designations of shorelands and wetlands associated with shorelines of the state](#)
- [WAC 173-26 - State master program approval/amendment procedures and master program guidelines](#)
- [WAC 173-27 - Shoreline management permit and enforcement procedures](#)
- [16 U.S. Code Chapter 35 - Endangered Species Act](#)
- [ESA 4\(d\) Rules - Protective Regulations, National Marine Fisheries Service, Northwest Regional Office](#)
- [ESA Section 4 Regulations, 50 CFR Part 424 - Listing endangered and threatened species and designating critical habitat](#)
- [ESA Section 7 Regulations, 50 CFR Part 402 - Interagency cooperation](#)
- [ESA Section 10 Regulations, 50 CFR Part 222 - General endangered and threatened marine species](#)

Chapter 1: Overview of a city

- [City and town classification, MRSC](#)
- [City and town forms of government, MRSC](#)
- [Washington city and town profiles, MRSC](#)
- [Why are there so many types of cities and counties? A guide to municipal classifications and forms of government, MRSC](#)
- [Code City Handbook, MRSC](#)
- [Initiative and Referendum Guide, MRSC](#)
- [Knowing the territory: Basic legal guidelines for Washington city, county, and special purpose district officials, MRSC](#)
- [The closest governments to the people: A complete reference guide to local government in Washington State, MRSC](#)
- [You have it, use it: Home rule in Washington, AWC](#)

Chapter 2: Leadership & management

- [Mayor & Councilmember Handbook, AWC/MRSC](#)
- [City and town forms of government, MRSC](#)
- [Washington city and town profiles, MRSC](#)
- [Elected officials first year road map, AWC](#)
- [Interlocal cooperation, MRSC](#)
- [Roles and responsibilities of local government leaders, MRSC](#)

Chapter 3: Successful city councils

- [Elected Officials Essentials trainings, AWC](#)
- [City eLearning library, AWC](#)
- [Mayor & Councilmember Handbook, AWC/MRSC](#)
- [OPMA practice tips and checklists, MRSC](#)
- [PRA practice tips and checklists, MRSC](#)
- [When First Amendment rights and public meetings clash, MRSC](#)
- [Local ordinances for Washington cities and counties, MRSC](#)
- [Parliamentary procedure: A brief guide to Robert's Rules of Order, MRSC](#)
- [Advisory boards and commissions, MRSC](#)
- [Statutes related to boards and commissions, MRSC](#)
- [Community engagement resources, MRSC](#)
- [Planning for stronger local democracy, NLC/ICMA](#)

Chapter 4: Planning your city's future

- [Economic development in Washington state: An introduction, MRSC](#)
- [Planning for economic development, MRSC](#)
- [Economic development statutes, MRSC](#)
- [Strategic planning, MRSC](#)
- [Charting your future Part 2: Conducting a strategic planning retreat, MRSC](#)
- [Facilitator directory, AWC](#)
- [Downtown revitalization, USDA](#)
- [Infrastructure Assistance Coordinating Council, IACC](#)
- [Infrastructure funding opportunities, IACC](#)
- [Tourism and local governments, MRSC](#)
- [Washington Rural Development, USDA](#)
- [Washington State Main Street Program, Dept. of Archaeology & Historic Preservation](#)
- [PDC guidelines for city officials: Elections activity, AWC](#)
- [10 steps for a successful legislative session, AWC](#)
- [Session is only the tip of the iceberg, AWC](#)
- [Public agency lobbying, Public Disclosure Commission](#)
- [Volunteer programs and policies, MRSC](#)
- [Federal Volunteer Protection Act of 1997](#)

Chapter 5: Ethics, open government, and fairness—Staying on the right side of the law

- [Knowing the territory: Basic legal guidelines for Washington city, county, and special purpose district officials, MRSC](#)
- [OPMA practice tips and checklists, MRSC](#)
- [PRA practice tips and checklists, MRSC](#)
- [Open government resource manual, AGO](#)
- [Electronic records – PRA and records retention practice tips for local governments, MRSC](#)
- [Electronic records – PRA and records retention do's and don'ts for local governments, MRSC](#)
- [PRA – Agency obligations: A starting point checklist for local governments, MRSC](#)
- [PRA – Performing an adequate search for record - Practice tips for local governments, MRSC](#)
- [Public Records Act court decisions, MRSC](#)
- [The PRA applies to work-related texting on a personal cell phone, MRSC](#)
- [Appearance of Fairness Doctrine, MRSC](#)
- [Ethics and conflicts of interest, MRSC](#)
- [Public hearings, MRSC](#)
- [Short course on local planning, AWC, Commerce](#)
- [Running for local elected office, MRSC](#)
- [Guidelines for local government agencies in election campaigns, PDC](#)

Chapter 6: Municipal budgeting and fiscal management

- [2026 Budget Suggestions, MRSC](#)
- [Budgeting, MRSC](#)
- [Introduction to budgeting, MRSC](#)
- [City and town budget procedures, MRSC](#)
- [Financial intelligence tool \(FIT\), SAO](#)
- [Fraud prevention – Resource library, SAO](#)
- [Recommended budget practices: A framework for improved state and local government budgeting, GFOA](#)
- [Revenue guide for Washington cities and towns, MRSC](#)
- [Salary and Benefit Survey, AWC](#)
- [Municipal Tax and User Fee Survey, AWC](#)
- [Budgeting, Accounting, and Reporting System \(BARS\) Manual, SAO](#)
- [The Center for Government Innovation, SAO](#)
- [About performance audits, SAO](#)
- [Capital facilities planning, Commerce](#)
- [Tax reference manual, DOR](#)
- [Local government financing, Washington State Treasurer](#)
- [Debt management policies, MRSC](#)

Chapter 7: Human resources and labor relations

- [State of the Cities: Municipal workforce – The foundation of city services, AWC](#)
- [Personnel policy manuals, MRSC](#)
- [Police and law enforcement personnel management, MRSC](#)
- [Hiring procedures, MRSC](#)
- [Civil service, MRSC](#)
- [Basics of collective bargaining – Negotiating with unions in the public sector, AWC](#)
- [2024 Washington State Public Employer Overtime Guide, AWC](#)
- [Salary and Benefit Survey, AWC](#)
- [ADA Guide for Small Towns, DOJ](#)
- [Handy reference guide to the Fair Labor Standards Act, U.S. Department of Labor](#)
- [Family and Medical Leave Act, U.S. Department of Labor](#)
- [Required workplace posters, L&I](#)

Chapter 8: Public safety & emergency management

- [Fireworks regulation, MRSC](#)
- [Local government fire services – Authority and requirements, MRSC](#)
- [Community wildfire resilience and preparedness, Dept. of Natural Resources](#)
- [Public employers' toolkit, IRS](#)
- [Cannabis regulation, MRSC](#)
- [City and county court services, MRSC](#)
- [Jail services and alternatives to incarceration, MRSC](#)
- [Washington crime data, WASPC](#)
- [Local government emergency planning, MRSC](#)
- [Local mitigation planning handbook, FEMA](#)

Chapter 9: Public works and infrastructure

- [Bidding and awarding a public works contract, MRSC](#)
- [Competitive bidding for small works contracts, MRSC](#)
- [City Bidding Book, MRSC](#)
- [Transportation Benefit Districts, MRSC](#)
- [Asset management: A handbook for small water systems, EPA](#)
- [Asset management for small water systems, DOH](#)
- [Interlocal cooperation in public works, MRSC](#)
- [Setting small drinking water system rates for a sustainable future, EPA](#)
- [Water utilities, MRSC](#)
- [Sewer utilities, MRSC](#)
- [Local Improvement Districts, MRSC](#)
- [Selecting a preventive maintenance treatment for flexible pavements, USDOT](#)
- [Sidewalk construction, maintenance, and repair, MRSC](#)
- [Snow and ice removal policies, MRSC](#)
- [Comprehensive planning, MRSC](#)
- [Transportation plans and plan elements, MRSC](#)
- [Parks and recreation finance, MRSC](#)

Chapter 10: Comprehensive planning, growth management, and environmental protection

- [Building resilient cities: From risk assessment to redevelopment, Local Governments for Sustainability](#)
- [Growth management, Commerce](#)
- [Growth Management Act laws and rules, Commerce](#)
- [Growth Management Act, MRSC](#)
- [Comprehensive planning, MRSC](#)
- [Critical areas, Commerce](#)
- [Critical areas, MRSC](#)
- [Critical areas assistance handbook, Commerce](#)
- [Short Course on Local Planning, AWC, Commerce](#)
- [Small communities critical areas ordinance implementation guidebook, Commerce](#)
- [State Environmental Policy Act, MRSC](#)
- [State Environmental Policy Act, Ecology](#)
- [Shorelands and Environmental Assistance, Ecology](#)
- [Shoreline Management Act, Ecology](#)
- [Shoreline Management Act, MRSC](#)
- [Municipal stormwater general permits, Ecology](#)
- [A citizen's guide to the 4\(d\) Rule for threatened salmon and steelhead on the West Coast, NOAA](#)
- [Threatened and endangered species in Washington, WA Fish & Wildlife](#)
- [Endangered and threatened species search, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service](#)
- [Governor's salmon strategy update – Securing a future for people and salmon in Washington, Office of the Governor](#)
- [State of Salmon in Watersheds, Governor's Salmon Recovery Office](#)
- [Estuary and Salmon Restoration Program, WA Fish & Wildlife](#)



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