

Breaking Down the Three Forms of Government

South Carolina law allows municipalities to organize under one of three forms of government. It also allows municipalities to change the form of government by referendum.



**Municipal Association
of South Carolina**

Although each of the three forms have unique structures, some things remain the same in all instances. For example, in all three forms of municipal government in South Carolina, all legislative and policy making authority rests with the council. All councils must meet at least one time per month and comply with the notice and agenda requirements in the SC Freedom of Information Act. In all cases, the mayor, or a majority of council, can call special meetings.

Mayor–council form

The council

- has four or more councilmembers, plus the mayor.
- Holds all legislative and policy power.
- can hire an administrator to "assist the mayor in his office."
- appoints the municipal clerk, attorney and judge.
- adopts the balanced budget, which is prepared for council by the mayor.

The mayor

- votes as a member of council and presides over council meetings.
- serves as chief executive officer, supervising departments, as well as appointing and removing employees in accordance with personnel rules adopted by council.
- prepares and submits the budget and capital program to council, and makes the annual financial report to the public and to council.

Council form

The council

- has either five, seven or nine councilmembers, including the mayor.
- holds all legislative, policy and administrative power.
- can hire an administrator to assist council and can appoint an officer of the city other than a councilmember to administer departments with the direction of council.
- appoints the municipal clerk, attorney and judge.
- prepares and adopts a balanced budget.

The mayor

- has no other additional authority compared to other councilmembers.
- performs administrative duties only if authorized to do so by council.
- presides at council meetings by tradition, not statutory authority.
- may exercise informal authority as leader of council and staff as spokesperson for the council.

Council–manager form

The council

- has either four, six or eight councilmembers, plus the mayor.
- holds all legislative and policy power.
- employs a manager, attorney and judge.
- adopts a balanced budget, which is prepared for council by the manager.

The mayor

- has no additional power compared to other councilmembers.
- has no administrative responsibilities.
- presides at council meetings by tradition, not statutory authority.
- may exercise informal authority as leader of council and staff as spokesperson for the council.

The manager

- serves as chief executive and head of the administrative branch, appointing and removing employees, including the clerk, and setting salaries.
- prepares and administers the annual budget and makes financial reports.
- Advises council on departments and appointments.