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Understanding Forms of Government and Defining Your Role

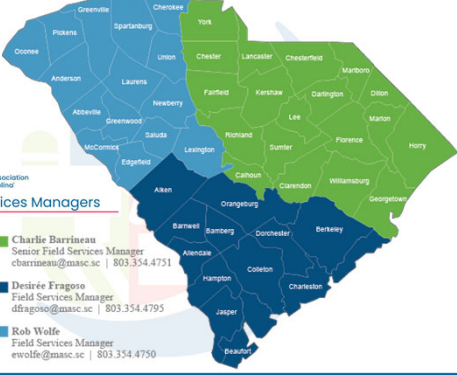


Small Cities
SUMMIT

Charlie Barrineau
Municipal Association of SC
August 13, 2025



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A Reminder of Your Oath


"I do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I am duly qualified, according to the constitution of this state, to exercise the duties of the office to which I have been elected (appointed), and that I will, to the best of my ability, discharge the duties thereof, and preserve, protect, and defend the constitution of this state and of the United States. So help me God."



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A Reminder of Your Oath

"As mayor (councilmember) of the (City/Town) of _____, I will equally, fairly, and impartially, to the best of my ability and skill, exercise the trust reposed in me, and I will use my best endeavors to preserve the peace and carry into effect according to law the purposes for which I have been elected. So help me God."



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Civility.
Respect.
Solutions.



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I pledge to build a stronger and more prosperous community by advocating for civil engagement, respecting others and their viewpoints, and finding solutions for the betterment of my city or town.

Civility. Respect. Solutions.

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To Be Clear

All municipal governments in South Carolina operate under one of three forms of government: mayor-council, council or council-manager. Each form can be equally effective.

The Municipal Association of South Carolina does not make recommendations on which form a city or town chooses.

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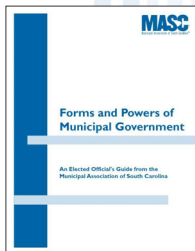


The Three Forms of Municipal Government in South Carolina



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Forms and Powers of Government *Resources*



S.C. Code of Laws Title 5
Chapters 5,9,11,13

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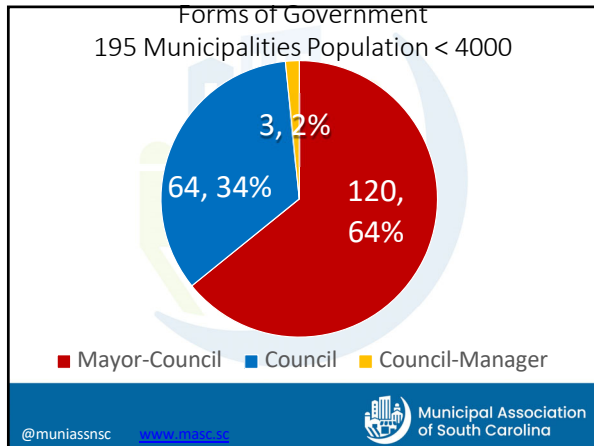
Keyword: forms of government

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Let's Dance!

- Servant leadership
- Trust
- Communication



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Forms and Powers of Government
Mayor-Council Form

General Information

- Most utilized form of municipal government in S.C. (135 of 271)
- Often called the strong mayor form because the Mayor is granted by state law the right to exercise legislative as well as executive and administrative authority

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Mayor-Council Form in SC

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graph TD; Voters --> Mayor; Voters --> Council; Mayor --> Administrator; Mayor --> Clerk; Mayor --> Attorney; Council --> Clerk; Council --> Attorney; Administrator --> DepartmentHeads[Department Heads]; AdvisoryBoards[Advisory Boards] --- Mayor;
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Forms and Powers of Government

Council Form

General Information

- Second most used form of municipal government in S.C. (102 of 271 municipalities)
- Sometimes called the weak mayor form which refers to the Mayor's lack of formal executive authority
- No separation of powers between the executive and the legislative functions
- Often called governance by committee because of shared powers

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Council Form in SC

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graph TD; Voters --> MayorCouncil[Mayor/Council]; MayorCouncil --> Administrator; MayorCouncil --> Clerk; MayorCouncil --> Attorney; Administrator --> DepartmentHeads[Department Heads]; AdvisoryBoards[Advisory Boards] --- MayorCouncil;
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Forms and Powers of Government *Council Manager Form*

General Information

- Third most used form of municipal government in S.C. (34 of 271 municipalities)
- The Council and Mayor are forbidden by law from interfering with the operation of the departments, offices and agencies under the direction of the manager
- No direct involvement in the hiring and firing of employees under the manager or directly dealing with or giving orders to those employees

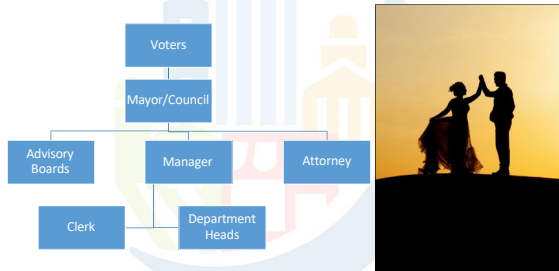
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Council-Manager Form in SC



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Forms and Powers of Government *Change Form of Government*

- May only be implemented with approval of the voters via referendum
- Ordinance Method
 - The municipal council calls for referendum by ordinance
- Petition Method
 - Requires the signatures of at least 15% of the municipality's qualified electors
- Another referendum to consider a change in FOG may not be held for another 4-years following the vote

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**FIELD SERVICES
MANAGERS**
TOP TEN TIPS
FROM THE ROAD



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**FIELD SERVICES
MANAGERS**
TOP TEN TIPS
FROM THE ROAD

10. Share the same info with everyone
9. Don't surprise anyone at a meeting
8. Stay in touch with staff contacts
7. Avoid engaging in debates on social media
6. Understand the city's finances

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**FIELD SERVICES
MANAGERS**
TOP TEN TIPS
FROM THE ROAD

5. Build trust with fellow councilmembers
4. Obtain your agenda packet early
3. Actually, read the agenda packet
2. Remember: You're part of a team
1. Celebrate the wins


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Interactive Case Studies



Case Study #1

The City of Civility has just experienced major flooding on Main Street and some residential areas. Residents are demanding immediate action. The mayor holds a press conference promising emergency repairs. A council member does a "Facebook Live" blaming the city for not being more proactive. Confusion spreads among departments heads and residents.

- ☐ Who holds the executive authority in this situation?
- ☐ What are the risks of role confusion during a crisis?
- ☐ How could clearer structure and communication have helped?



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Case Study #2

The City of Collaboration is facing a budget shortfall. The finance director proposes cuts to recreation programs. The mayor wants to protect public safety funding. Other council members want to increase utility fees instead. Residents are angry, and staff morale is dropping. Who decides what?

- ☐ Who drives the budget process under each form of government?
- ☐ What role should staff play in presenting options versus making recommendations?
- ☐ How do politics and governance impact difficult financial decisions?


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QUESTIONS