



County Government at Work

Revised June 2025



A Functional Grouping of County Agencies and Departments

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Eighteenth Edition, 2025

PREFACE

County Government at Work provides a basic overview of the roles and responsibilities of the departments, agencies, and commissions that carry out the health, safety, and welfare functions of county governments. This 18th edition of **County Government at Work** is a substantially revised version of a reference guide for county officials initially authored by Professors Al House and Garland Wood in 1976. Over the years, the reference guide has been updated and expanded by the current authors to reflect changes in county government. Retired Professor Kenneth VerBurg provided input to the publication over the years. Gary Taylor, Extension Specialist for State and Local Government (1999–2004), contributed his expertise to the 12th and 13th editions. Special thanks to Will Shields and Joe Martin, Visiting Extension Specialists, and Beth Moore, Extension Public Policy Specialist, for their help in updating tables and charts, editorial assistance, and graphic design for the 14th edition. Dr. Eric Scorsone and Joe Martin contributed their expertise for the 15th edition. Claire Layman, Dr. Mark Skidmore, Kurt Schindler, John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, and Eric Walcott contributed their expertise to update later editions.

Readers are referred to the **Guide to Michigan County Government**, Fifth Edition, by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, which can be ordered through the MSU Extension Bookstore at www.shop.msu.edu.

County Government at Work is organized around four functional groupings: *County Finance and Administration, Health and Human Services, Public Safety and Courts, and Physical and Economic Development*.

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INTRODUCTION

Development of County Government in Michigan

We trace the beginnings of the Michigan local government system to the adoption of the Northwest Ordinance in 1785 and 1787, the Continental Congress' charter for the settling and governing of the lands west of Pennsylvania to the Mississippi River and north of the Ohio River. The Northwest Ordinance provided for the temporary rule of these lands by the national government until states were organized in the territory.

Thomas Jefferson, then a member of the Continental Congress, was enamored with the experiment of direct democracy being practiced in the New England Towns. He envisioned a time when the subdivided units of the Northwest Territory would also develop into "pure and elementary republics," much like those in Massachusetts and the rest of New England. He was, therefore, influential in having the Ordinance include provisions that would set the stage for the development of a town type of government. Lands were surveyed into townships, with one of the sections in each township to be set aside to support a local school system. A group of townships were partitioned off to become counties upon reaching a specific population threshold.

In 1796, the acting territorial governor appointed by Congress set the boundaries for Wayne County. It included virtually all of Michigan and parts of Ohio, Indiana, Illinois, and Wisconsin. Wayne County, with the Detroit settlement as its center, would be the "regional" headquarters for governing this part of the territory. It is important to acknowledge that the United States government authorized the creation of these territories when the Anishinaabe, Shawnee, Delaware, and Miami Indigenous nations were already residing on these lands.

Gradually, as the lands became settled, state borders were set and new counties were established. The final boundaries for Wayne County were established in 1826. In 1830, there were 12 counties in Michigan with Michilimackinac having the largest land area. By 1852, the boundaries of most of the counties in the southern part of the lower-peninsula had been set. In 1891, Dickinson County was organized, becoming the last of Michigan's 83 counties.

The Constitution of 1835. Michigan's first state constitution provided for the continuation of many of the county officers already established under the territorial government. The 1835 Constitution required the election of a county clerk, treasurer, sheriff, register of deeds, surveyor, and at least one coroner. The governor appointed the prosecuting attorneys. This constitution was also influential in setting the pattern for the system of courts. **The 1835 Constitution**, however, did not address the matter of how the county board of commissioners was to be constituted, so it is little wonder that we in Michigan battled over this question. The legislative council of the Northwest Territory had provided for the supervisors of organized townships to constitute the county board of commissioners. In 1838 the state legislature changed the system to provide for the election of commissioners from the county at large. This approach lasted only four years and then the legislature reestablished the supervisor system. Township supervisors sat as members of the county boards of commissioners until 1966, with the board structure staying the same under two subsequent state constitutions.

The 1850 Constitution. By 1850, it was time for a new constitutional convention. The 1850 Constitution reaffirmed most of the patterns that had developed to that point, adding the

prosecutor as an elected official and deleting the coroner and surveyor from the list. The statutes that the legislature enacted following the adoption of this constitution became fundamental in terms of the powers and duties of the elected officers for county government. Many of those laws remain in effect in present times.

The 1908 Constitution. The early 1900s were a period of reaction and reform—a reaction to the patronage abuses that occurred under Jacksonian (Andrew Jackson) philosophies. The reforms stressed the value of good government and the idea that government should be managed and run in a businesslike way.

The 1908 convention gave home rule or charter government powers to cities and villages but not to counties or townships, although delegates discussed it. In their "address to the people," the delegates stated that they were giving the county boards of supervisors the authority to set their own salaries as "an extension of the right of home rule."

This convention was also notable for its assignment of health and welfare activities to counties. The 1908 Constitution authorized counties to establish "charitable hospitals, sanatoria, and other institutions," as well as an "infirmary for the care and support of their indigent poor and unfortunate." Otherwise, the new constitution left the counties pretty much unaffected; counties retained the same powers and officers accorded them by the 1850 Constitution.

The Present Era of Michigan County Government

The present era of county government in Michigan can be dated to the **1963 State Constitution**. Although this constitution requires the state legislature to provide home rule for counties, it was not this new constitution that characterized county government as we find it in Michigan today. Other factors were more important. One of these was the requirement in the federal constitution that led to the U.S. Supreme Court decision that county commissioners and other legislative bodies had to be elected on the basis of one person, one vote. This 1967 decision resulted in the shift from county boards of supervisors to county boards of commissioners elected in single-member districts.

The County Reapportionment Board has the power to change the number of county legislators (commissioners), a process that occurs only once every decade following the Census. Over the past four decades since the "One-Person, One Vote" Supreme Court ruling, the total number of county commissioners has declined from 1,026 to 619 for the 1992–2023 time period (<https://micounties.org/legislative-update-11-19-21/>). County Apportionment Boards will review the number of commissioners and the district boundaries following release of the Census data every ten years.

Another important factor affecting our current system of county government was the expanded federal role in domestic programming during the 1960s and 1970s, often referred to as active or new federalism. The increased federal involvement resulted in two impacts. First, federal funds flowing directly or indirectly to county government expanded the service and employment levels of county government (Federal Revenue Sharing Act of 1972 and Comprehensive Employment and Training Act of 1973). Secondly, federal funds flowing through the state expanded the state's role in county government. The state assumed full program responsibility in some areas and developed state-county partnerships in other areas. For counties, this has meant an involvement in a broader range of programs and services than had previously been the case. It

has also produced an increase in state regulations and requirements, with some loss in the discretionary authority of county boards of commissioners. During this period, county-state cost sharing arrangements expanded and additional grant programs were initiated. Federal revenue sharing ended in 1986.

The 1990s and into the 21st century have witnessed the continued expansion of county government roles related to health, education, public safety, and welfare. The increasing demand for correction (jail) capacity, both at the state and county level, has placed increased expenditure pressure on county governments. Public safety and courts represent the largest expenditure cost center in county government. The increased expenditure pressure for law and courts creates tension, with other cost centers in county government vying for county government revenues.

The adoption of Proposal A in 1994 had a direct impact on the flow of revenues to support the varied expenditure needs in county government. The taxable value component of Proposal A, combined with the prohibition on millage rollups, the lingering effects of the 1978 Headlee Amendment to Michigan's Constitution, and voter resistance to expanding millage levies for counties has resulted in constrained revenues for county governments. While the 1970s and 1980s witnessed major growth in county government in terms of capacity as well as finances, since then county government has seen the opposite occurrence with the need to reassess its governance role due to constrained revenues. Declining state tax revenues, beginning in 2000, resulted in decreased funding of State Revenue Sharing. The COVID-19 pandemic resulted in significant revenue challenges for county government, as state revenue sharing payments fell by more than \$217 million. However, federal support increased to mitigate the financial impact of the pandemic lockdown policies via the Coronavirus Local Fiscal Recovery Act and other federal spending laws.

As a result of the 1963 Constitution's requirement for home rule, some of the organizational arrangements of county government have changed. The 1973 Optional Unified Form of County Government Act has led to the election of county executives in Oakland and Bay Counties. Revisions in the county home rule legislation in 1980 paved the way for the formation of Wayne County as the first charter county.

The first elected executive under a county charter took office in 1983. Macomb County is the second charter county, electing a county executive and a new, smaller board of commissioners in November 2010. These two approaches to county administration will be briefly reviewed in subsequent pages. It is unknown at this point whether these alternative forms of governance will become more widespread.

As county government evolves in the 21st century, counties will continue to provide services on behalf of state government. No doubt the mix of services will change as new needs emerge. However, county government will remain an "agent of the state," carrying out functions and duties on behalf of state government, continuing a role that was established when the first Territorial Legislature was created. At the same time, county government is a local government intended to be responsive to local community needs and therefore must also make decisions about local program and service provision that constituents desire and the county can provide and afford.

Additional Reading:

See <https://micounties.org/legislative-update-11-19-21/>.

COUNTY ADMINISTRATION AND FINANCE

County Board of Commissioners

County Clerk

Country Treasurer

County Administration

County Controller

Optional Unified Form of County Government

Home Rule/Charter County

Board of Auditors

Corporation Counsel

Equalization Director

Tax Allocation Board

COUNTY BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS

Purpose:

The county board of commissioners is the chief policymaking body of county government. It is also involved in some administrative activities.

The chief role of the county board commissioner is to be the legislative body of county government. As such, it serves as the "gatekeeper" of many county activities. The main responsibility of a legislative body is to critically evaluate the proposals for change from the status quo. Most of the proposals will come from the outside—citizens, administrators of county departments, the state legislature or the courts. However, some proposals will come from individual commissioners as well as from board committees.

Typically, a board responds to a proposal by adopting (with or without changes) or defeating a resolution. Most board actions take the form of a resolution. The procedure for adopting ordinances is a bit more complex and counties generally adopt few ordinances compared to city or township government.

Another dimension of the board as a legislative body is the oversight function—inquiring into the affairs of county agencies, assessing their performance, and through the adoption of resolutions, providing new policy direction or help in solving problems.

Below are some of the ways the board carries out these legislative responsibilities.

Activities of County Board of Commissioners:

- Develop and adopt the annual county government budget.
- Monitor county expenditures.
- Audit all monthly bills as required by statute.
- Adopt equalization of tax assessments throughout the county.
- Set compensation of all elected officials, and many appointed officials and county employees according to statutory authority.
- Appoint a number of department heads and members of boards and commissions.
- Establish personnel policies and procedures for a number of county departments; this is done jointly with elected officials, as affecting their departments.
- Review and adopt grants.
- Establish new programs or terminate existing ones.
- Provide for necessary facilities and equipment for county government operation, and for maintenance of such facilities and equipment.
- Provide for county participation in several multi-county human service programs.
- Assist local units of government, through intergovernmental contracts, in areas of public works, human services, law enforcement, etc. At times this involves granting the full faith and credit of the county to secure borrowing for local projects, subject to voter approval.
- Plan for coordinated development in unincorporated areas in cooperation with townships.
- Adopt and administer zoning for townships where no township zoning ordinance exists, if desired by the people.
- Adopt other ordinances as provided by law.

Selection and Compensation:

Prior to 2024, each commissioner was elected from a commissioner district for a two-year term on a partisan ballot. However, starting with elections held in November 2024, commissioners serve four-year terms. The board may hire staff such as a county administrator, county coordinator, or board assistants as needed to carry out its tasks. The county board of commissioners may adopt state statute for the hiring or appointment of a county controller, with the statute providing designated powers and authority. County voters may choose the election of a county executive or authorize the appointment of a county administrator. With the exception of the elected county executive, central administrative staff serve in a support role to the county board of commissioners and county departments.

The board of commissioners sets its own compensation unless the county has a compensation commission. Any resolution changing compensation of board members does not take effect until the beginning of the following term of office. Boards vary in size from 5 to 21 members. A vacancy occurring during the term is filled by appointment by the remaining members of the board of commissioners within 30 days of the time of the vacancy. If the vacancy is not filled within 30 days, the vacancy must be filled by special election.

Departmental Revenues:

The county board of commissioners sets the county tax rate, within its own rate limitations; approves grant applications and receives grant money; reviews and sets many fees collected by county departments; receives state and federal revenue sharing money; and borrows money for several purposes.

COMMENTS

The most important power of the county board of commissioners is budgeting for the number of employee positions in offices under the board's authority and setting their compensation. Many county government offices and services are required (mandated) by law. For example, most of the activities of the courts, the clerk, treasurer, prosecutor, drain commissioner, register of deeds, and equalization director are required by law. However, the levels of service are not often mentioned in statute. The board of commissioners, working with department heads, must determine what is an acceptable level of service and then provide the necessary funds in the budget, if possible, within financial limitations.

What guidelines are useful to county boards of commissioners? In case of counter services (clerk, treasurer, register of deeds), the convenience of the persons seeking service (licenses, property transfer registration, vital statistics, etc.) is important. How long should one expect to have to wait for service? Would a reduction in staff result in loss of revenues or lead to errors? How would loss of services affect particular persons, groups, and the community generally? Have proposed cutbacks in county services been discussed with affected groups? Is technology available that could substitute for personal service?

There are mandates other than legal that deserve consideration. Tradition is often important regarding programs and services which people have come to expect because "the services have always been available." Programs, such as those for senior citizens, are supported by a

strong community policy imperative. In some cases, both tradition and policy imperatives combine to support services. See additional papers from MSU Extension for further discussion on “mandates.”

The relative power of the department head to hold the line against loss of staff is important and varies from department to department. Courts in the past, for example, attempted to enforce their budget positions by the issuance of court orders to the board of commissioners. Currently, if budget requests or orders seem unreasonable to the board, an appeal to the state court administrator may be made and mediation arrangements provided through Michigan Association of Counties and the State Supreme Court Administrators Office can be utilized.

Additional Reading:

Role of County Commissioners: Policymaking v. Administration and Serving on Statutory Boards and Commissions, by Lynn R. Harvey, Ag Economics Staff Paper No. 92–95, December 1998.

Part I: Michigan County Government Mandated Services and Offices, by Eric Scorsone.

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019.

COUNTY CLERK

Purpose:

The county clerk is clerk of the circuit court, custodian of the circuit court seal, clerk of the board of commissioners, clerk of the board of canvassers, clerk of the gun board, clerk of the tax allocation board, clerk and member of the plat board, chief election officer of the county, registrar of statistics, receiver of assumed names, co-partnership certificates and professional businesses, recorder of military discharges, member of the apportionment committee, and one of the financial officers of the county.

Personnel Selection:

The position is filled by election on a partisan ballot for a four-year term. Circuit judges in the county appoint a replacement if a vacancy occurs between elections.

Relationship to County Board of Commissioners:

The county clerk is clerk of the county board of commissioners and in that capacity the clerk's office is responsible to prepare minutes of the board meetings. Traditionally, the clerk has been responsible for financial accounting. In over one-half of the counties, the clerk's office still maintains accounting records, notifies the county board of commissioners about claims filed against the county, and prepares the payment warrants ordered by the county board of commissioners. In counties that have a controller, the clerk may or may not have the accounting function as part of the clerk's office. In either case, the county board of commissioners may assign responsibilities for bill paying and accounting to the clerk's office or the controller's office if the county has adopted the Controller's statute. The controller establishes the method of accounting practices. In counties operating under a county executive or home rule, the general accounting and financial management of the county is no longer the responsibility of the county clerk. The county board of commissioners sets the salary for the county clerk and establishes the budget for the office. The clerk and the county board of commissioners jointly set the personnel policies for the clerk's office. The clerk selects employees in the office.

Departmental Revenues:

The clerk's office collects money from fees and licenses, most of which are receipted into the general fund of the county.

Additional reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 4–4 to 4–10)

COUNTY TREASURER

Purpose:

The county treasurer is the custodian of all county monies. The treasurer receives revenue from all county departments and prepares a trial balance monthly for each county fund, reconciles the numerous bank accounts, and invests idle county funds and investments. The treasurer collects all delinquent real property taxes, administers the March settlement (tax monies) with each unit of local government, conducts the annual May tax sale of real estate on which taxes have been delinquent for three years and administers the tax delinquent revolving fund. The treasurer collects and processes inheritance taxes, certifies warranty deeds, inventories safety deposit boxes of deceased persons, and often performs other functions as assigned by the board of commissioners. The treasurer is a member of several boards—county election commission, county tax allocation board when it functions, plat board, and apportionment commission. The county treasurer also serves as treasurer for several boards such as a hospital board, and a possible designate for the regional library board and the district health department.

Personnel Selection:

The county treasurer is elected on a partisan ballot for a four-year term. A committee consisting of the probate judge, prosecuting attorney, and county clerk fill any vacancies that might occur. The county board of commissioners and the treasurer jointly establish personnel policies for the office. The treasurer selects employees in the office. The board sets the salary for the treasurer.

Relationship to County Board of Commissioners:

The county board of commissioners by statute directs the treasurer in the selection of depositories and in investment of idle monies. It is advisable for the county board of commissioners, in consultation with the county treasurer, to establish a county investment policy and a tax delinquent revolving fund policy. The board may request reports from the treasurer on the status of funds, bank accounts, and investments. In many counties, the treasurer makes estimates of future revenue yields and reports to the board finance committee for budgeting purposes. The treasurer pays the bills in accordance with the county budget. The county treasurer pays the bills as ordered by the county budget and county board of commissioners.

Department Revenues:

The treasurer collects fees for some of the office's services; the fees go into the general fund of the county.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 4–2 to 4–9)

Changes to the Property Tax Delinquency and Reversion Process in Michigan, Citizens Research Council, Memorandum 1052, January 2000.

COUNTY ADMINISTRATION

Purpose:

Many county boards of commissioners desire some administrative assistance, but do not wish to create a strong statutory office such as controller. Public Act 156, 1851, is a broad state statute that permits the county board of commissioners to employ individuals to assist in fulfilling the functions of county government. The administrator or coordinator cannot move the duties of other county offices to the office of administrator, but there is much to be done which is of the nature of information gathering and organizing into the form of alternative courses of action and their consequences. An administrator can assist the board in assembling the budget, be designated as the chief administrative officer as provided by the Uniform Accounting Act, put contracts together, schedule contract initiation and termination, monitor the execution of the budget throughout the year, and dozens of other administrative tasks. Personnel management and purchasing are among the assignments of some administrators.

Personnel Selection:

An administrator to the board of commissioners, whatever the title, serves at the pleasure of the board, or may be given a contract for a specific number of years. The contract for county administrator must be limited to three years in duration unless it is entered into after August 1 of an even-numbered year. In that case, the contract is limited to a year. The board sets compensation for the administrative officer and approves the selection of any staff.

Relationship to the County Board of Commissioners:

The administrator, coordinator, or assistant to the board is an agent of the board without specific statutory powers. However, P.A. 156 of 1851 (<https://legislature.mi.gov/Laws/MCL?objectName=MCL-46-13A>) does provide for the hiring of a county purchasing agent. Generally, the purchasing function is assigned to the central administrator such as county administrator, county coordinator, county controller, or director of finance.

Departmental Revenues:

The office generates no significant amount of revenue, although the administrator may actively seek grants and coordinate grant applications.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (4–6 to 4–10)

County Government Administration: Legal Basis and Options, by Lynn R. Harvey, Michigan State University, AEC Staff Paper 92–75 Revised 1996.

COUNTY CONTROLLER

Purpose:

A county board of commissioners may create an office of county controller by passing a resolution for that purpose. When a board does so, it enacts for that specific county the provisions of the County Boards of Commissioners Act (MCL 46.13b). The Act states that the controller is the chief accounting officer, purchasing officer, and manager of the county buildings and grounds. In addition, a board generally assigns other duties such as budget preparation, budget monitoring and reporting, personnel administration, collective bargaining, and other administrative responsibilities.

In 1980, the Michigan Court of Appeals decided that there was no statutory basis for giving the controller's office the board's financial accounts and the function of paying bills. Until the Michigan Supreme Court decided the issue in 1987 (428 Mich. 300) in an Ottawa County case, the question remained as to which office performs those functions. The court held that it is the prerogative of the county board of commissioners to determine whether the function is the responsibility of the clerk or the controller.

Personnel Selection:

With a majority vote of the county board of commissioners, the office of controller may be created. The county board of commissioners may then appoint a person to the position and set the compensation and budget. The controller serves at the pleasure of the board but can be removed only by a two-thirds vote of the board members. The staff of the controller's office operates under the personnel policy of the county.

Relationship to the County Board of Commissioners:

As stated above, the board establishes the office of controller and that person is an agent of the board of commissioners. Whether the controller becomes a strong administrative officer depends upon the person appointed, policies set for the office, and the general cooperation of county offices.

Departmental Revenues:

The office generates no significant amounts of revenue, although the controller may actively seek grants and coordinate grant applications.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 4–7 to 4–9)

County Government Administration: Legal Basis and Options, by Lynn R. Harvey, Michigan State University, AEC Staff Paper 92-75, Revised 1996.

MCL 46.13b

OPTIONAL UNIFIED FORM OF COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Purpose:

The Optional Unified Form of County Government Act, Public Act 139, 1973, provides for some reorganization of county government with an option of either an appointed county manager or an elected county executive. The functions of these offices are similar to those of controller, discussed above. The electorate must approve either of the two optional forms provided by this law. Both Oakland and Bay Counties have organized under this law and have chosen the option of an elected executive. While several counties have placed the option of an appointed county manager on a ballot, no county to date has been successful in obtaining voter approval for the county manager option.

Personnel Selection:

If the voters of a county choose the manager form of county government, a manager is appointed by the county board of commissioners who serves at the pleasure of the county board of commissioners and may be removed by a majority of board members. If the executive option is selected, the county executive is elected on a partisan ballot for a four-year term. The salaries of both the manager and the executive are set by the board of commissioners.

Relationship to the County Board of Commissioners:

The relationship of the county manager to the board is similar to that of a controller. The manager serves at the pleasure of the board and would therefore tend to act as an agent of the board. The law does give the manager specific authority over some offices. Offices of elected officials are not under the authority of the manager.

The county executive is elected on the basis of their own political base and is therefore much more independent from the board. The county executive may veto any ordinance or resolution adopted by the board, including all or any items of an ordinance appropriating funds. This provision gives the county executive line-item veto of any part of the budget, thereby giving the executive bargaining power affecting departments headed by elected officials. The elected executive may reorganize county government to some extent, but the departments headed by an elected county officer are not under the direct supervision of the executive. However, the executive does exert budgetary control over all county departments.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 4–11 to 4–14)

County Government Administration: Legal Basis and Options, by Lynn R. Harvey, Michigan State University, AEC Staff Paper 92-75 Revised 2014.

COUNTY HOME RULE

Purpose:

Home rule or charter county status offers another approach to reorganizing county administration. The 1963 state constitution ordered the legislature to enact county home rule and in 1966 the Charter Counties Act (P.A. 293) was approved. For several years, no county chose to organize under its provisions. In 1980, the legislature revised the statute, preparatory to the reorganization of Wayne County government. In 1981, Wayne County (<https://www.waynecounty.com/elected/commission/home-rule-charter.aspx>) became the first county in Michigan to organize as a home rule or charter county. Macomb County voters approved their charter in 2009, becoming Michigan's second charter county.

In general, this statute provides for the election of a county charter commission. This commission has 180 days to complete the drafting of a county charter. The voters then decide whether to adopt the county charter and reorganize under its provisions.

In all charter counties except Wayne (those with less than 1.5 million population), election of a county executive and the constitutional officers is required. Such counties must also continue to have a road commission. The charter may not diminish the duties of county officers or the road commission.

Charter county government does not grant additional taxing powers unless the voters approve. Nor may a charter authorize the county government to take over the services of townships and cities within the county without their approval. Such countywide services must also be made available to the county at large if the service is financed from general funds.

Although the Charter Counties Act requires a county charter to contain many of the present provisions of state law, the act does permit a county charter to make substantial revisions in the organizational structure outside the limitations mentioned above. The act also allows the creation of a strong finance department. In addition, the charter becomes a basic working document for a specific county government. Thus, a county charter may promote a better understanding of the basic rules for that specific county.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 4–11 to 4–13)

County Government Administration: Legal Basis and Options, by Lynn R. Harvey, Michigan State University, AEC Staff Paper 92-75 Revised 1996.

See <https://www.waynecounty.com/elected/commission/home-rule-charter.aspx>.

BOARD OF AUDITORS

Purpose:

The board of auditors is a county administrative board with a wide range of powers provided by law (MCL 46.13b). One of the members usually works as a full-time employee. The board of auditors develops a budget proposal each year that is presented to the county board of commissioners for approval. The board audits invoices and claims, prepares checks, reviews the accounts of various county offices, recommends the number and compensation for county employees, approves all official bonds in which the county has an interest, manages buildings and grounds and their maintenance, and contracts for county printing. The board of auditors has the principal, and often exclusive, authority in the area of financial management. (No county employs this approach at this time and given the other options available to counties, it is unlikely that a county would adopt the Board of Auditors as an administrative option.)

Personnel Selection:

Members are appointed by the county board of commissioners for terms fixed by law. Salaries are set by the board of commissioners.

Relationship to County Board of Commissioners:

The county board of commissioners appoints auditors and sets their compensation. Final approval of budgets remains with the county board of commissioners so that budget proposals submitted by the auditors must fall within the range of acceptability to the board of commissioners.

Departmental Revenues:

The board of auditors does not conduct revenue-producing services of any significant scale.

Additional Reading:

See MCL 46.13b.

CORPORATION COUNSEL

Purpose:

The corporation counsel acts as the legal counsel for the county board of commissioners and the agencies of county government. Boards of commissioners who need legal opinions and advice in areas such as taxation and public finance, administration, employee bargaining, intergovernmental relations, and powers of the board and agencies sometimes find that the prosecutor's office is totally occupied with matters of criminal law. The legislature has thus provided that in such cases the board may hire legal assistance either on a contractual basis or on a permanent basis.

Personnel Selection:

The county board of commissioners is concerned with hiring a person or a firm that is experienced in the area generally known as municipal law, or in a much broader sense, civil law. Quite a number of specialties are required, so that counties are looking increasingly to the option of hiring specialized firms as needed. The board sets compensation, whether in terms of salaries and benefits or contractual payments.

Relationship with Board of Commissioners:

By majority action (resolution) of the members of the county board of commissioners, the prosecutor may be relieved of the responsibility for acting as civil counsel. The board may then employ an attorney or firm and set the rate of compensation to be paid. By the same action, the attorney can be dismissed. The attorney serves at the pleasure of the board of commissioners. When a legal firm serves as corporation council, the usual practice is to develop a written agreement that outlines service and compensation.

Departmental Revenues:

The office of corporation counsel is not designed to generate revenues.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 9–22 to 9–23)

EQUALIZATION DIRECTOR

The Equalization Director heads the department of equalization. The duty of the equalization department is to survey tax assessments of real and personal property and assist the county board in equalization decisions. In addition, the department may be charged by the board to assist local assessing officers in developing and maintaining accurate property descriptions; to identify, list, and evaluate properties for tax purposes; and to develop and use uniform valuation standards and assessing techniques. If a township or city does not employ an assessor who is certified at the proper level, and the unit does not in other ways provide for the assessment of property by a qualified person or firm, then the department of equalization is required by law to assess the property and charge the cost back to the township or city. A city or township may contract with the equalization department to do all or some part of the assessing work.

Personnel Selection:

The county board of commissioners appoints an equalization director on the basis of merit and level of certification required by the State Tax Commission in that particular county. As of 2025, counties with a total state equalized valuation greater than \$3.737 billion must employ a Michigan Master Assessing Officer, formerly known as a Level IV Assessor as county equalization director. The county must employ a Michigan Master Assessing Officer if a county's combined total of real and personal property for the industrial and commercial classes (including utility property) exceeds 20% of \$3.737 billion. A Michigan Advanced Assessing Officer, formerly known as a Level III Assessor, is required for the equalization position in counties with total SEV greater than \$859 million but less than \$3.737 billion.

(https://www.michigan.gov/treasury/-/media/Project/Websites/treasury/STC/2017/2017_STC_How_to_Become_an_Assessor_in_Michigan.pdf?rev=6291b6fa5c584f048687a83cc1aa54d0&hash=873CF33A4E42E7F189A6504A34CEA5A6)

Relationship to the County Board of Commissioners:

The director is assigned basic duties by state law, but the level of support given to the department by the county board of commissioners usually determines the degree to which those duties are carried out. The county board of commissioners sets the salaries and determines the number and compensation of employees in the office. The General Property Tax Act requires every county to have a qualified equalization director.

Departmental Revenues:

The equalization department can generate revenues through contracts with cities and townships to do all or some part of the assessment work.

Additional Reading:

Michigan Assessor Magazine, published by The Michigan Assessors Association Inc., PO Box 409, Westphalia, MI 48894.

Property Tax Primer, by Mark Skidmore, Michigan State University Extension.

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 7–10 to 7–13)

TAX ALLOCATION BOARD

Purpose:

When property tax limitations were first imposed in 1932–1933, the legislature established a county tax allocation board to divide 15 mills of taxing authority among school districts, townships, and the county. In most counties with a Tax Allocation Board, the board typically meets annually to review the expressed needs of the units of government for tax dollars and then the board allocates the millage. The legislature has already allocated 8.1 of the 15 mills, so the board meets each year to allocate the remaining 6.9 mills. The board does not function in the 74 counties with a fixed millage. (<https://www.canr.msu.edu/news/2020-michigan-county-allocated-tax-rates>) Since the 1994 property tax reforms, schools no longer participate in the process. The 15–18 mill limit in each county is now reduced by the portion of the millage allocated to schools in 1994.

Fixed Millage:

The current Michigan Constitution permits the voters of a county to set a tax rate other than the adjusted 15-mill limit, and to determine the allocation of those mills to the relevant taxing jurisdictions for a specified duration up to 20 years. The rate may be set as high as 18 mills or at any lower level with voter approval. The fixed millage limit is also reduced by the 6 mill State Education Tax set for schools in 1994. With the Headlee rollback provision adopted in 1978, counties tend to fix the millage for a shorter period to minimize the impact of the rollback.

Action to establish a fixed millage system in a county may be initiated in two ways. The first is by a resolution of the county tax allocation board, and the second is by initiatory petition signed by 4% of the registered voters in each township and city within the county. The county tax allocation board is assigned the duty of advising the county board of commissioners about the distribution of mills. Approval by a majority of the electorate voting on the question is necessary before the fixed millage plan may be put into effect. Currently, most counties have voted to fix their millage.

Personnel Selection:

The county tax allocation board is comprised of six members whose designation or manner of selection is set forth in Section 211.205 of Michigan Compiled Laws. Board members include: (1) county treasurer; (2) chairperson of the county board finance committee or chairperson of the county board of auditors, if there is such a board in a given county; (3) the superintendent of the intermediate school district; (4) a municipal resident; (5) a supervisor of one of the township boards; and (6) a citizen who has no official connection with any governmental unit.

Relationship to the County Board of Commissioners:

The county board of commissioners must submit a preliminary budget to the tax allocation board each year in April, showing expected revenue needs for the following year.

Additional Reading:

Property Tax Primer, by Mark Skidmore, Michigan State University Extension.

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 7–16 to 7–33)

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

County Health Coordinating Council

Commission or Council on Aging

Michigan State University Extension

Emergency Medical Services

Hospital Board of Trustees and Board of Institutions

County Library Board (or Regional Board)

Mental Health Organizations

Public Health Department

Social Services

Board County Veterans' Affairs

COUNTY-HEALTH COORDINATING COUNCIL (OR MULTI-PURPOSE COLLABORATING BODIES)

The most common health and human service agencies in county governments are featured on the following pages. The Michigan Department of Community Health (now merged into the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services) provided leadership for the creation of *Multi-Purpose Collaborating Bodies* (MPCB) in 1996. The function of the MPCB is to make recommendations on how to provide coordinated service plans to serve the needs of families. Multiple agencies work together to create a community vision and mobilize resources. The intent of the reform was to create a collaborative body that utilizes a coordinated approach for better serving children and families. The council includes county agencies such as mental health, public health, the juvenile division of probate court, friend of the court, Department of Health and Human Services, Commission on Aging, and perhaps others.

Schools are participating members on some coordinating councils. This council has no specific statutory authority but is intended to bring agency directors together, leading to better coordinated services for the county clients and avoiding the duplication of selected services. The participation of county commissioners on the MPCB varies. Some counties and board representatives take a very active role on the coordinating body while others appoint community residents to the body.

In many cases, human service programs are offered through a complex system of local, state, and federal partnerships both in the delivery and the funding of the services. The advent of federal block grants, the emphasis on managed health care, the realignment of categorical grants, and the state merger of community mental health and public health has resulted in evolving organizational changes in the delivery of community health services. Some counties are organized on a single county basis and other counties have formed a district comprised of two to four counties. Several counties have established an associated arrangement for the management of community health services but operate independently in terms of finances. A complicating factor in community health delivery is the lack of consistency between the various health organizational delivery arrangements. For example, a district public health department may include a three-county arrangement, however, mental health services may be delivered on a district basis but with a different grouping of counties or be a single-county mental health authority. Thus, a county may be involved in several different organizational arrangements for community health care service delivery.

COMMISSION OR COUNCIL ON AGING

Serving the needs of older adults in the county is accomplished through a variety of institutional arrangements. Senior service programs are known by a variety of names in the state. Counties have established commissions on aging, councils on aging, departments on aging, older person's commission, or contracted with community action agencies. Some agencies are public entities while others are non-profit 501(c)(3) corporations. Services delivered by senior programs and agencies vary throughout the state may include: hot meals served in convenient locations; meals on wheels, health care, prescription drug program, senior news bulletins; information, referral, and advocacy; senior citizens volunteer program for community service; recreation and travel program; and home maintenance and repair assistance. The State Office of Aging Services serves as a coordinating body for the 14 planning and service regions (Area Agencies on Aging). The State Office of Aging Services acts as a pass-through agency for the federal Older Americans Act grants. The Area Agencies on Aging may contract with county councils, commissions, and/or departments on aging for specific deliverable services.

Personnel Selection:

If the county board of commissioners has established a commission or council on aging as a department within county government, the appointment of advisory board members is addressed by county board rules or policies and procedures. Boards may appoint members to the commission or council depending on the by-laws and organizational guidelines. If the council or commission is a county department, the board would appoint the director.

The commission or council and the director select staff based on the number of positions, as approved by the county board of commissioners. The staff comes under the county's personnel policy if the council or commission is part of county government. If senior services are delivered by a non-profit organization, the board's role is limited, though board members may serve on the board.

Relationship to the County Board of Commissioners:

When the commission on aging is organized as a department of county government, then the county board of commissioners approves its budget, even if the vast majority of its funds come from federal and state agencies. The county board of commissioners may appoint the director of the commission on aging and place the staff of the commission under county personnel policies. Whether the board appoints the director is a function of how services to seniors are organized.

Departmental Revenues:

The department on aging collects monies for some of its meals and services on the basis of ability to pay. Also, the department receives grants from the federal government covering the major part of its administrative costs. Seventy-eight counties have special voted millage to support programs serving senior citizens.

Additional Reading:

Michigan Office of Aging Services, P.O. Box 30676, Lansing, MI 48909 (517)373-8230.

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 13–37 to 13–38)

See the Office of Aging Services website: <https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/adult-child-serv/adults-and-seniors/behavioral-and-physical-health-and-aging-services/aging-services>.

MICHIGAN STATE UNIVERSITY EXTENSION

Purpose:

MSU Extension extends the resources of Michigan State University to the people of Michigan through educational programs developed and delivered by educational staff in four broad program areas: Children and Youth; Health and Nutrition; Community, Food, and Environment; and Agriculture and Agribusiness. MSU Extension serves both rural and urban citizens with programs that utilize resources and expertise of MSU colleges and departments. MSU Extension programs are conducted in an informal educational setting of meetings, workshops, demonstrations, consultations, and online technology. County Extension offices are typically located in county buildings where staff serve residents in all counties of the state. Support for the offices and programs comes from federal appropriations through the U.S. Department of Agriculture, state appropriations, county government sources, plus research and outreach grants from public and private sources.

Personnel Selection:

Often, secretarial support for the county Extension office is provided by county staff subject to county personnel policies and hiring procedures. The Extension district director works with county administration to arrange office space and support. In some cases, counties make financial grants to Michigan State University for the employment of professional Extension educators with a predominantly county focus to their work. The working relationship between MSU Extension and each county is governed by a Memorandum of Agreement.

Relationship to the County Board of Commissioners:

The county board of commissioners, through one or more of its working committees, may become involved in Extension program development. The board may participate in the selection of professional Extension staff housed in county facilities, furnish the office space, provide office operating funds for support staff, and hire support staff. The educational programs in each county evolve from local needs as identified by the district Extension council, professional Extension staff, state initiatives and local collaborating partners such as county boards of commissioners and county departments.

Departmental Revenues:

Some revenue is generated from charges for publications, soil testing, and educational workshops.

Additional Reading:

Ask in the local Extension office for publications describing the services of MSU Extension or visit with your Extension district director.

See the MSU Extension's website: <https://www.canr.msu.edu/outreach/>.

EMERGENCY MEDICAL SERVICES

Purpose:

The purpose of this program is to provide emergency medical assistance to injured persons or those with a critical medical emergency. Counties do not have specific responsibility to provide emergency medical services (EMS) to county residents. Changes in state law that required the licensing of medical emergency personnel and the establishment of minimum transport equipment specifications left many communities without emergency medical services. Counties have responded in various ways to ensure that emergency medical services are available to residents.

In some counties, the responsibility for providing emergency services has been assigned to the sheriff's department. Contracting with a private firm to provide the services has proven to be a workable alternative for other counties. Contracting with another local unit of government such as city, township, or village that is providing the emergency medical service has provided county residents with such service. Where adequate service is available from private firms, counties have left the provision of emergency medical services to the firms with the cost being borne by individuals and their insurance provider.

Personnel Selection:

The responsibility of providing emergency medical services may be variously assigned. If a separate department is established, the personnel would be under the general supervision of the county board of commissioners. In the case where EMS is assigned to the sheriff's department, the sheriff would hold primary responsibility. Counties contracting EMS from a private firm or another unit of government would not have responsibility for personnel in these instances.

Relationship to the County Board of Commissioners:

The county board of commissioners would ordinarily have the responsibility for establishing the service and its organization. Initiative for the service, however, may come from various sources such as the sheriff, citizen petition, a private EMS provider, or through board action. The county board of commissioners influences the program through its appropriation mechanism and the setting of the fee structure.

In cases where the county board of commissioners contracts with a private EMS provider or with another unit of government for EMS services, the county board of commissioners would have the responsibility for reviewing and signing the contract. Additionally, state law requires that county government assume the cost of serving citizens who require the use of EMS services but are unable to pay. Twenty-nine counties levy extra-voted ambulance or emergency services millages.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 9–31 to 9–33)

HOSPITAL BOARD OF TRUSTEES AND BOARD OF INSTITUTIONS AND MEDICAL CARE FACILITIES

Purpose:

Hospital boards of trustees constitute the governing boards for facilities under their control. Several laws, dating as far back as 1913, authorize the county boards of commissioners to build, operate, and/or appropriate to hospitals and sanatoria.

Personnel Selection:

The county board of commissioners appoints hospital boards under the respective enabling law. Hospital boards have the power to employ personnel, set rates of compensation, and establish personnel policies.

Relationship to the County Board of Commissioners:

As a general rule, boards of county commissioners have little formal voice in the management of county hospitals. One linkage is through the power of appointment. Another linkage is the required, detailed annual report to the county board of commissioners.

All counties have a county social services board (formerly the county welfare board) and one of the duties of that board is to provide oversight of the medical care facility. The board consists of three members, with two appointed by the county board of commissioners (see Social Services Board).

Departmental Revenues:

County hospitals receive revenues from federal agencies, state aid, tax levies, and various fees charged for services.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 13–35 to 13–36)

COUNTY (OR REGIONAL) LIBRARY BOARD

Purpose:

The county board of commissioners of any county may establish and maintain, or provide by contract, for a public library free to its residents. The money it appropriates goes into the county library fund, together with the county's penal fine and state aid library revenues. This fund is used to run the library to serve all the people of the county. The county board of commissioners may join with other units of government within the county to provide district library services or may contract with other units to provide such services. The board may enter into a regional library system, conforming to the state plan.

Personnel Selection:

The county board of commissioners appoints a five-member library board for staggered five-year terms. The county library board manages the library fund, and thus is responsible for acquiring facilities, library materials, and staffing to operate the library.

Relationship to the County Board of Commissioners:

The library appointment power is an important link. Also, the library board must submit its budget to the county board of commissioners for approval.

Department Revenues:

The library board receives revenues from the county's penal fines and state aid library revenues if qualifying on the basis of the local level of support. The library receives a small amount of revenue from its own fines on overdue materials. Additionally, 19 counties levy extra-voted millage to support the county or district library.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 13–31 to 13–45)

MENTAL HEALTH ORGANIZATIONS

Revisions in the 1995 mental health code provided options to counties in the organization of mental health programs. Counties can now organize as a single-county mental health agency, similar to a county department where the county board of commissioners determines the policy and procedures. The second option permits two or more counties, by contract under the Urban Cooperation Act (MCLA 15.261ff), to organize mental health services. Fifty-one counties have selected the multiple county arrangements and are part of 15 mental health organizations. The third option provided by the mental health code is the creation of an authority (MCLA 330.1204); four counties have selected the authority option. The latter two forms are considered governmental entities, separate from the county or counties. The appointed boards under these forms have the responsibility for oversight through the enactment of policies and procedures. Any of the three organizational options may contract with other mental health providers (private or non- profit) to deliver selected mental health services.

Regardless of how a county organizes its mental health services, they must have a board to oversee the operation. The county mental health board is a twelve-member board with the overall objective of coordinating community mental health services with those that can be offered in state institutions. More specifically, the goals are (1) reducing the intensity, duration, and dysfunctional consequences of mental illness so that the individuals served will maintain or return to a self-help capability of individuals who are intellectually disabled; and (2) assuring the protection and care of all persons in foster care.

Personnel Selection:

The county board of commissioners appoints the members of the mental health board. The funding responsibility is shared by the county and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services with the Community Mental Health Services Program (CMHSP) board hiring the director and providing fiscal and policy oversight.

Relationship to the County Board of Commissioners:

The county board of commissioners appoints the members of the mental health board, or in the case of a multi-county mental health board, counties appoint members jointly. At least four of the members may be county commissioners. County boards of commissioners have the responsibility to review the program plan and the budget for the forthcoming year and the boards have the right to determine the procedures and regulations applicable to the county mental health department.

Mental health boards are designated as "full management boards." Full management boards receive all monies from the state and they assume the responsibility for managing the care of individual clients and paying the approved charges. By contrast, a shared management board receives state dollars but must return dollars to the state to cover some incurred program costs.

More recently the state has permitted county and regional mental health agencies to become independent authorities upon action by the board of commissioners. The county can benefit financially by taking this action. The authority approach is intended to facilitate the county mental health role in a managed care environment.

Departmental Revenues:

Since the mental health board is primarily a coordinating agency, there is no significant generation of revenues. Mental Health Departments may charge for selected services with the revenue used to partially offset program costs.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 13–9 to 13–13)

See resources available from Michigan Association of Community Mental Health Boards, 426 S. Walnut St., Lansing, MI (517) 374-6848.

See the Michigan Office of Community Mental Health Services website for more information on mental health programs: <https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs/keep-mi-healthy/mentalhealth/mentalhealth/cmhsp>.

See MCLA 15.261ff.

PUBLIC HEALTH DEPARTMENT

Purpose:

Public health departments are involved in a wide range of activities. Among the required basic health programs are adolescent health promotion, communicable disease control, community assessment, emergency preparedness, family planning, regulation of food establishments, health for aging populations, health education, hearing, immunizations, infant/child health care, maternal health promotion, nutrition, on-site sewage disposal management, prenatal and postpartum care, private wells, public health laboratories, public food supply, private food supply, public swimming pools, public water systems, and vision screening.

In addition, health departments are eligible for reimbursement for eligible programs such as healthcare outreach and enrollment; adult immunizations; behavioral health services childhood immunizations; children's special healthcare services; communicable disease control; emergency preparedness; environmental health; epidemiology and surveillance; family planning; food service sanitation; health promotion, prevention, and education; hearing and vision screening; HIV/AIDS program; lead screening and response; maternal infant healthcare program; recreational facility safety; sewage management activities; sexually transmitted infections; tobacco prevention and control; tuberculosis control; water supply quality and safety; and the women, infants, and children's program.

Counties may operate as a single county health department or join with neighboring counties and establish a district health department comprised of 2–10 counties.

Personnel Selection:

In the counties with single-county boards of health, the boards are made up of five members who may be county commissioners. The regional boards are made-up of at least two county commissioners from each county, but the counties involved may decide upon a larger board. The district health board selects a health officer who is the head of the department, but in the case of the county board of health, that power resides with the board of commissioners.

Relationship to the County Board of Commissioners:

The county board of commissioners appoints health board members, approves rules for the department, determines the compensation for health board members, and may revoke or amend any fee schedule of the health department. The county board of commissioners has the power to create personnel positions and specify compensation, approve labor contracts, and approve the budget for the county health department, or jointly for the district health department.

Department Revenues:

The public health department charges for many of its services and receives revenues from the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. Public Act 368 of 1978 provided for 50% state funding for a set of basic services. Other programs are funded by state grants, board appropriations, and fees for services.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 13–1 to 13–9)

See website for the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services:

<https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs>.

See Public Act 368, 1978.

SOCIAL SERVICES BOARD (HUMAN SERVICES AGENCY BOARD)

Purpose:

The county social services (CSS) board is a three-member board with the duties of supervising the administration of the county infirmary, county medical care facility, and childcare institution, except where there is a board of institutions. The board conducts an annual review of social service programs within the county, develops policy and supervises the administration of county administered social services funds, administers several work training projects, and makes annual policy recommendations to the Michigan County Social Services Association. Public Act 237 of 1975 transferred most of the funding and legal responsibility for social service programs to what is now called the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).

Personnel Selection:

The county board of commissioners appoints two of the three members of the county social services board, and the director of social services appoints the third member. County social service department employees are actually state DHHS employees. Terms on the county social services board are for three years and members may not be elected office holders.

Relationship to the County Board of Commissioners:

The county board of commissioners appoints two members of the CSS board and sets the level of compensation and expenses.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 13–35 to 13–36)

See the website for the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services:
<https://www.michigan.gov/mdhhs>.

COUNTY VETERANS' AFFAIRS

Purposes:

Every county has a soldiers' relief commission unless the county board of commissioners has created a county department of veterans' affairs. In addition, each county has or is in a multi-county district that has a veteran's county committee to help locally administer the Michigan Veterans' Trust Fund. The soldiers' relief commission administers the funds appropriated by the board of commissioners, not exceeding one tenth of a mill annually, for the relief of honorably discharged veterans who need relief. The county board of commissioners contributes to burial expenses of veterans, and in some cases their spouses, who die with an estate of not more than \$25,000. In 2003, the legislature raised the estate limit to \$40,000 but gave the board the authority to retain the \$25,000 level by adopting a resolution to that effect. An assistance program for veterans who need relief, using funds from the state veterans' fund, is also available.

Personnel Selection:

The probate judge appoints the three members of the soldiers' relief commission. If the county board of commissioners creates a county department of veterans' affairs, that department assumes the powers and duties of the soldiers' relief commission, which is abolished. The county board of commissioners appoints four members of the new veterans' committee for staggered four-year terms. Committee members must be county residents who are honorably discharged veterans. This committee may appoint a veteran service officer and other necessary employees.

Relationship to the County Board of Commissioners:

The county board of commissioners contributes substantially to burial expenses of veterans. In some counties the board supplements veteran trust fund monies and supports a veteran's department staff. Where the county board of commissioners has established a veterans' department, then the board appoints the four-member committee. The board must furnish facilities for the veterans' trust fund committee.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 3–136 to 3–37)

PUBLIC SAFETY AND COURTS

Animal Control Office

Emergency Management

Circuit Court

Friend of Court (Family Court)

Probate and Juvenile Court (Family Court)

District Court

Circuit/District Court Probation

Community Corrections Program

County Medical Examiner

Prosecuting Attorney

County Sheriff

ANIMAL CONTROL OFFICE

Purpose:

The main function of this office is to administer county ordinances and state law regarding loose dogs and other animals. In addition, the office sells dog licenses, conducts a dog census, may operate a rabies clinic, sells or otherwise disposes of deceased animals, and investigates livestock claims.

Personnel Selection:

The responsibility for this function is variously assigned to the county sheriff, a separate animal control agency, or to an independent humane society. In some cases, the animal control unit is placed under the control of the health department. If the responsibility is assigned to the sheriff, then the sheriff selects personnel. If a separate office is established, the animal control officer would likely be appointed by the county board of commissioners and report either to the county board, county administrator, county controller, or county executive.

Relationship to County Board of Commissioners:

The county board of commissioners has jurisdiction over the assignment of the function related to animal control. In addition, it must appropriate the required funds for facilities and staff. The county board of commissioners selects the administrators if the animal control function is carried out by a separate office or department. The board is also involved to the extent that it could adopt an animal control ordinance.

Departmental Revenues:

This office can contribute substantial funds to the general fund of the county through the sale of licenses, fees for reclaimed animals, sale of animals, as well as fines resulting from tickets issued for violation of the ordinance. If operated by a humane society, the county does not receive much of the revenue.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 9–29 to 9–30)

See MCLA 287.270.

EMERGENCY PREPAREDNESS AND HOMELAND SECURITY

Purpose:

The purpose of emergency management programs is to make plans and obtain appropriate equipment and supplies to be used in the event of a natural disaster, chemical spill, nuclear accident, or military attack. Since the events of September 11, 2001, the scope of this role has been greatly expanded to include all types of disasters. It is frequently referred to as *all-hazard planning*. The county emergency preparedness program is now responsible for pulling together all of the human resources that have a stake in preventing and managing any type of disaster. This program is responsible for deciding the priorities for the use of the financial resources that are now available to all counties through the U.S. Department of Homeland Security—Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA). In addition, many counties have established plans to ensure continuity of government before, during, and after any type of disaster.

Personnel Selection:

Under the Michigan Emergency Management Act (Public Act 390 of 1976, as amended), each county is required to appoint an emergency management coordinator. The county board of commissioners appoints the emergency management coordinator. Some boards have assigned the county sheriff to this duty.

Relationship to the County Board of Commissioners:

The officer assists the county in meeting the mitigation plan requirements for certain FEMA assistance programs, obtaining natural disaster aid, and federal surplus property and homeland security monies.

Departmental Revenues:

The department may receive state and federal emergency preparedness grants in addition to general fund appropriations. All counties now receive monies under Homeland Security from the federal Department of Homeland Security and the Michigan State Police Emergency Management and Homeland Security Division.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 9–27 to 9–28)

See Michigan State Police Emergency Management and Homeland Security Division: <https://www.michigan.gov/msp/divisions/emhsd>.

See the United States Department of Homeland Security: <http://www.dhs.gov/>.

See MCLA 30.409.

Extension Disaster Education Network (EDEN): <https://extensiondisaster.net/>.

CIRCUIT COURT

Purpose:

Circuit courts are the state's major trial courts. They have general original jurisdiction and appellate review of district and probate decisions. Circuits are organized along county lines with one circuit in heavily-populated counties and two or more counties in one circuit in less populated areas.

In 1996, the legislature adopted significant reforms in the state court system. A major change was the creation of a Family Division in the Circuit Court. This division brings together the divorce and custody jurisdiction of the circuit courts and the family related jurisdiction of the probate courts. In addition, the reforms consolidated the Detroit Records Court into the Wayne County Circuit Court and abandoned the earlier approach of dividing the state into four regional court systems, especially the third Judicial District consisting of Wayne County.

Personnel Selection:

Circuit judges are elected for six-year terms in non-partisan elections. The governor appoints a judge to fill any vacancy that may occur. The state Supreme Court now appoints one judge (not necessarily a circuit judge) to serve as *chief judge* of the county. The chief judge designates a judge in each of the other courts to be chief judge of a particular court in the county. The 1996 reforms also reestablished the definition of the *employer* for court employees. The county board of commissioners and the chief judge can jointly determine the employer roles that each will fulfill, but if they cannot agree the statute designates the board as the employer for financially related aspects of employment; the chief judge as employer for personnel (appointment, discharge, schedules, etc.) in the court.

Relationship to County Board of Commissioners:

Judgeships are created by the state legislature and with the 1996 reforms are paid by the state. Salaries will be set at 85% of the salary paid to Supreme Court justices. The 1996 reforms require a chief judge to submit a line-item budget to the board of commissioners; the board may adopt either a line item or a lump sum budget at its discretion. The line-item budget implies that a judge may not deviate from the allocations provided by the board.

Department Revenues:

Circuit courts generate revenues from both court fees and fines. Fines imposed for violating state laws are paid to the county treasurer to be used for library purposes. Other portions of costs are sent to the state for various purposes. The state also provides financial assistance to the courts based on a formula developed by the Trial Court Assessment Commission (TCAC) that takes into account the relative complexity of the cases the several circuit courts must deal with.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 10–5 to 10–13)
Trial Court Funding Commission Final Report:

https://www.courts.michigan.gov/4a099a/siteassets/reports/tcfc_final_report_9-30-2019.pdf.

FRIEND OF COURT (FAMILY DIVISION OF CIRCUIT COURT)

Purpose:

The Friend of Court (FOC) is the investigative, accounting, reporting, and enforcing agency of the Family Division of Circuit Court in domestic relations cases involving child and/or spousal support, child custody, and parenting time. The FOC office provides recommendations as to the custody of minors in divorce cases and collects and disburses child support and alimony orders. The chief judge of the circuit court appoints domestic relations referees. The chief judge may appoint as referee an attorney who is an employee of the Friend of Court and/or a member of the State Bar of Michigan.

Personnel Selection:

Chief judges have the responsibility for appointing people to vacant FOC positions. The FOC is answerable to the chief circuit judge. A statute requires the judge to make an annual evaluation of the performance of the FOC staff and to file a report with the state court office.

Relationship to the County Board of Commissioners:

The county board of commissioners is responsible for providing the facilities and staff positions for these offices. The 1996 reforms make the county board of commissioners' *co-employers* for employees in the department.

Department Revenues:

FOC offices generate some revenues for the county general fund both from fees received for administration of support payments and from federal programs that pass to counties a portion of the savings made from Family Independence Program (FIP) payment reductions. The FOC charges service fees from active child support cases and from various hearings and investigations. The county board of commissioners appropriates funds for the operation of the offices.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 10–13 to 10–18)

See MCL 552.501-535 (FOC powers and duties), MCL 552.601-650 (Support and parenting time enforcement), MCL 722.21-30 (Child Custody Acts), MCL 552.1101-1901 (Uniform Interstate Family Support Acts), Michigan Court Rules 3.201- 3.219.

PROBATE AND JUVENILE COURT (FAMILY DIVISION)

Purpose:

Probate courts are courts of special jurisdiction, jurisdiction limited largely to administration of wills and estates. Most of the other functions such as those relating to juvenile delinquency, cases of child abuse and neglect, adoptions, name changes, secret marriages, waivers of three-day waiting periods for marriage licenses, acknowledgment of paternity, and a variety of other issues are now assigned to the family division of circuit court. The long-term goals of the 1996 reform are “one family, one judge” to provide more continuity in handling family matters, and to be more holistic in addressing family needs.

This office has the responsibility to care for the youth who become wards of probate court. Such care is rendered both in a county-operated youth home or in foster homes and facilities on contract with the court and the Michigan Department of Health and Human Services. The Family Division may contract with in-state or out-of-state facilities for the placement of juveniles, employ juvenile agents, provide diagnostic, psychological and medical services, provide court-supervised foster care and group homes, and contract with other county agencies for specific services to be utilized in addressing youth and families at-risk. A portion of the funding for the care of foster children, private institutional court placements, in-home care and group homes comes from the county's Child Care Fund, a joint financing effort between counties and the state.

Personnel Selection:

Probate judges are elected on a nonpartisan ballot for terms of six years. The governor fills vacancies in the judgeships. Probate judges and boards of commissioners function as co-employers of the court employees in accordance with a mutual agreement. In the absence of such an agreement, the probate judge is responsible for the personnel aspects of the employer role, whereas the county board of commissioners is responsible for the financial dimensions of the role.

Relationship to the County Board of Commissioners:

The state pays the salaries of probate judges at the rate of 85% of the salary paid to state Supreme Court justices. The county board of commissioners is responsible for providing facilities and staff for the court. In addition, the board appropriates the operating funds of the court on either a lump sum or line-item basis.

Probate judges play a variety of roles in county government, including being responsible for making a number of appointments. They appoint county members of the state boundary commission and participate on a number of committees to fill certain vacancies.

Departmental Revenues:

Probate courts are directed by state law to assess fees for certain services. Many of these fees are divided between the state and county. County receipts may be placed in the county general fund.

DISTRICT COURT

Purpose:

District Courts in Michigan are courts of limited jurisdiction dealing with "minor" civil and criminal litigation. They replaced the justice of the peace court system and all but five municipal courts. Their jurisdiction in criminal cases is limited to misdemeanors and to civil cases up to \$25,000. They also provide small claims court services on civil issues involving disputes up to \$7,000.

District courts are divided into three classes. Class 1 courts have countywide jurisdiction, class 3 courts serve a particular city or township or combination of such local districts, and class 2 courts serve the remainder of the county when there are class 3 courts in the county.

Personnel Selection:

District court judges are elected on a non-partisan ballot for terms of six years. Discipline and removal of judges are a responsibility of the Michigan Judicial Tenure Commission to which complaints may be sent. Vacancies in these judgeships are filled by gubernatorial appointment.

Relationship to County Board of Commissioners.

The county is the district-funding unit (DFU) of first and second class district courts. Judges' salaries are set by statute—84% of Supreme Court justice salaries.

The DFU, or board of commissioners, is co-employer with the chief judge of the district court in accordance with the terms they agree upon. If they do not agree, the statute assigns the financial aspect of employment to the county board of commissioners and the personnel aspects to the court. The chief judge must submit a line-item budget request and the governing body sets the budget for the court on either a line item or lump sum basis.

Department Revenues

District courts generate substantial revenues from fines and fees. Fines levied for violation of state laws must be used for library purposes. Fines for violations of local ordinances are divided between the DFU and the local unit whose ordinance was violated. Portions of the fees (costs) are sent to the state.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 10–20 to 10–26).

CIRCUIT COURT PROBATION

Purpose:

This office is created to oversee the behavior of those placed on probation by the district courts.

Personnel Selection:

District court judges select the staff members for this office. Such members are answerable to the judges of the district court.

Relationship to the County Board of Commissioners:

The county board of commissioners may decide whether such an office is to be created. If it is established, the county board of commissioners must appropriate the funds necessary for facilities and staff.

Departmental Revenues:

The office does not produce departmental revenues.

COMMUNITY CORRECTIONS PROGRAM

Purpose:

The Michigan Community Corrections Act (PA 511 of 1988) established a statewide policy for funding locally developed and operated corrections programs to divert nonviolent offenders from local jails and state prisons. The law created the Office of Community Corrections to work with local governments that will oversee local community correction advisory boards, administer grants, and monitor programs under the Act. Community corrections advisory boards at present cover 45 of Michigan's 83 counties.

The overall goals of the community corrections program are to reduce the number of admissions to jails and prisons of nonviolent offenders where appropriate, to use local jail resources more cost-effectively, and to gain widespread support of the Community Corrections Act.

Personnel Selection:

The Governor appoints the Michigan Community Corrections Board. The local community corrections advisory board is appointed by the county board of commissioners and may be a joint city/county board of commissioners or county only. It is comprised of 14 members. The act requires representatives from the following groups, agencies, or departments: county sheriff, chief city police, circuit court judge, district court judge, probate court judge, and one representative from the county board of commissioners, city council, mental health department, public health department, substance abuse council, employment and training or community alternative program, prosecuting attorney, criminal defense attorney, member from the business community, member from the community news media, circuit or district court probation, and one representative from the general public.

Relationship to County Board of Commissioners:

The community corrections advisory board is a planning and policy-making body for the county. As a planning body, the corrections board is responsible for developing and submitting a comprehensive corrections plan and overseeing on-going operations of community programs and reporting to state officials. Since the county is eligible to receive community correction grants, the county board of commissioners is involved not only with representation on the advisory board, but providing oversight as to the expenditure of funds for the program.

Departmental Revenues:

Program funded by state grants.

Additional Reading:

Michigan Office of Community Corrections, P.O. Box 30003, Lansing, MI 48909. Phone: (517) 373-1426.

Community Corrections Advisory Boards: https://www.michigan.gov/-/media/Project/Websites/corrections/progserv/Folder1/CCAB_Contact_Informationdoc.pdf?rev=b28a5f463e3f4eaa8ee5c07b7c5a1ecc.

See PA 511 of 1988.

COUNTY MEDICAL EXAMINER

Purpose:

This office is responsible for certifying the cause of death of a person when foul play is suspected, when the cause is not apparent or when a person not in the care of a physician dies.

Personnel Selection:

The county medical examiner is a physician who is probably employed on a contract basis to administer the law. This person in turn may deputize other physicians to assist in the responsibility. Deputies in counties with a population of under 50,000 need not be physicians.

Relationship to the County Board of Commissioners:

The county board of commissioners is primarily responsible for securing these services either by contract, by agreement with an adjacent county, or by employing on salary such a person. The board is also responsible for appropriating the funds necessary to carry out these duties.

Departmental Revenues:

This office, as a general rule, does not generate departmental revenues.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 9–26 to 9–28).

See MCL 52.201-216.

PROSECUTING ATTORNEY

Purpose:

The purpose of this office is to authorize and pursue legal proceedings against persons who have been charged with violating a state law or county ordinance. County prosecutors in many counties also serve as legal counsel to the county board of commissioners and county officials. They also are charged with a number of other minor duties not directly related to prosecution or legal counsel services. In smaller counties, the position may be part-time.

Personnel Services:

The county prosecutor is elected on a partisan ballot for a four-year term. The prosecutor also selects the assistant prosecutors and other staff in the office. Vacancies in the office are filled by the circuit judges in the county.

Relationship to the County Board of Commissioners:

The county board of commissioners must appropriate the funds for the office and the staff as well as set the compensation for the prosecutor and staff. The county board of commissioners may relieve the prosecutor of responsibilities for civil counsel to the board by establishing an office of corporation counsel or by contracting for the service.

Departmental Revenues:

The prosecutor's office does not usually generate significant departmental revenues. However, by administering a program to reimburse the county for defense fees of those who are unable to pay, they may produce some general fund receipts. Most county prosecutors participate in the state's cooperative reimbursement program and receive some state grant funds.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 9–19 to 9–25)

COUNTY SHERIFF

Purpose:

The office of sheriff has several responsibilities related to the preservation of the peace within the county. These responsibilities include crime prevention and investigation, management of the county jail, serving as officer of the courts, performing liquor law enforcements, and ensuring marine/snowmobile safety. In some counties, the sheriff's office is involved with the Drug Abuse Resistance Education (D.A.R.E.) program and also serves as part of a multi-unit drug enforcement team.

Personnel Selection:

The sheriff is elected on a partisan ballot to a four-year term. Employee selection and assignment are primarily the responsibility of the sheriff. The Governor may remove a sheriff, as well as other elected officers, if removal is warranted.

Relationship to County Board of Commissioners

The county board of commissioners is responsible for appropriating the funds needed to finance much of the sheriff's operation. Although county boards of commissioners cannot hire and fire deputies, they can limit the number of deputies through their budget decisions. The collective bargaining process is another way that the sheriff and the commissioners interact.

In developing the sheriff's budget, the county board of commissioners should take into consideration the requirements concerning the jail facilities, equipment and staffing imposed by the Michigan Department of Corrections and the federal courts. However, with respect to road patrols, the board is under no specific statutory mandate to provide funds for road patrol. In fact, local units of government may contract with the sheriff's department and the board for road patrol services. It should be noted that a reduction in road patrol units would probably result in loss of some state secondary road patrol grant monies.

Counties are eligible to participate in a number of state grant programs including secondary road patrol, marine safety, snowmobile safety, drug prevention, community corrections programs, and regional drug enforcement.

Departmental Revenues:

The sheriff's department may generate a variety of revenues: grants from the state for enforcement of liquor, marine, and snowmobile laws, as well as road patrol grants. Other sources are sales to prisoners, contracts with townships, and fees for holding prisoners from other jurisdictions in the jail (bed rental).

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 9–1 to 9–18)

PHYSICAL AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Abstract Office

Airport Board

Building Authority

Building Department

County Drain Commissioner

Economic Development Corporation

County Fair Board

Parks and Recreation Commission

County Plat Board

County Planning Commission

Regional Planning

Board of Public Works

Register of Deeds

County Road Commission

County Coordinating Zoning Committee

Zoning Board of Appeals

ABSTRACT OFFICE

Purpose:

The purpose of this office is to establish and maintain a system of abstracts of title to land in the county and to sell the abstracts of title. The office also furnishes information regarding the titles. Many counties have privatized abstract services.

Personnel Selection:

Responsibility for administration of the abstract office may be assigned to the register of deeds or to some other person employed by the county board of commissioners.

Relationship to the Count Board of Commissioners:

The county board of commissioners is responsible for appropriating funds and approving staff positions for the office, if they have not privatized abstract services.

Departmental Revenues:

The abstract office generates fees for the services provided. The funds are placed in the county's general fund.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 13–28 to 13–29)

AIRPORT BOARD

Purpose:

The purpose of the airport board is to set policy and oversee the administration of a county airport or airports.

Personnel Selection:

As noted in the discussion of the road commission, the airport responsibility may be assigned to that body. The county board of commissioners may also establish a committee consisting of three commissioners who constitute the airport board. A county and another governmental unit may also create an airport authority and appoint its membership to the airport board.

Relationship to the County Board of Commissioners:

Relationships will vary according to the established structure. If it is a county-owned airport, the county board of commissioners, through its committee, is the direct overseer and is involved in appropriating funds and possibly levying taxes. If managed by the road commission or authority, the county board's relationship is minimal unless it has to appropriate funds for the operation of the airport.

Departmental Revenues:

The airport facility could generate departmental revenues through landing fees, rentals, as well as state and federal grants.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 12–11 to 12–13)

BUILDING AUTHORITY

Purpose:

One or more units of government can incorporate a building authority for the purpose of constructing or acquiring and maintaining buildings, automobile parking lots or structures, recreational facilities, and stadiums. The main purpose of the law and resulting authority is to finance the capital improvements listed above. The authority may issue either of two types of bonds: (1) building authority revenue bonds, which involve only the pledge of receipts and/or contractual rents; (2) building authority bonds, which are secured in addition by a pledge of full faith and credit by the units of government contracting with the authority. A contract secured by this pledge of full faith and credit is subject to a referendum by petition within 45 days of the notice of intention of entering into a contract. This pledge of full faith and credit by the county board of commissioners is now tax-limited. That is, no additional tax is authorized. In the event that scheduled revenues become insufficient to pay principal and interest, the board must budget the necessary revenues first, before other activities are budgeted. Building authority bonds issued before December 1978, and those approved in an election are tax-unlimited. If a capital improvement is made by the authority, the authority continues to function, mainly to service and protect the interests of the bond holders.

Personnel Selection:

The building authority commission members are appointed by the legislative bodies of the involved units, in this case the county board of commissioners. No elected official may be appointed to the authority commission. The authority commission generally uses consultants for all but a small amount of the work.

Relationship to the County Board of Commissioners:

The county board of commissioners, or other unit or units of government involved in the authority, write the articles of incorporation so that their objectives are carried out by the authority. In this sense, the authority exists primarily as a financing arrangement. The authority can, however, expedite the planning and construction process.

Additional Reading:

See MCL 123.951-965.

BUILDING DEPARTMENT

Purpose:

The purpose of this office is to administer the state construction code. Because of the relation of the building permit process, the officials in this department may also be involved in zoning administration. The county is required to provide building code enforcement in those parts of the county where townships and cities do not provide their own enforcement.

Personnel Selection:

The county board of commissioners may select the building inspector or an officer assigned this responsibility. The county board of commissioners may remove the building inspector from office by majority vote.

Relationship to County Board of Commissioners:

The county building inspector is answerable to the county board of commissioners. The board has the responsibility to appropriate funds for facilities and staff of this office as well as to set the rate of pay of its employees. The board chairperson also appoints the members of the appeals board for the building code.

Departmental Revenues:

The amount of revenues produced by this department depends upon the amount of new construction. Building permit and inspection fees are the source of the revenues.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 11–32 to 11–33)

COUNTY DRAIN COMMISSIONER

Purpose:

In most counties, the county drain commissioner is the responsible agent for overseeing the drainage ways in the county. The officer generally oversees the maintenance of existing drains and the planning of new drains, administers the process for bids and awarding contracts, and assesses the costs to properties that will benefit. Some county drain commissioners have also been involved in carrying out inland lake improvements and sewer and water programs.

Personnel Selection:

The position is filled by election for a four-year term. (See exceptions below.)

Relationship to the County Board of Commissioners:

The county board of commissioners sets the county drain commissioner's salary and designates the positions to which deputies may be appointed. County boards of commissioners in counties with less than 12,000 people may abolish the office and assign it to the road commission. The county board of commissioners may also designate the county drain commissioner to be the agent for water and sewer services under PA 342 of 1939. The drain commissioner is a key member of the board of public works under PA 185 of 1957.

Departmental Revenues:

County drain commissioners may generate substantial revenues from county drain special assessments, most of which are used either to finance debt or to plan and carry out projects. The county drain commissioner may be instrumental in obtaining federal grants for water pollution abatement or lake improvements.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 12–19 to 12–25)

Michigan Association of County Drain Commissioners: <https://macdc.us/>.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

Purpose:

The corporation is an agency established to facilitate low-cost financing of commercial and industrial development. The economic development corporation (EDC) may issue tax exempt revenue bonds or notes for purposes within the limits of the Internal Revenue Code. In addition, it may receive assistance from any state agency or department, its political subdivisions and any agency or department thereof, or any other official public body. The county may acquire land under this enabling legislation—PA 338 of 1974—and convey it to the economic development corporation. Counties, cities, villages, and townships may all establish an economic development corporation under the same statute.

Personnel Selection:

The county board of commissioners appoints a governing body of not less than nine members. The county board of commissioners may hire an executive director for the EDC.

Relationship to the County Board of Commissioners:

If the corporation is created by the county, then the county board of commissioners appoints its governing body, and all projects must be reviewed and approved by the county board of commissioners.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 11–13 to 11–15)

COUNTY FAIR BOARD

Purpose:

The purpose of the County Fair Board is to oversee (and sometimes administer) the operation of the county fair.

Personnel Selection:

The county board of commissioners appoints the fair board if the fairgrounds are county-owned. Most fair boards, however, are appointed by county agricultural societies who may own and operate the county fair. Or the county agricultural society may operate the fair but lease the fairgrounds from the county.

Relationship to County Board of Commissioners:

The county board of commissioners may appropriate funds (up to one-tenth of a mill for the fair) and may select the membership of the fair board as indicated above. (MCL 46.153)

Departmental Revenues:

Fair boards vary widely in their profitability. Some may generate substantial revenues, others very little. Proceeds are normally used to maintain and improve the facility. Fair boards also receive state grants for exhibit prizes and grounds improvements.

Additional Reading:

See MCL 46.153.

PARKS AND RECREATION COMMISSION

Purpose:

The parks and recreation commission determines the needs for parks and recreational facilities, acquires properties for these purposes, develops and operates the sites for park and recreational uses, and assesses charges for park use.

Personnel Selection:

Option 1: **Single County Park Commission**—Four park commissioners designated in the law, two others may be county commissioners, with the balance composed of citizens chosen by county board of commissioners. The term of office is three years (PA 261 of 1965).

Option 2: **Multi-County Park Commission**—Four members from each participating county, two from each county designated by law. The term of office is three years (PA 261 of 1965).

Option 3: **County Park Trustees**—Under a 1913 law (PA 90 of 1913), the county road commission is the county park board.

Employees are selected according to county personnel rules under option 1, by the park board under option 2, and by the road commission under option 3.

Relationship to County Board of Commissioners:

The county board of commissioners selects the parks and recreation commissioners. Under option 1, personnel work under county personnel rules. Commissions rely upon county board of commissioners appropriations for annual operating budget if not capital budget (state and federal funds may be involved). With option 2, multi-county park commissions must have their budgets approved by participating county boards of commissioners.

Departmental Revenues:

Parks and recreation commissions may set charges for services and obtain revenues from park concessions. They may also obtain federal and state grants for capital development.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 13-47 to 13-49)

COUNTY PLAT BOARD

Purpose:

The county plat board administers plat review of subdivisions of land in the county under the Land Division Act (PA 288 of 1967).

Personnel Selection:

The county plat board usually consists of the county clerk (secretary), treasurer, and register of deeds (chair).

Relationship to the County Board of Commissioners:

The county board of commissioners may adopt a fee schedule for the review of plats and most counties appropriate funds to compensate plat board members for attendance at the meetings. The chairperson of the county board of commissioners is a member of the plat board in counties where the office of clerk and register of deeds have been combined.

Departmental Revenues:

The county plat board does not generate any fees, but the plat review process can result in the collection of some fees if a fee schedule has been adopted.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 11–33 to 11–34)

See PA 288 of 1967.

COUNTY PLANNING COMMISSION

Purpose:

The county planning commission has the responsibility to conduct studies regarding development of the county; develop plans for county development and capital improvements, and cooperate with related municipal, state, and federal agencies in supplying and obtaining pertinent data; and foster cooperation within the county. It also administers zoning, if the county has an adopted zoning ordinance.

Personnel Selection:

The county planning commission has 5, 7, 9, or 11 members who serve staggered three-year terms. Membership of the commission is to represent the “major interests” in the county as identified by the county board of commissioners in the ordinance that creates a county planning commission. The commission selects its own chairperson. The planning commission selects employees in accordance with county personnel policies. Not more than one third of the membership may be ex-officio members. An ex-officio member may be anyone, or a combination of: (1) The chief administrative official (e.g., county administrator) or a person designated by the chief administrative official; (2) The county board of commissioners chair; (3) A member of the county board of commissioners. The ordinance creating the county planning commission must spell out which one or combination of ex-officio members will be used. All members of the planning commission shall be qualified electors in the county, except that one member may be appointed who is not, if this is specified in the ordinance creating the commission. A county board of commissioners may designate the county planning commission as the metropolitan county planning commission.

Relationship to County Board of Commissioners:

The county board of commissioners sets the budget for the county planning commission, names members, regulates personnel appointment by county personnel rules, and sets per diem compensation. The county board of commissioners may also assign a zoning function to the planning commission for townships that do not currently have adopted zoning ordinances.

Departmental Revenues:

A county planning commission usually generates little departmental revenue. They may generate some fee revenue (for hearings, permits, etc.). If the county provides staff assistance to townships, then the departmental revenues may be greater.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 11–19 to 11–28).

Michigan Planning Guidebook, and *Michigan Zoning Guidebook: for Citizens and Local Officials* available from MSU Extension.

See MCL 125.3801 et seq.

REGIONAL PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT COMMISSIONS

(State Regions)

Purpose:

Michigan counties are organized into 14 multi-county regional planning and development commissions (RPDC), also known as state planning and development regions, regional planning commissions, and councils of government. The commissions select a director and a staff and conduct planning in one or more of the following areas: land use, housing, water quality, solid waste, transportation, recreation, historical preservation, criminal justice, coastal zone management, and subjects related to economic development and human services. The commission reviews plans and grant applications of local units of government before they are submitted to federal agencies for possible funding. In 2013, Governor Snyder announced the Regional Prosperity Initiative (RPI)—the realignment of the 14 existing RPDCs into 10 Prosperity Regions—to encourage local private, public, and non-profit partners to create vibrant regional economies by developing a consensus vision and implementation plan for economic prosperity.

Personnel Selection:

Commission members are selected according to bylaws drawn up by the participating units of government within the region. Commissions select a director and the director and commission select a staff of planners and a supporting staff.

Relationship to the Board of Commissioners:

County boards of commissioners appropriate money to help support the work of the commission and staff. County planning commissions, where they exist, often conduct the planning for the county in addition to regional plans. The regional planning staff do planning work for a county under funding agreements.

Departmental Revenues:

RPDC's receive money from federal agencies, state government appropriations, local government appropriations, and from planning contracts with local units of government.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 11–11 to 11–12)

See the State of Michigan - Regional Prosperity Initiative website:

<https://www.miregions.com/aboutregions.asp>

See MCL 125.11-25.

BOARD OF PUBLIC WORKS

Purpose:

The purpose of the board of public works is to function as the policy body for the development activities under its jurisdiction—mainly water and sewer services installed and operated according to county-municipality agreements. They may also operate disposal sites.

Personnel Selection:

The board of public works consists of three, five, or seven members chosen by the county commissioners, who may also be members. Drain commissioners are statutorily assigned to the body. The county board of commissioners, by a two-thirds vote, may designate the road commission to be the board of public works. Commissioners may reverse the action by the same margin.

Relationship to the Board:

The county board of commissioners determines the compensation for the board of public works. Bonds issued by the board of public works are subject to county board of commissioners approval. Commissioners may advance funds to the board of public works. The personnel for the board of public works must be employed according to county personnel rules.

Departmental Revenues:

The board of public works may generate substantial revenues but proceeds are used to finance debt and board of public works services, such as water and sewer service, planning, execution and maintenance, or sanitary landfill operations.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 11–38 to 11–40)

See MCL 123.731 et seq. (PA 185 of 1957), the County Department and Board of Public Works Act.

REGISTER OF DEEDS

Purpose:

The primary purpose of this office is to maintain permanent files of a variety of property records. Most of these records relate to real property in the county, but others concern business documents such as assignments of mortgages and securities, attachments, notices of suits pending, sheriff's deeds, U.S. Marshals' claims, certificates of sale, financing statements, and discharges of these documents when they are filed. The register of deeds also serves on the county plat board.

Personnel Selection:

The register of deeds is an elected official, elected to a four-year term on a partisan ballot. A committee comprised of the probate judge, prosecuting attorney and county clerk fills any vacancy that might occur. The register of deeds selects the employees in the office.

Relationship to County Board of Commissioners:

The county board of commissioners is responsible for setting the salary of the register, for the employees in the office, as well as the appropriations for the office in general. The county board of commissioners may also decide whether the office should be combined with that of the county clerk.

Departmental Revenues:

The register's office generates substantial revenues from recording fees and other revenues such as the property transfer tax.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 13–25 to 13–30)

COUNTY ROAD COMMISSION

Purpose:

The county road commission is owner and manager of all public streets and roads in the county except those assigned to cities and villages. Its job is to maintain and improve the public road system. The county road commission may also have responsibility for parks, airport facilities, and public works programs.

Personnel Selection:

The county road commission consists of three or five persons, elected or appointed, serving staggered six-year terms. As of 2024, 34 counties have elected county road commissioners and 42 counties appoint the road commissioners. In seven counties, the county board of commissioners has by resolution dissolved the road commission and transferred all powers, duties, and functions to the county board of commissioners.

As of 2020, dissolution of a road commission requires majority vote of electors. (<https://legislature.mi.gov/Bills/Bill?ObjectName=2019-SB-0323>) An elected road commission is created by the county board of commissioners passing a resolution requesting the county clerk prepare and schedule an election of county road commission members. If the county board of commissioners chooses to revert to an appointed status for road commissioners, the board passes a resolution and appoints each member as their term expires. The county road commission selects the county road engineer. Appointed road commissioners may be removed by the county board of commissioners upon cause and after a hearing, if one is requested.

Relationship to County Board of Commissioners:

Appointment of road commissioners is the principal linkage with the county board of commissioners, along with the responsibility to set county road commission members' salaries. With the approval of the county board of commissioners, the road commission may have a board secretary. The county board of commissioners sets the salary for this position. In some instances, general fund appropriations to the road commission for road purposes may provide some leverage with the road commission.

Departmental Revenues:

The county road commission is financed principally from state gasoline and weight taxes. Additional funding may occur from contracts with local governments for cost sharing road maintenance and construction and from general fund appropriations from the county board of commissioners.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 12–1 to 12–10)

County Road Association of Michigan, 101 S. Washington Sq., Ste. 200, Lansing, MI 48933, ph. (517) 482-1189, www.micountyroads.org.

See <https://legislature.mi.gov/Bills/Bill?ObjectName=2019-SB-0323>.

See MCL 247.651-672, PA 51 of 1951, MCL 224.1-32, PA 283 of 1909 Chapter IV.

COUNTY COORDINATING ZONING COMMITTEE

Purpose:

This is a committee of the county board of commissioners in counties that do not have a county planning commission. Its purpose is to review township zoning amendments to eliminate or reduce conflicts in zoning between two local units. The county board of commissioners may waive by resolution its right to review township zoning amendments.

Personnel Selection:

This body consists of three or five members appointed by the county board of commissioners.

Relationship to the County Board of Commissioners:

It is a committee of the county board of commissioners.

Departmental Revenues:

The committee does not generate any departmental revenues.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 11–19 to 11–26)

Michigan Planning Guidebook, and Michigan Zoning Guidebook: for Citizens and Local Officials, available from MSU Extension.

Planning and Zoning*A*Syst #1-#11, MSU Extension bulletins E-3051-3058 & E-3104-3106, available from your county Extension office.

See MCL 125.3307.

ZONING BOARD OF APPEALS

Purpose:

The purpose of the zoning board of appeals is to hear and decide appeals brought to it by persons seeking variances from the county zoning ordinance or who are not satisfied with a decision made by the county zoning administrator, enforcement officer, or county planning commission in administering and enforcing the county zoning ordinance.

Personnel Selection:

The zoning board of appeals consists of not fewer than five members (or not fewer than three members if the county population is less than 5,000), each serving three-year terms. One board member must also serve on the county planning commission. Elected officials and county employees are prohibited from membership. Members shall reside in the part of the county that is subject to county zoning.

Relationship to the County Board of Commissioners

The county board of commissioners appoints the members of the appeals board.

Departmental Revenues:

Board of zoning appeals generates some revenues, coming from appeal fees, which are set by the county board of commissioners.

Additional Reading:

Guide to Michigan County Government by John Amrhein, Brad Neumann, Kurt Schindler, Mary Schulz, and Eric Walcott, Fifth Edition, Michigan State University, 2019. (pp. 11–28 to 11–31)



Michigan County Governments



County Government at Work

**For additional resources related to Michigan local government, visit
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