

FORMS OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN METROPOLITAN WASHINGTON

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Metropolitan Washington
Council of Governments

COG Members

- Comprised of 24 jurisdictions

District of Columbia

Virginia

City of Alexandria

Arlington County

City of Fairfax

Fairfax County

City of Falls Church

Loudoun County

City of Manassas

City of Manassas Park

Prince William County

Maryland

Town of Bladensburg

City of Bowie

City of College Park

Charles County

City of Frederick

Frederick County

City of Gaithersburg

City of Greenbelt

City of Hyattsville

City of Laurel

Montgomery County

Prince George's County

City of Rockville

City of Takoma Park



Similarities and Differences in Governance



District of Columbia

- City created by the Residence Act of 1790 as the seat of National Government.
- A federal district that is not a part of any state.



District of Columbia

1973 Home Rule Act

- Congress gave certain powers to the District. The Home Rule Charter provides for an elected Mayor and Council.
- Council = Chairman elected at large and 12 members (4 elected at large + 1 from each of 8 wards).
- Congress reviews all legislation passed by Council before it can become law and retains authority over District budget.



Maryland

- Maryland is perceived to be a “home rule” state – i.e. localities have all powers except those withheld by the state.
- However, authority varies at the county level from Dillon Rule, to Code Home Rule, and to Charter Home Rule.



Virginia

- Virginia is perceived to be a “Dillon Rule” state – i.e. localities have only powers that have been expressly granted to them by the state, those that are necessarily or fairly implied therefrom, and those that are essential and indispensable.
- Depending on the specific power, actual local authority may be similar in both states.



How Were Member Localities Created?

- Montgomery, Prince George's Counties and Frederick County, Maryland each have a charter from the General Assembly.
- Cities in Virginia also have charters.
- State legislature gave Fairfax County authority to adopt an urban county executive form of government and Prince William a county executive form of government with somewhat different powers from other counties.

Number of Governing Body Members

- 13 – District of Columbia (Mayor not included)

(The following include at-large chair/mayor, but not independently elected CXO):

- 11 – Hyattsville, Prince George’s County
- 10 – Fairfax County
- 9 – Montgomery and Loudoun Counties, College Park
- 8 – Prince William County
- 7 – Bowie, Takoma Park, Alexandria, Frederick County, Greenbelt, City of Fairfax, Falls Church, Manassas, Manassas Park
- 6 – Gaithersburg and City of Frederick
- 5 – Bladensburg, Charles County, Laurel, Rockville, Arlington County



Terms of Governing Body Members

- Terms vary with the jurisdiction: 4, 3 or 2 year terms.
- Some Maryland council members have term limits.
- Some members are elected by districts or wards, others are elected at large.
- Some governing bodies have both members elected by districts and at-large members.

Titles of Governing Body Members

Depending on the jurisdiction, members may be called:

- Supervisors
- Aldermen
- Commissioners
- Council Members
- Members of the Board

Heads of Local Governments - Cities

- Maryland and Virginia cities have at-large, elected Mayors.
- In Greenbelt, the Council appoints the Mayor (generally the council member that received the most votes in the last election).



Heads of Local Governments - Counties

- Prince George's and Montgomery Counties in Maryland have at-large, elected County Executives.
- Virginia counties of Fairfax, Prince William, and Loudoun have at-large, elected chairs of the Board of Supervisors.
- Arlington County Board appoints Chair for a 1 year rotating term.

Administrative Heads of Localities

- District Mayor appoints the City Administrator.
- In Montgomery County, the County Chief Administrative Officer is appointed by the County Executive and confirmed by the Council. In Prince George's County, the Chief Administrative Officer also serves under the County Executive.
- In Virginia, the governing bodies appoint County/City Managers/Administrators.
- All serve at the pleasure of the appointing authority.

Variety of Legislative Backgrounds

- Understanding the forms of local government enables a greater appreciation of the collective ability of COG members to work together to improve the region.

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