

The Maryland Municipal League

The Maryland Municipal League, founded in 1936, represents 157 municipal governments and two special taxing districts throughout the State. A voluntary, nonprofit, nonpartisan association controlled and maintained by city and town governments, the League works to strengthen the role and capacity of municipal government through research, legislation, technical assistance, training, and the dissemination of information for its members. Through its membership in the National League of Cities, the League offers legislative representation in Washington, urban research programs, and a national municipal government information exchange.

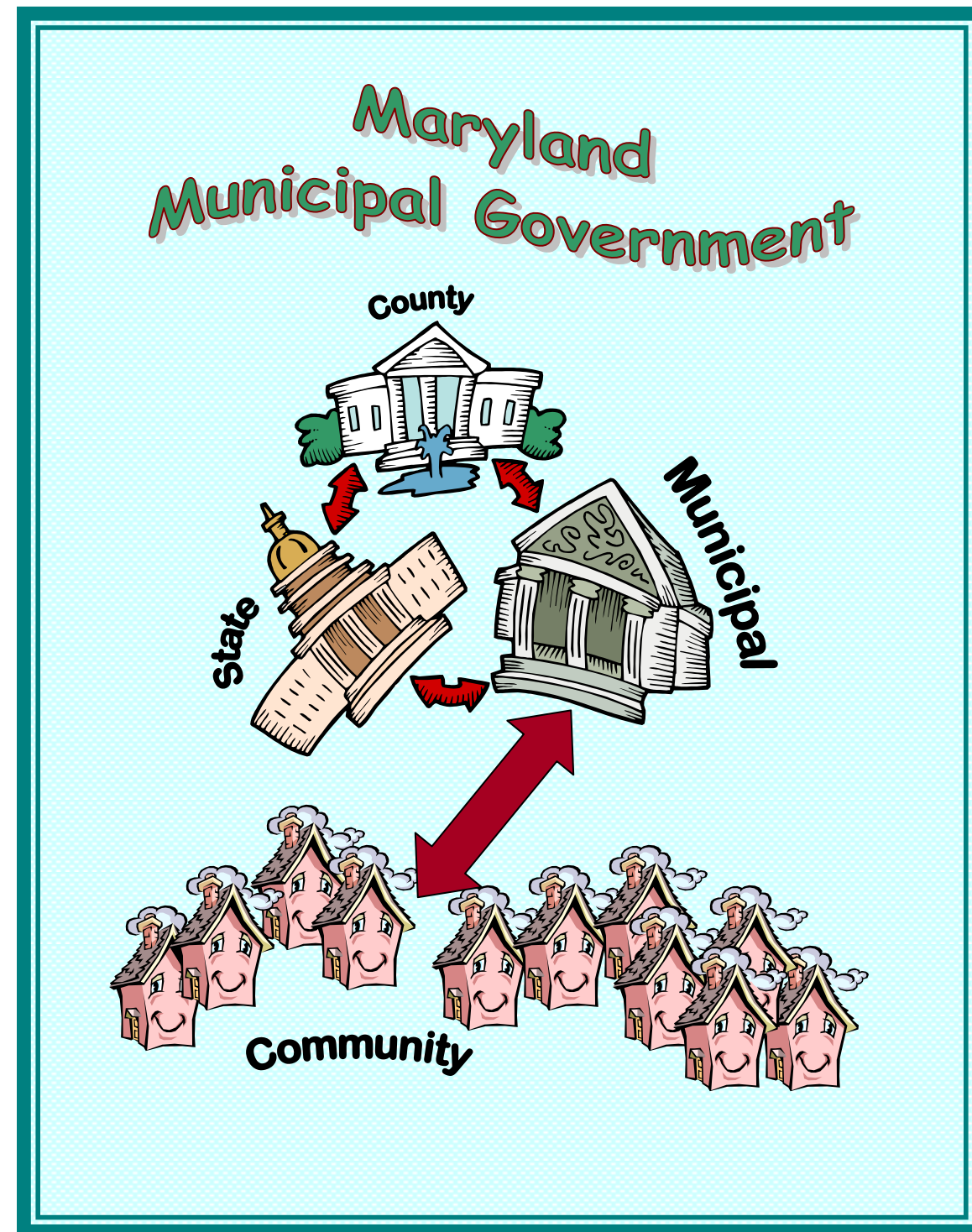


The association of Maryland's cities and towns

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Review Questions



1. What makes a municipality different from other places that sometimes refer to themselves as cities or towns?
2. Do all cities and towns provide the same services to their citizens?
3. How many municipalities are there in Maryland?
4. What county has the most municipalities?
5. Which counties do not have any municipalities?
6. Why would a community wish to incorporate to become a municipality?
7. Why would a community decide not to become a municipality?
8. What do mayors generally do?
9. What are the 4 forms of municipal government?
10. What is parliamentary procedure?
11. What is the primary decision making tool for municipal governments?
12. What are some of the services that municipal governments provide for their citizens?
13. How does municipal government get the money it needs to provide services to citizens?
14. What do elected officials have to do if the municipality receives less revenue than expected to pay for the services listed in the budget for the coming year?

Municipalities (Incorporated Cities & Towns)

In Maryland, local government refers to county and municipal governments. A municipality (mu-nic'-i-pal'-i-ty) is a **city or town** that has written its own **charter**, which is like a constitution, that outlines the general powers it has chosen to exercise and the roles and responsibilities of the elected and key appointed officials. A municipality is an independent government, separate from county government, with legal authority to exist granted by the State Government. The powers that municipalities and counties have are defined in the *Maryland State Constitution* and laws passed by the *General Assembly*. Citizens living in municipalities elect their own officials to pass ordinances (*local rules*), create a budget, and to provide services and programs that they want or need. Not all cities and towns provide the same services to their citizens or have the same rules. The citizens living in each municipality develop their own rules and choose the kinds of services they want their city or town to provide, such as police, water and sewer, trash collection, road maintenance, parks, street lights, snow removal and planning and zoning.

Cities and towns do not have responsibility for education (schools), permanent jails, public health, or social welfare programs. State law requires county governments to provide these services to citizens.

Municipal government is often referred to as “**the level of government closest to the people**” because it is easier for citizens to voice their opinions and to make changes in their government when they are unhappy with it. Citizens who live in a municipality also reside in a county, pay county taxes, can vote in county elections and participate in the county political process.

There are 157 municipalities in Maryland, including Baltimore City, and 23 counties. Prince George's County has the largest number of municipalities (27) within its borders. Baltimore and Howard Counties have no municipalities within their borders. The community you live in may not be an incorporated city or town.

Look at the map on the inside cover of this booklet to determine if you reside in a municipality. If you do not, identify a municipality closest to where you live.

Why would a community desire to become a municipality?

Some communities feel that they have a special need for services or laws that the county government is not providing. Many communities want to govern themselves, so that they can have direct control over their tax revenue (*money that citizens pay to their city/town government to provide services based on the value of their property*) enabling them to provide the services they need or want, and to determine how much and what kind of growth should take place in their community.

So why haven't all communities chosen to become municipalities?

Before a community can become a municipality, it must get permission from the county government. Counties are often reluctant to give up control over areas within their borders. Also, counties would lose some of the tax revenue that would have to be shared with the new municipality. Some communities decide that there is too much responsibility involved in becoming a municipality. Citizens may have to pay higher taxes and may find it too difficult to find volunteers to govern the affairs of a municipality. Becoming a municipality allows for more independence in deciding how to spend the community's tax money and in preparing for the future, but it also means more responsibility.

Sample Agenda - Mayor and City Council Meeting

City or Town of _____

Date and Time

AGENDA

1. Call to Order
2. Pledge of Allegiance
3. Approval of Minutes
4. **Consent Items** (*Approval of things that do not require discussion, like paying monthly utility bills for city/town hall*)
5. **Appointments to Boards and Committees**
 - Planning & Zoning Board
 - City/Town Picnic and Craft Show Committee
6. **Presentations**
 - Proclamation recognizing the Elersby High School Marching Band for participating in the 4th of July parade
 - Proclamation recognizing the volunteers participating in the annual city/town clean up week
7. Citizen Comments
8. City/Town Announcements
9. Reports from the City/Town Manager and other Municipal Departments
10. **Discussion and Vote on Issues**
 - Installation of speed cameras
 - Street repair schedule
 - Juvenile Curfew
11. Adjournment

The Mock Council Meeting

Model the agenda after a real city/town meeting agenda like the sample agenda on page 17. Use as many students as possible. With a little imagination, everyone can be involved (i.e. during council meetings, most of those attending the meeting are afforded the opportunity to speak about an issue on the agenda).

Municipal Roles

Mayor, Burgess or President/Chairman of the Council/Commission
Council/Commission
City/Town Manager
City/Town Attorney
Other appropriate staff

Audience Roles

Issue presenters
Citizens For
Citizens Against
Reporters

Citizens can present self-interest type issues or complaints under Citizens Comments item on the agenda. Also have a proclamation item on the agenda.

Elected Officials

Citizens are elected in each municipality to serve on the city/town council. In some cities and towns, councilpersons are called commissioners or aldermen. The mayor, in some cities or towns called president or burgess, is the chief elected official and is normally the official spokesperson for the city/town. The mayor is usually responsible for day-to-day operations and for creating the annual budget for the municipality. The council is responsible for approving the Mayor's budget and for passing local ordinances (laws). Each city and town determines the exact roles and responsibilities of the mayor and council through its charter.

Structure of Municipal Government

While no two municipalities in Maryland are exactly alike, they generally fall into one of the four structural categories common to all municipalities in the United States. The categories are:

Strong Mayor & Council (the mayor is a more independent supervisor)

Weak Mayor & Council (the mayor shares law making and supervisory powers with the council)

Commissioner (each elected official also supervises a municipal department, such as public works)

Council/Manager (the mayor and council hire a professional supervisor)

Most Maryland city and town government structures are a mix of these categories. Each city/town has the ability to choose the form of government that best suits its needs and the desires of its citizens. The role of the mayor and council/commission is different depending on the form of government being practiced.

Mock City/Town Council Meeting Guidelines

Two-Week Time Frame

Elect a minimum of 3 to a maximum of 5 council members or commissioners and a mayor, burgess or president of the council/commission.

First Week

Classroom visit by an elected official:

The week before your mock council meeting, have an elected official visit the classroom to talk about what municipal government is. Involve the students as much as possible in discussions.

Teacher and class discussion:

- Chain of command of your form of government
- Budget
- Types of issues with which the council or commission deals
- Municipal services and how they affect citizens lives

Teacher:

- Candidate selection (Will the students select their own candidates or will the teacher provide a slate of officers?)
- Assembly for candidates' speeches
- Campaign guidelines
- Voting procedures (limited to the grade level participating)

Second Week

Council meeting can be held during a school assembly or even at the city or town hall; the meeting should last approximately 30-45 minutes.



Structure of the city/town government

The Roles of Mayors

Mock Council Meeting Guidelines



The mayor of one municipality may have more or less power than the mayor of another. For example, in some cities, the mayor works full-time in the position, supervises the city work force, enforces all laws and can even veto laws passed by the council. In others, the mayor simply presides over city/town meetings and serves much like the other members of the council in addition to being the ceremonial head of government. In some cities or towns, the mayor cannot vote at all on issues. In others, the mayor votes only to break a tie vote among the council members; and in still other cities and towns, the mayor has the power to vote on all matters.

Regardless of how much power they possess, mayors are usually the persons that provide the overall direction for the city or town. The mayor attends all official functions of the municipality and is usually the person who meets with other community groups, levels of government and various agencies about city/town issues. The dedication and enthusiasm of the mayor often has a great impact on the other elected officials and how citizens view their government.

Contact the mayor in your city or town or in the nearest city/town to find out more about the role of the mayor.

Municipal Meetings

Each municipality meets regularly, usually monthly, to accomplish business, pass ordinances, and discuss issues facing the municipality. The citizens of the municipality are invited to every regular meeting. It is important that the public has the opportunity to hear what is going on in their municipality and to be able to witness the discussion. The mayor and the council also set up special meetings called public hearings to hear public opinion on specific issues like a proposal for a new shopping center.

The mayor and council follow guidelines to make sure all regular meetings are open to the public, including the press, and advance notice of the meeting must be advertised in a newspaper or posted in public areas within the municipality.

The issues to be covered in a meeting are printed on the agenda, which is a schedule of the order that the issues will be discussed.

Most mayors and councils use parliamentary procedure, a set of rules for conduct at meetings. These rules allow a process for everyone to be heard and for decisions to be made in an orderly manner.

The mayor and council often appoint special committees to help in the governing process. Committees oversee and offer advice and recommendations in areas such as transportation, land use planning, economic development and public safety and usually make reports during a council meeting

Creating Imaginary Cities and Towns

Three Week Time Frame

Week 1 - Classroom visit by an elected and/or an appointed official:

Two weeks before you begin this activity (a good activity to conduct during Municipal Government Month, recognized annually each November), have an elected official and/or a planning commission member visit the classroom to provide some history on how the city or town developed, what zoning is all about, and what the plans are for the future. Ask your visitors to bring along charts and other hands-on materials that would help to keep the students' attention. Involve the students as much as possible in discussions.

Week 2 - Teacher:

Explain that you would like each student to create a map depicting the elements of an imaginary city or town. The student should include: the name of the city/town, the street layout, parks & playgrounds, churches, businesses, restaurants, and city/town hall. Have the students begin to work on their projects immediately after the visit from city/town officials. This could also be a class group activity. (Allow at least one week for working on the project/s.)

Week 3 - Work with city/town officials to:

- Arrange to display the map(s) at city or town hall.
- Ask city/town officials to invite your class along with teachers and family members to city/town hall for a reception and viewing of the students' work. Cookies and punch could be provided by volunteers.
- Award a prize(s) for the best depiction of a municipality.

Municipal Budgets



I have a great idea for my imaginary city!

The budget is the primary decision-making tool for cities and towns. It shows how the money that the city/town collects from municipal property taxes (the money collected from property owners in the city) and other sources each year will be spent to provide services to citizens such as trash and snow removal, road repairs and police protection. The budget must be approved by the elected officials every year before July 1 and normally includes a listing of services and the amount of money to be used for each service for the coming year. The elected officials will also decide on how much money they need to charge the property owners (property taxes) to pay for services that the city/town citizens want. The elected officials must let citizens know how the city/town money will be spent and how much they will be paying in property taxes by having a special meeting called a budget hearing, before they vote to approve the budget.

Many cities/towns have a law that requires them to have a balanced budget. In other words, they cannot spend more money than they expect to receive. When a city/town finds out it will receive less money than expected to pay for the services listed in the budget for the coming year, the elected officials have to make some hard decisions. They either have to ask citizens to pay more taxes, cut back on spending or even eliminate some services. Sometimes elected officials have different opinions about what to do if this happens.

Attend a municipal council meeting to learn about the kinds of things that cities/towns have to pay for.



Bright Ideas for Learning More about Municipal Government



Invite municipal elected and appointed officials and various city employees like the police chief, public works director or the city/town manager to your classroom for an informal question-and-answer session.



Sponsor a "creative" contest in conjunction with art, music and/or English teachers where students create an original piece of art including photography, music, poetry, etc., focusing on some particular aspect of your city or town and the role of municipal government.



Sponsor a poster contest that relates to a particular city government issue, e.g., recycling, water conservation, police services, recreation and parks, transportation, planning, etc.



Conduct a "Creating a City/Town" activity with students following a visit to the classroom by an elected and/or appointed official to talk about the role and function of municipal government. (A description of this activity is included in this booklet.)



Host a competition to seek the best solution to a city/town problem. Invite the winner to present the solution to the city or town council during a meeting. Don't forget to invite the press!



Sponsor a scavenger hunt with clue cards leading to specific areas in the city/town, such as city/town hall, the city/town park and the public works building, etc. Present participants with awards and/or certificates.



Conduct mock council meetings with your students in city/town hall or in the classroom. (A description of this activity is included in this booklet.)

