

VIRGINIA INSTITUTE OF GOVERNMENT

Local Government Structure, Roles & Responsibilities

- January 8, 2025
- Virginia Municipal League



VIRGINIA LOCAL ELECTED
OFFICIALS CONFERENCE

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Introduction

- **Charles Hartgrove, ICMA-CM**
- Managing Director – Virginia Institute of Government (VIG)
- Previously served as Chief Deputy Commissioner – Virginia Department of Taxation
- Former town manager and deputy city manager leading Virginia communities for over 20 years: Lynchburg, Ashland, Middleburg, and Gate City

WELDON COOPER CENTER FOR PUBLIC SERVICE

- Business Units
 - Center for Economic and Policy Studies
 - Center for Survey Research
 - Demographics Research Group
 - Sorensen Institute for Political Leadership
 - *Virginia Institute of Government*

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What is VIG?

- VIG was created in 1994 by the General Assembly
- Policy and operational assistance to over 220 Virginia cities, towns, and counties - AskVIG
- Annual membership dues for access to VIG are based on population of locality
- Provide nationwide professional development programs for local gov leaders at all levels
- Consulting services – council/board retreats, strategic planning, leadership teams
- Administer certification programs for commissioners of the revenue, treasurers, and staff
- www.coopercenter.org/vig

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Who is VIG?



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- Local Government Overview
 - Almost 90,000 units of local government in the United States
 - No level of government plays a more active role in our daily lives than local
 - Local government 101
 - Form of government

LOCAL GOV

- Challenges for #LocalGov

- Local governments are increasingly being asked to do more with less
- Outside of pandemic one-time funding, Federal and state support is declining
- Citizens are demanding a more caring, responsive government
- New technology continues to revolutionize communication and service deployment
- Evolving expectations for local government services evolving because of COVID-19

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- Local Government Authority
 - Constitution of Virginia (1971)
 - Code of Virginia (e.g., §15.2)
 - Judicial Review (Federal and State courts)
 - City, town, or county charter (granted by the Virginia General Assembly)
 - Municipal or county code

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- Dillon Rule

- In *Municipal Corporations* (1872), Judge Dillon explained that in contrast to the powers of states, which are unlimited but for express restrictions under the state or federal constitution, municipalities only have the powers that are expressly granted to them.
- Critics of the rule have argued that it imposes unreasonable constraints on the ability of communities to govern themselves and undermines democracy - or that local self-government is a matter of natural right that does not need to be conferred by higher political structures.

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- Home Rule
 - Home rule involves the authority of a local government to prevent state government intervention with its operations. The extent of its power however, is subject to limitations prescribed by state constitutions and statutes.
 - When a municipality or other political subdivision has the power to decide for itself whether to follow a particular course of action without receiving specific approval from state officials, it acts

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- Unusual Features of Virginia

- Statewide pattern of city-county separation
- 1971 annexation moratorium (all cities since 1987 – recently extended to 2032)
- Fewer units of local government
- Fewer cities & less use of special districts
- No independent school divisions
- Fewer elected officials per capita
- Broader use of the council-manager plan, or variation, in cities, counties, & larger towns

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- Form of Local Government
 - Council-manager form of government
 - Required duties of a manager/administrator
 - ICMA Code of Ethics



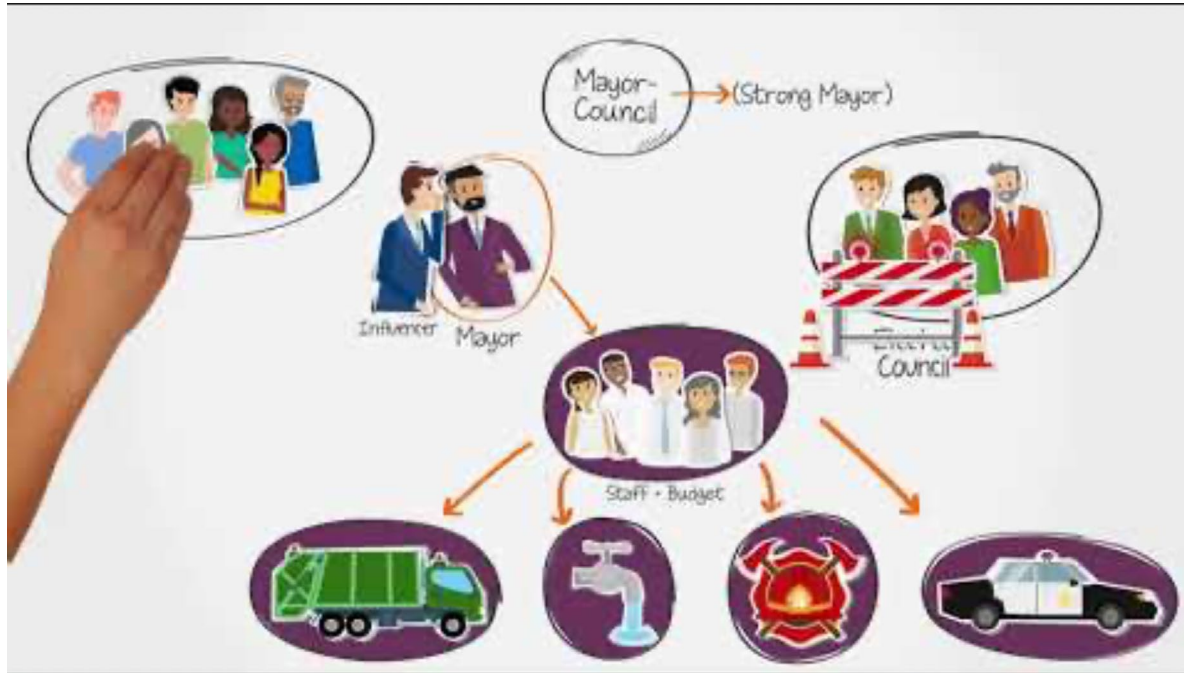
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- Council-Manager
 - Council-manager government combines the strong political leadership of elected officials with the professional managerial experience of an appointed manager or administrator.
 - All power and authority to set policy rests with an elected governing body, which includes a mayor or chairperson and members of the council, commission, or board. The governing body in turn hires a professional manager who has very broad authority to run the organization.

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- Council-Manager
 - Every community is different. Factors such as population, level of public services, size of staff, and unique local conditions contribute to the expectations of council for the manager.
 - City/town manager or county administrator/executive (chief administrative officer-CAO) works at the pleasure of the elected body.

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- Virginia CAO Responsibilities - §15.2-1541
 - See that within the locality the laws ordinances, resolutions, and bylaws of the elected body are faithfully executed
 - Attend all meetings of the elected body and recommend adoption of measures as the manager/administrator deems expedient
 - Make reports to the elected body from time to time upon the affairs of the locality

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- Virginia CAO Responsibilities - §15.2-1541
 - Keep the elected body fully advised of the locality's financial condition and its future financial needs
 - Prepare and submit to the elected body a proposed budget for the fiscal year
 - Execute the budget as finally adopted by the elected body

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- Council-Manager
 - ICMA Code of Ethics - www.icma.org
 - CAO is a facilitator of policy and ideas
 - An effective CAO should be able to ***implement and communicate*** an elected body's vision for the community

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- Bridging the Gap – Messy Middle
 - **Political acceptability** = The willingness of elected leaders, as representatives of the community, to accept a specific program, policy, or project.
 - **Administrative Sustainability** = Need for programs, policies, and projects to be efficiently maintained for the long term
 - Weighing priorities
 - Balanced budget/Debt Capacity
 - Funding
 - Staff resources/capacity

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- Bridging the gap

Align

- Staff priorities with governing body goals
- Governing body and staff expectations

LOCAL GOV

- Summary

- Bridging the gap is essential
- Good politics is about values, not right answers – Stories matter
- Democratic process is “messy”. We can disagree and still work together.

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- Questions?

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