



KNOW YOUR LOCAL GOVERNMENT:
A GUIDE TO LOCAL GOVERNMENT IN LAFAYETTE PARISH
Part 1: Basic Structure



Historic Structure of Local Government

Historically, the parish unit of government in Louisiana served the needs of its spread-out, rural farming people. County (parish) governments across the United States have followed the historic English shire structure and its officials:

- a court
- a sheriff for tax collection and protection, public works, and poor relief
- justices of the peace
- a coroner
- constable(s)

Parish and City Governments Are Classified as Political Subdivisions of the State

Parish and city or town governments are classified political subdivisions of the state of Louisiana--through the Constitution and the State Legislature who create them, control them to some degree, and define their powers.

The Louisiana Constitution mandates each multi-parish district elect and partially support:

- a district attorney
- judges for the district court
- judges for the circuit appellate court

The Louisiana Constitution mandates each parish:

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|-----------------------------|---------------------------------------------|
| (1) elect for itself | (2) appoint a Registrar of Voters |
| • an Assessor | |
| • a Clerk of Court | |
| • a Coroner | (3) build & maintain a court house and jail |
| • a School Board | feed and clothe the inmates |
| • a Sheriff | |
| • a parish legislative body | |

The Louisiana Legislature’s Lawrason Act of 1898 established a uniform type of government for the governance of the municipalities of Louisiana. The Lawrason Act is currently in place for Broussard, Carencro, Duson, Scott, and Youngsville, and most of other Louisiana municipalities.

Home rule for Lafayette Parish was permitted by an act of the Louisiana Legislature and the approval of the voters of the state of Louisiana.

The Teche-Vermilion Freshwater District and the Lafayette Economic Development Authority are both supported by local property taxes. They were created by the Louisiana Legislature as political subdivisions of the state.

(Over)

The parish government is considered the primary, or general service, part of local government.

- Lafayette parish government may take any form of several forms, such as police jury, commission, or president-council, consolidated with city government or not consolidated.
- Whatever form the voters choose, the primary parish government still must meet the state's requirements.

The parish government does not control or manage the special-service units of parish government.

- Lafayette's primary, or general service parish government, Lafayette City-Parish Consolidated Government, is separate from the School Board, Sheriff, Clerk of Court, Assessor, Coroner, and other special-service units of parish government.
- Broussard, Carencro, Duson, Scott, and Youngsville also have completely independent governments from the parish government.
- Some of the special purpose units of government, including some boards and commissions, can ask the voters for taxes and borrow money, either by themselves or through the general-purpose parish government, Lafayette City-Parish Consolidated Government.

With the addition of each unit of local government, executive power is decentralized.

- No one unit of local government has had or has today total charge of the parish.
- There is no top to bottom organizational chart for the various units of local government in Lafayette Parish.
- They are independent or semi-independent of each other in their governing.
- The organizational chart of the major units of local government is a very long, straight line of equal or almost equal players, each with its own goals and separate or semi-separate funding.
- Voluntary intergovernmental agreements have helped to build joint effort and capacity to handle issues and needs in common.

Power of the Voters in Local Government

The state of Louisiana delegates the powers and costs of local government to the voters.

The Constitution of the State of Louisiana gives the people the right to govern by their will to

- protect the rights of each person
- secure justice for all
- preserve peace
- promote the happiness and general welfare of the people

Voters and residents in general affect local government in many important ways:

Voting
Paying taxes
Running for public office or campaigning for a candidate
Attending meetings of local units of government groups
Volunteering to be on a board or commission
Insisting local government follow open meeting laws
Providing public oversight for public projects and services

Serving on juries
Expressing opinions to public officials
Writing letters to the newspapers
Offering political forums through civic

Additional resource pages and detailed information on the specific units of local government in Lafayette Parish, are under construction at a dedicated website. The League of Women Voters of Lafayette has produced a companion piece entitled: "Guide to Officials Elected by Lafayette Parish Voters," found at <http://www.lwv-lafayette.org/voterinfo/OfficialsPublication/index.html> for online browsing or printing as pdf. document