

County Commissioner

Richard O. Avery, Director and Stacy D. Morris, Extension Program Specialist

The county commissioners court serves as the governing body in each of Texas' 254 counties. This administrative body was established by the Texas Constitution of 1876 and is comprised of a county judge and four commissioners. The major duties of the commissioners court involves overseeing the budgetary and policy making functions of county government. In addition, in many counties, commissioners have extensive responsibilities related to the building and maintenance of county roads.

Each county in Texas is divided into four commissioners precincts with one commissioner being directly elected by the voters of each precinct to a four year term. Commissioners are elected on staggered terms with two precincts voting for the office of commissioner in each general election. Precincts two and four of every county elect commissioners the same year the Texas gubernatorial election takes place while precincts one and three elect their commissioners in presidential election years. To be eligible to run for a county commissioner seat, an individual must be a qualified voter, a resident of that precinct and have never been convicted of a felony.

As the commissioners court meets to fulfill its budgetary and administrative responsibilities, each commissioner, along with the county judge, participates in all the decisions and work of the court. Passing a county budget is a major undertaking for the commissioners court. During the budget process, commissioners approve the employment level of the county and consider the level of funding necessary for the other county offices to carry out their duties and

responsibilities. In addition to approving the county budget, commissioners courts have other financial responsibilities. The commissioners court sets the county's property tax rate and has the authority to grant tax abatements for economic development and authorize contracts in the name of the county.

Beyond their budget duties, commissioners have the responsibility of providing oversight of the county's infrastructure. They are responsible for overseeing the construction, maintenance and improvement of county roads and bridges, establishing long-range thoroughfare, open space, and land use plans, and acquiring property for rights-of-way or other uses determined to be in the public's best interest. Commissioners each serve as the road and bridge administrator in their precinct except in places where a county unit road system has been adopted by local election. Other responsibilities include reviewing and approving subdivision platting and wastewater treatment for rural areas. Some commissioners are also responsible for providing rural ambulance services and subsidizing rural fire protection.

Additional personnel and operating responsibilities fall under the job duties of a county commissioner. Some of these duties include financial and law enforcement/jail needs planning, establishing commissioners and justice of the peace precinct boundaries, and setting employment and benefit policies for the county. Commissioners court may also call, conduct and certify elections, including bond elections, and appoint non-elected department heads and standing committees. Finally, as a member of the commissioners court, a county commissioner may

be called upon to fill vacancies in elective and appointive positions in the county and supervise and control the county courthouse, county buildings and other county facilities.

In order to stay up to date on the latest changes in state law affecting the operation of counties and to acquire improved management techniques and skills related to infrastructure maintenance, commissioners are required to earn sixteen classroom hours of continuing education annually related to the performance of their duties. Continuing education credits must be certified by an accredited public institution of higher education and commissioners may carry over up to eight hours of continuing education credit into the next year.

County commissioners have a broad range of duties. From their positions on the county's policymaking body to their responsibility for maintaining county roads and bridges, county commissioners are very visible representatives in county government.

For more information on the office of County Commissioner or other county government topics and issues, please contact the V.G. Young Institute of County Government.

**V. G. Young
Institute of County Government**

P.O. Box 2450

College Station, Texas 77841

Telephone: 979-845-4572

FAX: 979-862-1516

<http://vgyi.tamu.edu>