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## City and County of Denver

### How Denver City Government Works

Denver, the capital of Colorado, is a consolidated city and county. It serves as the financial, transportation, and distribution center of the Rocky Mountain region. Denver was officially formed on November 7, 1861. A non-partisan elected mayor, auditor, and 13-member city council govern Denver. Nine main departments carry out the functions of city government.

#### Organization

City [organization](#) is divided into departments, agencies, independent agencies and offices. The difference between a "department" and an "agency" in Denver's city organization is that departments are established and can only be abolished by the City Charter. Agencies are established either by order of the mayor or by city ordinance, and they can also be abolished without a vote of the people. They also are typically smaller in size and scope than departments.

#### Boards and Commissions

There is also another group that directly affects Denver city government and its policies - official boards and commissions. The mayor appoints a majority of the members of the various [City Boards and Commissions](#) that offer guidance and suggestions to many of our departments, such as Parks and Recreation. These volunteers usually serve without compensation.

#### Mayor

The office of the mayor is established by City Charter. The mayor is responsible for executive and administrative activities and may not have other employment during his or her term of office. The mayor is elected for a four-year term. The chief executive enforces all laws and ordinances; meets weekly with city council to report on Denver conditions and to recommend enactment of such measures as are deemed necessary. The mayor also approves or vetoes ordinances or resolutions passed by council; sees that all contracts with the city and county are faithfully kept and fully performed; signs all bonds and contracts; is responsible for the annual city and county budget estimate; and has broad powers of appointment limited only by the Career Service Authority and Civil Service Commission.

While the mayor does have a great deal of power, that power is by no means absolute. It is subject to certain checks and balances. For example, the budget must be approved by city council and can be changed by a majority vote of council. To date, council modifications of the budget have been relatively minor. All expenditures are checked by the city auditor who may refuse to allow an expenditure. [The Auditor](#) is an elected official and therefore independent of both the mayor and council.

Another check and balance is city council's ability to override the mayor's veto with nine out of its 13 votes. And only council can pass laws. The Mayor can only suggest that a certain law be passed. The final check and balance is that the mayor, as an elected official, may be recalled or defeated at a regular election.

#### Succession

A 1991 charter amendment changed the line of succession. It allows the mayor

to designate a Deputy Mayor from among the department managers. That individual is acting mayor when the mayor is out of town or unavailable, or if the mayor dies or resigns.

Second in line is the president of city council. In case of permanent absence, a special election would be held for mayor, within three months. Years ago, the manager of Public Works automatically became mayor in case of vacancy. Mayor Currihan resigned in 1968 to take a better-paying job with Continental Airlines. That's how Bill McNichols, then manager of Public Works became mayor and went on to be elected and twice re-elected.

### City Council

[City Council](#) was also established by the Denver City Charter. The strong mayor-council form of government does provide for wide legislative power. For example, council appropriates all money necessary to run the city. Only council may pass or change laws, often after holding a public hearing. Much of the council's work involves zoning matters.

Council, or a committee authorized by it, has the power to investigate any departmental official of Denver city government accused of certain types of misconduct.

By provisions of the City Charter, Denver is divided into 11 councilmanic districts of approximately equal population. The number of districts can be changed only by changing the City Charter, but the district boundaries can be changed by ordinance. They are changed every 10 years based on new census data. In addition to the 11 district council members, two council members are elected "at large." All council members serve four-year terms.

Council elects its own president. Members of council are paid an annual salary and may, with certain limitations, have other employment while serving. The members of council and the districts they represent are:

[District 1 Northwest Corner](#)

[District 2 Southwest Corner](#)

[District 3 Southwest](#)

[District 4 Southeast Corner](#)

[District 5 East Central](#)

[District 6 Southeast](#)

[District 7 South Central](#)

[District 8 Northeast](#)

[District 9 West Central](#)

[District 10 Capitol Hill](#)

[District 11 Northeast Corner](#)

[At Large](#)

[At Large](#)

City council meets every Monday evening at 5:30 p.m., except on legal holidays, in council chambers on the fourth floor of the City and County Building. All ordinances must have at least two readings before council and be approved by majority vote. These are called "first reading" and "second reading." Since, through the appropriations process, council controls the city "checkbook," members of council take an active part in budget hearings. They hear reports and funding requests from department and agency heads.

Much of the work of council is done in committees. There are ongoing committees and special committees established on an "as-needed" basis. A committee of city council covers issues from each of our agencies.

Just as the powers of the mayor are subject to certain checks and balances, the

powers of the council are also checked and balanced by other arms of government. For example, the mayor may veto a law passed by council. The city auditor may refuse to give approval for certain council expenditures. The state and federal courts may rule as unconstitutional a law passed by council, if such a law is challenged in court. Denver's ban on assault weapons was a recent example, although the courts ultimately ruled in the city's favor.

**Independent Agencies**

Independent agencies have policies and procedures set by appointed or elected officials other than the mayor or council. Such agencies are removed from the mayor's direct control. Generally, the mayor appoints some or all of the members for independent agency boards, who each in turn select their own directors. As an example, the director of personnel for the Career Service Authority is hired by the Career Service Board.

*Denver's **City and County Building** also known as **City Hall**, (shown above), is located at 1437 Bannock Street on the west side of the city's Civic Center Park. It opened in 1932. The Beaux-Arts Neoclassical city hall was designed by a coalition of 39 leading local architects. The City and County Building houses offices of the Mayor, meeting chambers of City Council, and offices for the Department of Law, Public Works, and Emergency Management; and courtrooms for County and District Court. Colorado's gold-domed State Capitol faces the Denver City and County Building from the east end of Civic Center Park. (Photo courtesy: Denver Metro Convention and Visitors Bureau.)*

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