



## Forms of Government

There are many variations in how local governments are structured across the 351 cities and towns that make up the Commonwealth of Massachusetts. Cities generally have a small council that serves as the legislative body and an elected mayor or appointed manager who functions as the chief executive. Towns typically have a Open or Representative Town Meeting that serves as a larger legislative body and a three- to five- member elected select board as its executive body with an appointed manager or administrator. Whether in a city or town, there are several possibilities for how local governments are organized.

## How to Make Organizational Changes to Local Government

### Example Bylaws and Enabling Legislation to Enact Structural Change

- M.G.L. c. 43C: Consolidated departments
- M.G.L. c. 41, § 2 Increase/decrease board size
- M.G.L. c. 41, § 1B: Appointed town offices and boards
- M.G.L. c. 41, § 21: Authorization for selectmen to act as or appoint other town officers

### Election of a Charter Commission or Adoption of a Home Rule Charter

A Charter refers to a written instrument that defines the government structure under which a city and town operates. A charter may create local offices; distribute powers, duties and responsibilities among local offices; and may establish and define certain procedures to be followed by a city or town government.

Under the Home Rule Amendment to the Massachusetts Constitution (Amendment Article 89) and the Home Rule Procedures Act (M.G.L. c. 43B), cities and towns can form a charter commission to adopt a new charter, entirely revise an existing charter or amend selected charter provisions. Under Section 3 of Ch. 43B, the process to form a charter commission is initiated when 15 percent of the voters petition the city council or select board to order a local ballot question on whether to adopt a new charter, or to revise or amend an existing charter.

### Special Act Charters

As an option to the Home Rule Charter process under Chapter 43B, communities can also adopt, revise or amend a charter by a special act of the State Legislature with approval by the Governor. Special acts, or special laws, involving government structure are applicable only to one city or town and, with few exceptions, are deemed to have the force of a charter. In cities, the city council must approve submission of a special act, and in towns, approval of town meeting is required. Under rarely used provisions of law, changes to local charters can be imposed on recommendation of the Governor and two-thirds vote of each branch of the Legislature.

Local actions to adopt, revise or amend a charter through a special law need not be approved by the voters at-large before, or after, Legislative enactment in order to take effect. However, as a matter of practice, the Legislature, or the city council or town meeting locally, almost always make special laws to adopt or change a charter contingent on voter approval.

# Financial Management Best Practices

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## Governance

- Legal Services
- Financial Management Team
- Home Rule

## Financial Planning

- Financial Policies
- Annual Budget Process in Towns
- Formal Budget and Municipal Calendar
- Quarterly Budget Projections
- Revenue and Expenditure Forecasting
- Free Cash
- Reserves
- Retirement Costs
- Special Purpose Stabilization Funds
- User Fees
- Financial Trend Monitoring

## Departmental Procedures

- Annual Audits
- Revenue and Appropriation Deficits
- Cash Flow Budgeting and Short-term Borrowing
- Cash Book
- On-line Bill Payments
- Reconciling Cash and Accounts Receivable
- Property Sales Inspections
- Employee Performance Evaluations
- Enforcing Collections

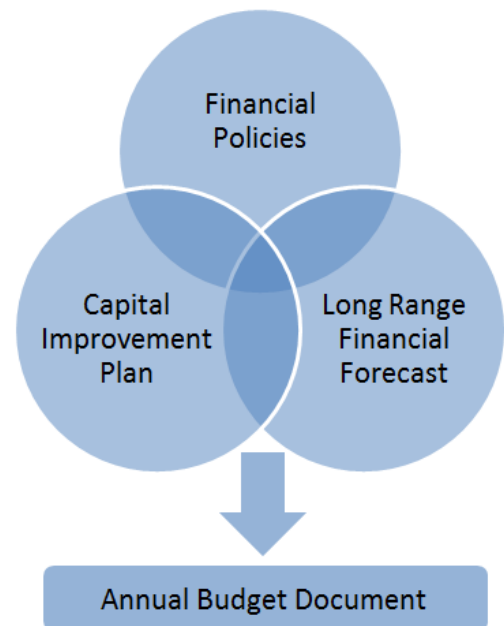
## Other

- Statutory Treatment of Municipal Revenues
- Understanding Municipal Debt
- Presenting and Funding Major Capital Projects
- Enterprise Funds
- Costing Municipal Services
- Intermunicipal Agreements
- Overrides and Exclusions

## Tools, Templates and Calculators

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- Debt Service Estimator
- Tax Impact
- Residential Exemption
- Tax Levy Shift
- Collector Receivable Control
- Employee Time Sheet
- Department Payroll Summary Voucher
- Debt Service Schedule
- Treasurer Cash Book
- Cash Flow Budget
- Indirect Cost Template



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