

Municipalities

The [local government system](#) in British Columbia is comprised of municipalities, [regional districts](#) and [improvement districts](#). Regional districts blanket the province, but, other than in the metropolitan areas of Greater Vancouver and Greater Victoria, municipalities are widely scattered. In addition, there are some 231 [improvement districts](#). Improvement districts tend to be very small and are generally single service providers (i.e. fire protection, water servicing).

There are 160 municipalities in British Columbia. Municipalities range in population size from small villages of fewer than 250 persons to large cities approaching 600,000 in [population](#). The median population size is 4,800. While municipalities cover only 1% of British Columbia's terrain they [serve](#) about 87% of the population. They range in geographic size from 60 hectares to 155,000 hectares. There are four classes of municipalities: village, town, district and city. These definitions are population-based. However, the authorities of each class are the same.

Municipal councils are [democratically elected](#) bodies and are accountable to their electorate. Councils are comprised of a mayor and councillors. Council size varies from 5 to 9 members depending on the [population](#) of the municipality.

Municipalities, along with non-municipal areas form part of the regional district system. Municipal councils appoint one or more members to sit as municipal representatives on their respective [regional board](#). This requirement to wear "two hats" is a unique and challenging aspect of the local government system in British Columbia.

Municipalities are the cornerstone of the [local government system](#) in British Columbia. They operate primarily under the [Community Charter](#) which recognizes them as an order of government within their jurisdiction. This recognition is unique in Canada and enables municipalities to provide a wide variety of [services](#) that are reflective of their community's needs and desires.

Municipalities have broad service authority to provide core responsibilities that include but are not limited to the following:

- general government;
- transportation – streets and roads, in some cases urban transit;
- protection – police, fire;
- [environment](#) – water treatment and supply, waste water treatment, refuse collection/disposal;
- recreation and culture – recreation centres, playing fields, parks, libraries;
- [land use planning](#) and regulation, building regulation, [zoning](#); and
- regulation – animal control, public health, signs, business licensing, municipal services.

Municipalities have flexibility in how and what [services](#) they provide, including the ability to enter into [private partnerships](#). Municipalities have flexibility in their ability to generate revenue to [finance](#) operations. This is done primarily through the [property tax system](#) but includes the ability to charge fees for services.

Municipalities are not responsible for schools, social assistance, hospitals. These are a provincial responsibility.

The Ministry is responsible for the legislative framework for local government. The [Local Government Department](#) actively works with municipalities to provide information and develop advisory materials (such as approval of a small number of bylaws, long-term capital borrowing

and [development cost charges](#)). Changes to [boundaries](#), [municipal incorporation](#), and resolving local government disputes are other areas where the department provides expertise to municipalities. The Department is also responsible for managing [transfer programs](#) to local governments.