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The difference between County government and City Government

Welcome back to Government 101!

We last learned about the role Harris County Commissioners play in our communities and how Commissioners Court works. Today, we will be discussing a common question that many have: What is the difference between County Government and City (Municipal) Government?

When comparing city and county government, it can be confusing at times to define, considering both types of government make up an important component of the overall structure; and while they both work together to provide similar services to their residents, they each have their own way of exercising authority; and they differ in purpose and structure.

County Government

County governments are essentially the administrative units of the state. Though the most common form of county government is the commission system, they can also form other two systems: the council-administrator system and the council-elected executive system.

As we mentioned in the previous article, the commission system is made up of elected commissioners and they serve as the governing body within the county. Together they perform judicial, legislative, and executive functions.

Amongst all of their responsibilities, few of them consist of adopting budgets, setting tax rates, maintaining buildings, roads, parks, and passing resolutions.

County governments in Texas offer their residents a vast amount of services by operating through elected officials rather than one central authority. County elected officials only answer to the voters and are not controlled by any other elected officials, thanks to our Texas Constitution that provides a checks and balances system.

Here's just a short list of all elected officials that make up a county government:

- County Judge
- County Commissioners' *(Note: There are four County Commissioners in Harris County)*
- County Attorney
- District Attorney
- County Clerk
- District Clerk
- County Treasure
- Sheriff
- Tax Assessor- Collector

- Justice of the Peace
- Constable
- County Auditor

City Government

Municipal governments are responsible for overseeing the functions of cities and towns, which are made up of relatively large populations. This kind of government is formed by two governing models: a council-manager system, and a mayor-council system.

Providing clean water, sewage and garbage disposal are just few of the things that municipal governments are responsible for. They are also in charge for overseeing city facilities, such as stadiums, street lighting, and parks.

In Harris County, we have the form of Mayor-Council system of government, which is composed of a Mayor, City Controller, and a City Council. The City's elected officials serve a total of two-year terms.

The Mayor serves as the chief administrator and is responsible for the general management of the City, as well as making sure that all laws and ordinances are being followed. This elected official also performs other administrative duties, such as signing motions and resolutions passed by the City Council, administrating oaths, and advising Council.

The City Council has the power to enforce all resolutions and ordinances. There are a total of sixteen Council Members: eleven are elected from districts and five that are elected by City voters. The City Council is responsible for approving City expenditures, adopting or altering annual budgets, and awarding of contracts. Altogether, including the Mayor, they act only by ordinance, resolution, or motion.

Finally, the City Controller, who serves as the City's chief financial officer. A few of the duties of this office can include: producing annual reports of City finances, conducting the sale of public improvement, processing and monitoring disbursements exceeding one billion dollars annually, operating and maintain the City's financial management, investing the City's funds, and conducting internal audits of the City's departments and federal grant programs.

Even though responsibilities for each elected official and government system may vary from state to state, there's one similar goal, and that is to serve the people. Therefore, County Governments and City Governments work together to help and better communities.

To learn more about what Precinct 2 is doing in your community, visit hcp2.com and follow us on social media.

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