

Metropolitan Council 101

FAQ

What is the Metropolitan Council?

The Metropolitan Council is the legislative body of Nashville, Tennessee and Davidson County. It has 40 members, 35 of which are district council representatives, and five of which are council members at-large. At-large council members are elected by the entirety of the metro area. One national survey of city councils lists Nashville's as the third largest, behind Chicago and New York City. Metro City Hall, where the Council meets, is located at 225 Polk Avenue. The presiding officer is the Vice Mayor, who is elected at large by the citizens.

The popularly elected vice mayor is the President of the Metropolitan Council and serves as its presiding officer, but is not a member of the Metro Council and does not vote except to break ties. Members elect a president pro tempore to serve in the absence of the Vice Mayor, and a deputy president pro tempore once the president pro tempore becomes presiding officer due to the Vice Mayor's death or resignation.

The mayor may veto resolutions and ordinances passed by the Metropolitan Council, but the veto can be overwritten with a two-thirds majority of the Council. With three-fourths of the entire council in favor, and not subject to veto, investigations may be conducted by the whole council or its committees.

How are the members elected?

The Council is a 40-member body of elected representatives -- 35 elected by district and five elected at-large, or county-wide by the citizens of Nashville.

Who can become a council member?

Under the Metropolitan Charter, members must be over the age of 25 and have lived within Davidson County for a year at the beginning of their terms. Members must also have lived in the district they want to represent for six months, and they must continue to reside in that district for the duration of their terms.

How long are the terms: Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Council Members?

Office terms (and limits) are as follows:

- * Mayor - 4 years (2 terms)
- * Vice-Mayor – 4 years (2 terms)
- * At-Large Council Members – 4 years (2 terms)
- * District Council Members – 4 years (2 terms)

What happens when a seat becomes vacant because of death, illness or other reasons?

Until 1994, a by-election would be held, to fill the vacancy but this practice was ended with an amendment to the Metro Charter, after it was felt by-elections had become too expensive. The vice mayor can appoint an individual at-large city council members to fill in for departed members.

In what form does the Council take action on matters?

The Council transacts all official business by the adoption or enactment of resolutions and ordinances.

METRO COUNCIL LEGISLATIVE PROCESS

What's the difference?

Ordinances typically amend or add sections to the Metropolitan Code of Laws; some other examples of the use of ordinances

- * budgets (annual operating or capital improvements)
- * tax levies
- * zoning matters
- * street or alley closures or name changes
- * acquisition of property
- * designated contracts.

Resolutions are generally used to make changes in internal policy or to take commendatory or memorializing action. Some examples:

- * Charter amendments for referendum
- * appropriations for equipment/repair purchases
- * claims/settlements of lawsuits exceeding \$1,000
- * leases
- * designated contracts.

What kind of vote is required for passage of Ordinances, Bills and Resolutions?

Ordinances, also referred to as "bills", require passage on three separate readings -- at Council meetings held on three different dates and require a majority vote of all Council members (21 votes) for passage on third and final reading.

Bills disapproved by the Planning Commission or the Traffic and Parking Commission require a two-thirds affirmative vote (27 votes) for passage.

Resolutions are adopted by a majority vote of all Council members voting and are only required to receive this affirmative vote one time.

Who writes the legislation that the Council considers?

Ordinances and resolutions originate from three different sources: the Department of Law, the Council Staff Office, and other departments of the Metropolitan Government.

The Department of Law prepares most of the ordinances and resolutions which are requested by or involve the various departments of the Metropolitan Government, particularly legislation which is not of a routine nature.

The Council Office Director prepares any legislation which is requested directly by a Council member. This may range from a resolution honoring an individual or group to a matter of particular interest or concern to the Council member.

What about routine legislation?

Certain other departments prepare legislation that is of a routine nature to the functioning of that department. The Planning Commission, for example, drafts all zoning legislation -- whether it is requested by a Council member or by a property owner.

Who should a citizen contact about getting legislation filed?

Any citizen should contact his/her Council representative to discuss potential legislation, as only a Council member can bring legislation to the floor of the Council for action.

Who has to sign legislation before it can be filed?

Any resolution or ordinance must be sponsored (signed) by at least one member of the Metropolitan Council before the Clerk can accept the legislation for filing. Any legislation approving a contract must have the fully-executed contracts filed at the time the legislation is filed.

COUNCIL MEETINGS

How often are Council Meetings held?

By Charter the regular meetings of the Council are held on the first and third Tuesdays of every month. In addition, with 48 hours' written notice, a special meeting may be called by the mayor or the vice mayor. It may also be requested by the majority of the council, which would require 21 votes in favor of the meeting.

Public hearings, at which the public can publicly address the Council, are held as required by law. All changes to the zoning maps or zoning laws require public hearings, and these are held at the first meeting of every odd-numbered month of the year (January, March, May, etc.). Various other public hearings, such as on the annual proposed budgets or redevelopment projects, are held as needed.

What is the filing deadline for regular meetings?

Deadline for filing legislation for Council action is 4:00 p.m. on the Tuesday which is one week before a regular meeting of the Council, except proposed amendments to the Capital Improvements Budget which have different filing requirements.

When is each Council agenda ready?

The Council agenda is prepared after the filing deadline and is available in the Clerk's Office or on its web page by 10:00 a.m. on the Wednesday preceding each Tuesday Council meeting.

When is the proposed operating budget filed each year?

The Charter requires the ordinance and proposed budget to be filed not later than March 25th each year.

Is the public allowed to speak on the proposed budget?

Yes, a public hearing is held by the Council when the budget ordinance is on second reading.

Can the budget be amended once it is filed?

Yes, the proposed budget may be amended at any time before final passage by the Council.

When is the budget usually adopted?

By Charter, a budget MUST be adopted not later than the 30th day of June.