

City Candidates Guide



2025

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Dear Candidate:

I would like to extend a word of thanks for your willingness to run for office. Your dedication to your community is a tangible demonstration of both your love for your city and your hope that it will achieve all that it can be. Those of us at the League are well aware of the commitment that is necessary for this undertaking, and we hope to be a meaningful resource for you along the way.

This candidate's guide serves as a starting point for your League resources. It is a tool to better understand city government in Kansas, the election process, taking office, and the basics of governing. I hope that you will find it to be a useful guide on your journey.

The League of Kansas Municipalities has been supporting cities in Kansas since 1910. We are happy to provide assistance to current and potential leaders across the state, and this is one small example of the resources we provide.

Our country's commitment to representative government can only occur when citizens are willing to undertake the challenge of public service. While the challenges are plenty, we hope that you find it to be rewarding, as well. Thank you for your service and for your commitment to your city. We are pleased to walk beside you along the way.

Many thanks,



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Elections

- ***Check for Local Rules.*** This brochure is designed to answer basic questions about city government in Kansas. Some cities may have locally altered their form of government or the election process. Therefore, it is important to check with the city clerk to determine if there are any local rules applicable in your city.
- ***Filing Deadline—June 1, 2025.*** The filing deadline for all city elections is 12:00 noon on June 1, or if that date is a Saturday, Sunday or holiday, then the deadline is 12:00 noon of the next day that is not a Saturday, Sunday or holiday. (K.S.A. 25-2109 and K.S.A. 25-205)
- ***Filing Location, Validation, and Fee.*** All candidates for municipal office are required to file with the county election officer either a declaration of intent to become a candidate accompanied by a fee of \$20 or a nomination petition with the proper number of signatures. (Contact your city to find out the number of signatures required.) Within three days of the filing of a nomination petition or declaration of intention to become a candidate for city office, the county election officer shall determine the validity of such petition or declaration. If the petition or declaration is found to be invalid, the county election officer shall notify the candidate and provide the reason for the finding. The candidate may object to the finding of invalidity in accordance with K.S.A. 25-308. (K.S.A. 25-205; 25-2110; 25-21a01)
- ***Qualifications.*** An individual seeking elected city office must be a “qualified elector.” This means at the time of filing for office, the person must be a registered voter in the city (and if the city is divided into wards or district, within the particular ward or district). (K.S.A. 14-109; 15-209; K.S.A. 25-21a01(f) and Attorney General Opinion No. 2001-16)
- ***Statement of Substantial Interest.*** No later than 10 days after the filing deadline for office, each candidate must file a statement of substantial interest. If the individual becomes a candidate after the filing deadline, the statement of substantial interest must be filed within 5 days of becoming a candidate. The statement should be filed in the same office where the individual filed the statement declaring candidacy for the local office. The statement may be found on the Government Commission website at ethics.kansas.gov/local-level-conflict-of-interest/ssi-instruction-guide-and-form. (K.S.A. 75-4302a)
- ***Partisan or Non-Partisan.*** City elections in Kansas may be partisan or non-partisan. The vast majority are non-partisan. Check with your city clerk.

- **Expenses.** Candidates in cities of the second or third class who do not intend to spend an aggregate amount of \$1,000 must file an affidavit of such intent with the county election officer not later than the ninth day preceding the primary election. Because this deadline falls on a Sunday, most county election officers will accept this affidavit on Monday, July 28, 2025. However, it is recommended that you confirm this deadline with your county election official. If less than \$1,000 is actually expended, no report needs be filed. If more than \$1,000 is expended, an itemized campaign finance statement must be filed with the county election officer within 30 days of the primary or general election. (K.S.A. 25-904)

In cities of the first class, candidates are governed by K.S.A. 25-4142, *et seq.*, and must file primary reports on July 28, 2025, and general reports on October 27, 2025, and January 12, 2025. (K.S.A. 25-4148)

Additionally, in cities of the first class, a report is required identifying each person who has made one or more contributions of \$300 or more in the period commencing 11 days before a primary or general election at which a local officer is to be elected and ending at 11:59 p.m. on the Wednesday preceding the date of the election. The report shall be filed on or before the close of business on the Thursday preceding the date of the election and shall contain the name and address of the contributor along with the amount and date of the contribution. (K.S.A. 25-4148b)

- **Primary—August 5, 2025.** The primary is held on the first Tuesday in August. Write-in candidates are not allowed in the primary. (K.S.A. 25-2108a)

In cities with wards or districts, if there are more than three qualified candidates for any ward or district, a primary shall be held. The two candidates receiving the greatest number of votes in each district shall move on to the general election. If there are three or fewer qualified candidates for any ward or district, there is no primary election and all of the individuals move on to the general election.

In cities with at-large elections, if there are more than three times the number of candidates as there are positions up for election, there shall be a primary election. Twice the number of candidates as the number of positions up for election and receiving the greatest number of votes shall move on to the general election. If there are not more than three times the number of candidates as there are positions up for election, there is no primary and all of the individuals move on to the general election. (K.S.A. 25-2108a)

The primary statutes are non-uniform and cities may alter these rules by the passage of a charter ordinance. Please consult your city to be clear on its requirements.

- **General Election—November 4, 2025.** City general elections are held the Tuesday following the first Monday in November in odd-numbered years, and in even numbered years, if needed. To determine if this election timetable applies in a specific city, it is important to check with the city clerk. (K.S.A. 25-2102 & 25-2107)
- **Canvass—November 10, 2025.** The county commissioners canvass the votes on the Monday following the election held on a Tuesday, except that the county election officer may move the canvass to any business day not later than 13 days following any election. (K.S.A. 25-3104)
- **Certification.** The county election officer submits a certification of the election to the governing body. (K.S.A. 25-2120 & 25-3110)
- **Term of Office.** The date for beginning a term of office can vary by city. A city can establish a date, following certification of the elections, between December 1 and the second Monday in January. There is no requirement to be sworn in at a meeting, this can be done at any time prior to beginning your term. Be sure and check with the city clerk to determine when your city has officers sworn in. (K.S.A. 25-2120)
- **Swearing In.** Following certification of the election results, city officials must be sworn in prior to officially taking office. (K.S.A. 25-2120)
- **Oath of Office.** An oath of office must be taken and signed by elected officials. The city clerk should maintain a copy of these oaths. (K.S.A. 25-2120 & 54-106)
- **Updating Statement of Substantial Interest.** Between April 15 and April 30, elected officials must update the statement of substantial interest that they filed as a candidate when there is any change during the preceding year. (K.S.A. 75-4302a)
- **Campaigning on Public Property.** No city officer or employee shall use, or authorize the use of public funds, vehicles, machinery, equipment, supplies, or the compensated time of any officer or employee to expressly advocate the nomination, election, or defeat of a clearly identified candidate for state or local office.

Further, no municipality shall allow any person to distribute any document which expressly advocates for the nomination, election, or defeat of a clearly identified candidate within any city building or structure unless each candidate for the office is permitted to do so in the same manner. (K.S.A. 25-4169a)

- **Bonding.** Elected city officials may be required to furnish a bond with surety payable for the use and benefit of the city in a certain amount and conditioned upon the faithful discharge of the official's duties. Where bonds are required either by state statute or by local ordinance, it is standard practice for cities to pay the cost of the bonds. Where a corporate surety bond is required, the city must pay the premium.

- ***Commission Cities of the Second Class.*** The mayor and each commissioner are required to furnish a surety bond of not less than \$5,000. Where the mayor or one of the commissioners is the custodian of money or securities in an amount greater than \$5,000, such custodian shall furnish a surety bond equal to the total amount of such funds in the person's possession. (K.S.A. 14-1304)
- ***Commission Cities of the Third Class.*** The mayor and each commissioner are required to furnish a surety bond of not less than \$2,000. (K.S.A. 15-1404)
- ***All Other Cities.*** There are no statutes requiring bonds for elected officials in other cities. These cities may adopt bond requirements by ordinance.
- ***Blanket Surety Bonds.*** Separate surety bonds are not required if the mayor and commissioners are included within a blanket surety bond covering the officers and employees of the city in an amount not less than required by statute. (K.S.A. 14-1304 & 15-1404)

City Government

What is a Municipality? The word municipality is usually understood to be synonymous with the word city; however, the word is sometimes used in a broader sense to mean a public corporation exercising governmental functions. In this sense, the word municipality may include a city, township, school board, county, or another political subdivision.

The word municipality is frequently defined within a specific legislative enactment. For an example see K.S.A. 12-1218, the general library act, where municipality is defined as a county, township, or incorporated city.

What is a City? Legally there are no towns or villages in Kansas. An area is either incorporated as a city or it is unincorporated territory. Unincorporated areas are sometimes designated by a name, but they are not legally constituted entities, and therefore have none of the legal powers to act as a properly established municipality.

State law provides for three classifications of cities in Kansas. In general, there are no special advantages or disadvantages in being one class of city rather than another. This is particularly true since the adoption of Constitutional Home Rule for all Kansas cities.

Cities are incorporated as cities of the third class and there are statutory procedures established for changing classification as the population of the city grows. Once a city has been proclaimed by the Governor as a city of a certain class, there is no provision for changing the class in the event of a population loss, except in cities of the second class with a population of 1,000 or less. (K.S.A. 14-901)

(1) Cities of the Third Class. When a city incorporates, it becomes a city of the third class. To be eligible for incorporation, there must be either: 1) 250 inhabitants or 250 or more platted lots, each of which is served by water and sewer lines owned by a non-profit corporation, and 50 electors sign a petition for incorporation; or 2) the territory has been designated a national landmark by the Congress of the United States. (K.S.A. 15-115, *et seq.*)

(2) Cities of the Second Class. To become a city of the second class, the city must have a population of more than 2,000 and less than 15,000. A city of more than 2,000 and less than 5,000 may remain a city of the third class until its population reaches 5,000. (K.S.A. 14-101)

(3) Cities of the First Class. Any city with a population of 15,000 or more may elect to become a city of the first class. When a city reaches a population of 25,000, it must certify that fact to the Governor who will then proclaim it to be a city of the first class. (K.S.A. 13-101)

Forms of Government

Forms of City Government. Kansas law authorizes three basic forms of city government. Cities may alter these basic statutory forms of city government using their constitutional home rule powers. In limited circumstances Kansas law also allows for the creation of a unified government through voter approval.

(1) Mayor-Council. The most prevalent form of city government, the mayor-council form, exists in all three classes of cities. It is used by nearly all cities of the third class. In cities of the first and second classes, the mayor and councilmembers are elected by ward, but in cities of the third class governing bodies are elected at-large. A variation of this form is called the modified-mayor-council form in which a mayor and three councilmembers are elected at-large and four councilmembers are elected by districts. The mayor is the chief administrative official in mayor-council cities, although some cities have made provisions for an appointed city administrator.

(2) Commission. The commission form of government has declined in popularity and is now found in only two cities of the third class and eight cities of the second class. In the commission form of government, as established by statute, the mayor and each commissioner is a department head. Under the statutory plan, commission sizes vary from three-to-five members and all members are elected by the city-at-large.

(3) *Commission/Council-Manager.* The third basic form of government provided by state law has three variations: commission-manager, mayor-council manager or council manager. Any class of city can adopt one of these forms using the procedure established in K.S.A. 12-1039 et seq. Regardless of the form used, the city manager administers the affairs of the city under the direction of the governing body which sets the policy for the city. Local variations of these statutory forms include the appointment of city administrators by certain mayor-council and commission cities under their constitutional home rule powers.

(4) *Unified Governments.* In Kansas this refers to the consolidation of a city and county government into a single governing body, designed to streamline administration, reduce duplication of services, and improve efficiency. This structure combines the powers, responsibilities, and resources of both the city and county into one entity, governed by a single elected body. Notable examples include the Unified Government of Wyandotte County and Kansas City, Kansas, which merged in 1997, and the consolidation of Greeley County and Tribune in 2009. Unified governments often retain features of both city and county operations, with flexibility to tailor governance to local needs, while enhancing regional cooperation and service delivery.

Legal Issues

Home Rule

Constitutional Home Rule is the single most important source of a city's legal authority to act. Home Rule is a direct grant of the power of local self-government from the people of Kansas through the state constitution (Art. 12, § 5) to each of the cities of this state. Home Rule is the right of the people of every city (no matter the class) to govern themselves by enacting and administering laws concerning local matters.

Under Home Rule, cities have the power to initiate legislation without the need for authority granted by the state legislature. In addition, if a statute prohibits or restricts a particular activity, but does not make that prohibition or restriction uniformly applicable to all cities, the city can use its Home Rule power to exempt itself by charter ordinance from the provisions of that statute.

Ethics

Municipal office is a public trust created in the interest of, and for the benefit of, the people. Public officers are fiduciaries and trustees of the public interest, and they owe an undivided loyalty to the people they serve.

Conflicts of Interest. Kansas law (K.S.A. 75-4301a, *et seq.*) contains certain requirements in order to achieve a workable, fair balance between public and private interests. It requires:

(1) Statements of Substantial Interest. Candidates running for local office and individuals appointed to fill a vacancy of an elective office must file statements of substantial interest. Deadlines for filing the statement of substantial interest vary based on the circumstance. Individuals who become candidates on or before the filing deadline, must file the statement within 10 days after the filing deadline. Individuals who become candidates after the filing deadline, must file the statement within five days of becoming a candidate. Individuals appointed to fill a vacancy of an elective office on or before April 30th of a calendar year, must file a statement between April 15th and April 30th of that year. Individuals appointed to fill a vacancy in an elective office after April 30th of a calendar year, must file a statement within 15 days of being appointed. The statement of substantial interest should be filed in the same office where the individual would file the statement declaring candidacy for the local office. The statement must be amended between April 15th and April 30th if the individual's interests changed during the preceding year. The statement may be found on the Kansas Governmental Ethics Commission website at ethics.kansas.gov/local-level-conflict-of-interest/ssi-instruction-guide-and-form. (K.S.A. 75-4302a)

(2) When Abstention Required. Local officials are required to abstain from making or participating in the making of any contract with any business in which the official is employed or has a substantial interest except when: (a) the contract was let after competitive bidding has been advertised by published notice; or (b) the contract is for property or services for which the price or rate is fixed by law. (K.S.A. 75-4304)

(3) Penalties. Failure to file a general or specific statement of substantial interest is a class B misdemeanor (up to 6 months imprisonment and/or fine of up to \$1,000). Violation of the law prohibiting participation in making of contracts is a class B misdemeanor and may result in forfeiture of office. Failure to file a specific statement of interest is also a class B misdemeanor. (K.S.A. 75-4306)

Incompatible Offices. Offices are considered to be incompatible when performance of the duties of one office in some way interferes with duties of the other office. That is, there is such an inherent inconsistency in the functions and duties of the two offices as to make it difficult for one person to honestly and impartially execute the duties of both offices. Once an incompatibility is found, the law declares that acceptance of the second office creates an automatic resignation from the first office held. (K.S.A. 25-123)

Governing body members of a city cannot be employees of the city.

Personnel Management

Personnel management is a cornerstone of effective municipal governance, ensuring that a city operates efficiently while meeting the needs of its community. It encompasses the recruitment, training, and retention of skilled employees, fostering a workforce that aligns with the municipality's goals and values. Moreover, it cultivates a positive organizational culture, encouraging collaboration, innovation, and responsiveness among employees. By prioritizing personnel management, municipalities can deliver high-quality services, build public trust, and adapt to evolving community challenges.

Public Funds

Some understanding of basic municipal financial procedures is essential to effective governing body service. Elected officials as stewards of public funds, bear the responsibility to ensure their allocation and expenditure align with the public interest, legal requirements, and principles of accountability and transparency. This includes adhering to budgetary constraints, prioritizing initiatives that benefit the community, and avoiding misuse or mismanagement.

Because it is the duty of the governing body to prepare and adopt a budget in the summer for the following calendar year, budget preparation is one of the most important tasks governing body members must undertake. The preparation is completed in June and July.

Kansas Open Meetings Act (KOMA)

Since 1972, Kansas has maintained an open meetings act which sets out requirements that must be followed by all political subdivisions and by all entities expending public funds. (K.S.A. 75-4317, *et seq.*) The Kansas Open Meetings Act requires that all meetings of entities subject to KOMA be held in open session, except for executive sessions. The public expects, and demands, a certain degree of openness in the management and conduct of public business, and KOMA is designed to help meet that goal. All elected officials bear an important responsibility in ensuring both the specific requirements and the intent of KOMA are met.

About the League

The League of Kansas Municipalities is a membership association that advocates on behalf of cities, offers training and guidance to city appointed and elected officials, and has a clear purpose of strengthening Kansas communities. Since 1910, the League has been a resource for cities across Kansas and has acted as a body to share ideas, facilitate communication between members, and provide information on best practices in city operations.

The League has over 550 member cities with populations from single-digit to over 400,000. The League is governed by members through a governing body of elected officials and city-appointed staff.

Mission Statement. The mission of the League is to serve as the convener, advocate, and trusted voice for Kansas local governments.

The League Advocates for Cities. The League fields a legislative staff to represent cities at the statehouse in Topeka and, when appropriate, in Washington, D.C. The League promotes Home Rule, effective public policy, and the value of local control.

The League Offers Guidance. Through guidance on new laws and administrative rules, research activities, publications, and contract services, the League provides insight and guidance to act as a resource for cities.

The League Provides Training and Education. The League provides training and education for elected city officials and city staff through conferences, the Municipal Training Institute, webinars, and workshops.

The League Keeps Cities Informed. The League produces a multitude of publications, provides numerous webinars on hot topics, and answers thousands of legal calls each year for cities to provide up-to-date information and keep members aware of the changing municipal environment.

THE VALUE OF KANSAS CITIES

BY THE NUMBERS:

<2%*

Cities comprise less than 2% of the land area in Kansas.

84%*

84% of the Kansas population live in cities.

57%*

57% of cities have a population of 500 or less.

90%*

90% of sales taxes are generated in Kansas cities.

CITIES PROVIDE SERVICES SUCH AS:



Public Safety



Safe Streets & Sidewalks



Utilities & Clean Water



Parks & Recreation



Libraries & Community Buildings

84%

of workers age 16 and over live in a city

Cities are growing at a faster rate than the state's overall population:



Population Growth in Cities

3.9%

Between 2010-2020



Population Growth in the State

2.9%

Between 2010-2020

Cities are home to:

83%

of the residential property in Kansas

87%

of commercial and residential property in Kansas

89%

of not-for-profit property in Kansas



LEAGUE
OF KANSAS MUNICIPALITIES

*Source: 2020 Decennial Census, U.S. Census Bureau

Cities are where Kansas' cultural, higher education, and health care facilities are located:



All 324 Public Libraries

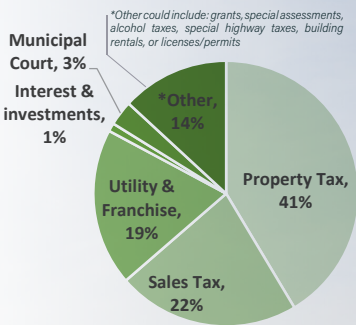


All 32 Kansas Board of Regents' Universities & Colleges

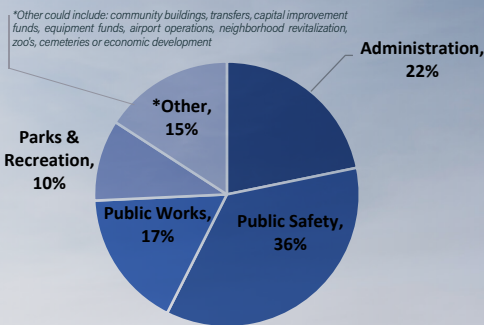


All 123 Hospitals

MUNICIPAL REVENUES



MUNICIPAL EXPENDITURES

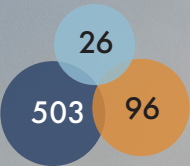


Note: Percentages are calculated on an average of nearly 50 cities comprised of Cities of the First, Second, and Third Classes. Some smaller cities include all municipal departments and building maintenance under General Government and have been included in Administration for the purposes of this analysis

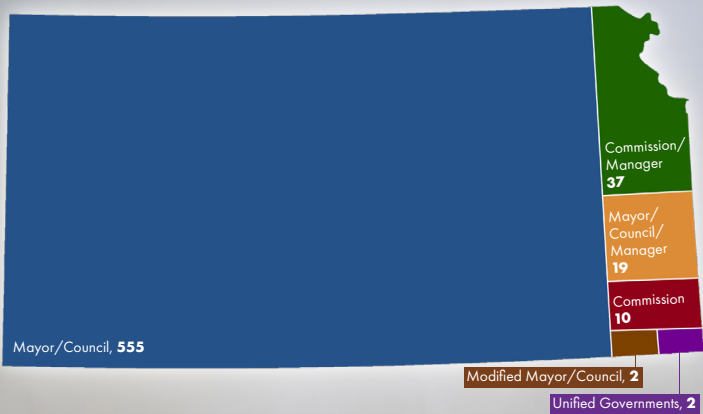
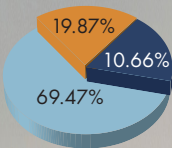
CLASS OF CITY

- Cities of the First Class
- Cities of the Second Class
- Cities of the Third Class

NUMBER OF CITIES



PERCENT OF TOTAL CITY POPULATION



Sources:
Kansas Department of Administration, 2020 Budget Estimates
Kansas Statistical Abstract, Institute for Policy & Social Research, The University of Kansas, 2021

Training Opportunities

Once elected to office, we encourage you to seek out training opportunities offered by the League. Attending these events will connect you to other local government officials and will provide valuable networking opportunities, as well as provide tools to help you succeed in office.

City Leaders Academy April 11-12, 2025 | Lawrence

Attending CLA is the first step new officials should take toward success in public office. This two-day event is open to both newly elected officials and experienced public servants and includes a selection of workshops and general sessions designed to provide insight into local government issues, as well as provide useful strategies to take back to your community. Re-elected officials or longer-term appointed officials will also value the up-to-date information on municipal operations and networking opportunities this conference offers. All participants will receive the *Governing Body Handbook*. Visit www.lkm.org for the latest information pertaining on training.

League Annual Conference

The League Annual Conference is the premier training event for elected and appointed officials. Join hundreds of city officials for specialized workshops, roundtable discussions, general sessions, and valuable networking, plus visit with nearly 100 vendors offering the latest products and services for your city. The conference also includes the Public Service Awards Breakfast, recognizing public servants who have given faithful, continuous service to their city for 40 or more years. The Annual Conference is a three-day event taking place in October each year. Visit www.lkm.org/AnnualConference for the most up-to-date information.





MUNICIPAL TRAINING INSTITUTE

A Program of The League

The **Municipal Training Institute** is a continuing education program designed for and is open to both elected and appointed city officials. The program offers courses in cities across the state. The purpose of the Institute is to provide an interactive curriculum of specialized instruction that will develop the knowledge and enhance the leadership abilities of those who serve the cities of Kansas. Municipal Training Institute curriculum focuses on a new topic nearly each month, and both in-person and online training are available.

There are three levels of achievement in the Institute. Full descriptions of the requirements for each of the levels can be found on www.lkm.org/MTILevels.

For more information about the League's conferences and other events, visit www.lkm.org/Conferences.



THE
LEAGUE
OF KANSAS MUNICIPALITIES

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