



UPDATE ON COUNTY COMMISSIONER FORM OF GOVERNMENT

DESCRIPTION

Structure and responsibilities of the commissioner form of government in Jefferson County, checks and balances, power of the office, and transparency.

BACKGROUND

When LWV/Jeffco was formed in 1953, a major concern was how county government would function in a county that was mostly unincorporated. A 1956-57 study resulted in consensus to support a state constitutional amendment to permit county home rule (Article XIV, Sec 16 passed in 1970). In 1976, League voted to support the election of five commissioners, as permitted by article XX of the state constitution, from five districts elected at large. A subsequent ballot proposal failed. Although League dropped the position in 1980, a 1991 restudy resulted in support of five commissioners elected by district. Again the subsequent ballot proposal failed.

In 2006, LWV/Jeffco studied and evaluated alternative governance structures for Jefferson County. The restudy focused on changing the county to structural home rule and increasing the number of commissioners. The local membership reached consensus on increasing the number of county commissioners from three to five members, but did not reach clear agreement on how commissioners should be elected.

This EMM updates much of the 2006 EMM information without addressing the number of commissioners. New material deals with transparency, citizen involvement, and communication.

CURRENT JEFFERSON COUNTY STATUS

Population and Area

Total population of Jefferson County as of July 1, 2009:	545,290
Population of Incorporated Jefferson County:	354,850
Population of Unincorporated Jefferson County:	190,440

Total Area of Jefferson County:	773 sq. mi.
Incorporated:	120 sq. mi. (15.5%)
Unincorporated:	653 sq. mi. (84.5%)

The Jefferson County Demographics chart (page 6) presents interesting population detail.

GOVERNMENT STRUCTURE AND RESPONSIBILITIES

State of Colorado County Structure

Traditionally counties have been considered to be a subdivision of state government, existing to administer state programs at a local level.

Although counties were originally designed to serve rural areas primarily, county boundaries now include both urban and rural areas. Consequently, county government in Colorado is responsible for performing functions in all areas of the county, both urban and rural.

As an administrative branch of government, counties do not have a court system of their own. They possess no inherent legislative powers and may exercise only those delegated to them by the General Assembly.



The basic organizational structure of all Colorado counties is the same, except for the home rule counties (Pitkin and Weld) and the City and County of Denver and Broomfield City and County. Broomfield and Denver are organized under a charter pursuant to article XX of the Colorado Constitution. Pitkin and Weld counties are organized pursuant to article XIV, section 16, of the Colorado Constitution and C.R.S. 30-11-501, et seq., which allow voters of a county to adopt a home rule charter establishing the organization and structure of county government and pursuant to C.R.S 30-35-101, et seq., which further implement constitutional provisions regarding home rule.

Home rule counties are required to provide all mandatory programs, services and facilities required by state law. A home rule county is permitted to provide such "permissive" programs, services and facilities, as may be authorized by state law. In this sense, home rule counties enjoy no more prerogatives than statutory counties.

Article XIV of the Colorado Constitution also establishes the organization and structure of non-home rule counties.

Governance

Jefferson County serves as both an administrative arm of the state government and as a unit of local government. Overseeing Jefferson County are three county commissioners. Each commissioner is elected by county residents and serves a four-year term. Commissioners serve as policy makers for land use, roads and bridges, parks and libraries, public protection, public assistance, health and intergovernmental services. The attached chart shows the county organizational structure.

Board of County Commissioners (BCC)

➤ *Structure:*

- Three members
- Elected at-large for four year staggered terms
- Each represents the entire county from the district in which they reside

➤ *Commissioners:*

Faye Griffith, District 1: She was elected in November 2008 and was sworn in on January 13, 2009. Boards and Commissions she is currently serving on:

- Chair of the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners
- Chair of the Jefferson County Law Enforcement Authority Board
- Urban Drainage and Flood Control District Board
- Head Start Policy Council
- Rocky Flats Stewardship Council
- Criminal Justice Strategic Planning Committee
- Child and Youth Leadership Commission
- E-911 Board
- Noxious Weed Advisory Board
- Alternate on the Boundary Control Commission and the Jefferson Economic Council.

John Odom, District 2: He was appointed to fill the unexpired term of District 2 Commissioner seat and took the oath of office on March 2, 2011. Boards and Commissions he is currently serving on:

- Clean Launch Board of Directors
- Community Corrections Board
- Jefferson Center for Mental Health Board
- Noxious Weed Advisory Board
- Alternate on the Boundary Control Commission, the Criminal Justice Strategic Planning Committee, the Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG), the Jefferson Economic Council, and the Jefferson Parkway Public Highway Authority Board.



Donald Rosier, District 3: He was elected in November 2010 and was sworn in on January 11, 2011. Boards and Commissions he is currently serving on:

- Chair Pro Tem for the Jefferson County Board of Commissioners
- Chair Jefferson County Law Enforcement Authority Board
- Boundary Control Commission
- Denver Regional Council of Governments (DRCOG)
- Jefferson Economic Council
- Jefferson Parkway Public Highway Authority Board
- Noxious Weed Advisory Board
- West Corridor Contingency Committee
- Alternate on the Jefferson County Head Start Policy Council.

CHECKS AND BALANCES

Jefferson County is governed as a “statutory” county established and regulated by state laws. At this time, most news media, except for the *Columbine Courier*, do not follow county government actions, so citizens have no easy way to be informed independently on issues or important policy decisions or actions.

TRANSPARENCY

Jeffco began a transparency initiative in 2008. To support it, the county established *Transparent Jeffco*, accessible from the county website, <http://jeffco.us>. The county has established four key accountability goals to achieve an open government. Currently, the website provides financial information, allowing citizens access to procurement, payment, contracts, and employee salary data.

CITIZEN INVOLVEMENT

Boards & Commissions

The Board of County Commissioners appoints more than 300 citizens to serve on boards and commissions. Board members study issues in-depth, oversee and make recommendations regarding specific, county functions and assist in governing Jefferson County. Applications for most open positions are taken in February. Members are appointed in March for staggered terms. The following is a list of established boards and commissions:

- Board of Adjustment
- Board of Health
- Community Development Advisory Board
- Community Service Advisory Board
- County Cultural Council
- CSU Extension Advisory Board
- Developmental Disabilities Resource Center
- Developmental Disabilities Resource Center
- Fair Advisory Board
- Historical Commission
- Jefferson Center for Mental Health Board
- Library Board
- Open Space Advisory Committee
- Planning Commission
- Scientific and Cultural Facilities District
- Tri-County Workforce Investment Board

The Library Board and the Mental Health Board oversee the management of their respective departments and choose their executive directors, unlike the other boards and commissions which are only advisory to the county commissioners. (http://co.jefferson.co.us/bcc/bcc_T25_R6.htm)



BCC Meetings

The county commission holds meetings on Tuesdays at 8AM at the Jefferson County Administration Building. These meetings are open to citizens, who may attend or view them online.

COMMUNICATION

Communication to citizens

Jeffco's communication is online only. Citizens may also sign up for a monthly electronic newsletter. However, it tends to highlight commissioner accomplishments without much in depth information. Additionally, a publication called " BCC Actions," accessible from the BCC web page, covers the hearings and staff briefings of the Jefferson County Board of County Commissioners. This summary gives employees and citizens an overview of these meetings.

Citizens may communicate to the county on a web page called "Citizen Connection." They may take a survey, join a blog, provide feedback, and view survey data from 2010. The quick survey has only four questions designed to give the county feedback on what is important to citizens.

Ways to Raise Issues

Citizens have two ways of raising issues in person. First, they may present issues at the weekly BCC meetings. However, they may speak for only three minutes, and the commissioners provide no responses to issues raised. Second, they can schedule a one-on-one meeting with a commissioner by contacting the Commissioner Coordinator, Linda Fine.

Currently, Jeffco does not have an issue tracking system like some government entities. Arvada citizens can identify concerns through web-based "Ask Arvada;" the concerns are routed to the appropriate department, and system tracking assures citizens receive responses. Jeffco Public Information official, Kathryn Heider, indicated Jeffco is exploring that type of system, but had no information as to when one might be implemented.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

What involvement should citizens have in Jefferson County government?

What questions would you like to ask the county commissioners based on this material or other issues presented this year, (for example, financing, county libraries)?

SOURCES

Program and History, League of Women Voters® of Jefferson County
LWV Jeffco Every Member Material, Alternative Governance Structures for Jefferson County, March 2006
Jefferson County website, <http://jeffco.us>
Kathryn Heider, Public Information official

COMMITTEE MEMBERS

Ann Herbert, Sue Marinelli, Elaine Olson, Linda Porter, Nancy Sipkin and Ruth Wells