



Florida League of Cities

2026 ANNUAL CONFERENCE

Cities 101

With Emily Colón and Chris Holley





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Overview



Florida: The Big Picture, Home Rule, Charters, City Structure



Fundamentals of Municipal Government: Forms of Government, City Services, Policy Making, Strategic Planning, Finance



Common City Challenges



Resources and Next Steps

Florida: The Big Picture

- ▶ Third-largest state by population (23.3 million in 2025) – California and Texas have larger populations
- ▶ Just over half of the state's population lives within a municipality
- ▶ 67 counties, 67 school districts, 1,800+ special districts
 - ▶ Cities and counties are “general-purpose” local governments
 - ▶ Special and school districts are “special-purpose”

Florida: Types of Local Government

- ▶ School District: Special-purpose local government with no Home Rule authority (67 total)
- ▶ Special Districts: Special-purpose local government with no Home Rule authority (ex. water management district)
 - ▶ Independent: about 1,200
 - ▶ Dependent: about 600
- ▶ County: General-purpose local government with Home Rule authority; often referred to as an 'arm-of-the-state' or 'sub-state' (67 total)
- ▶ Municipality: Optional level general-purpose local government with Home Rule authority; often referred to as a city, town, or village (411 total)

Florida's Cities

City, Town, or Village

- ▶ Independent, public corporations
- ▶ No legal difference in aesthetic name

Incorporated or Unincorporated

- ▶ Only two choices
- ▶ Always within a county

Elected Body

- ▶ Council or commission
- ▶ Sizes from three to 19 members – five is most common
- ▶ Part-time and nonpartisan
- ▶ Every city has a charter

Florida's Cities



411 cities, towns,
and villages



Populations range
from 14 to 1,000,00+

58%

Have populations
under 10,000

6,342

Median
population

Home Rule



Home rule powers state that any city/county can adopt laws as long as they don't conflict with state law.



Citizens put home rule powers in the Florida Constitution in 1968, reversing Dillon's Rule.



The Florida Legislature recognized it and passed the Home Rule Powers Act in 1973.

Florida's Municipalities In Law

- ▶ **Florida Constitution:** Article VIII, Section 2: establishment of a city as an optional level; empowered as governmental, proprietary, and corporate powers
- ▶ **Municipal Charter:** Broad framework of municipal government; specifics are in the ordinances
- ▶ **Municipal Ordinances:** Law issued by a local government
- ▶ **Municipal Resolutions:** Opinions in time or commemorative
- ▶ **Municipal Policies:** Administrative code usually adopted by ordinance

Charter Elements



Legal description of city, town, or village



Number of seats, terms, and qualifications



Fiduciary responsibilities



Description of legislative body: must be elected



Chain of command and form of government



Other contents

How Florida City Charters Vary

- ▶ Council sizes: Range from three to 19 seats, five being the most common
- ▶ Terms: Two, three, or four years, either staggered or all at once
- ▶ Term limits: Less than half of cities
- ▶ Elected body breakout: At-large, single-member, seated, mixed
- ▶ Mayor: Directly elected, rotated, or elected from within the council
- ▶ Titles: Council, commission, councilor, alderman, mayor, mayor pro-tem, etc.

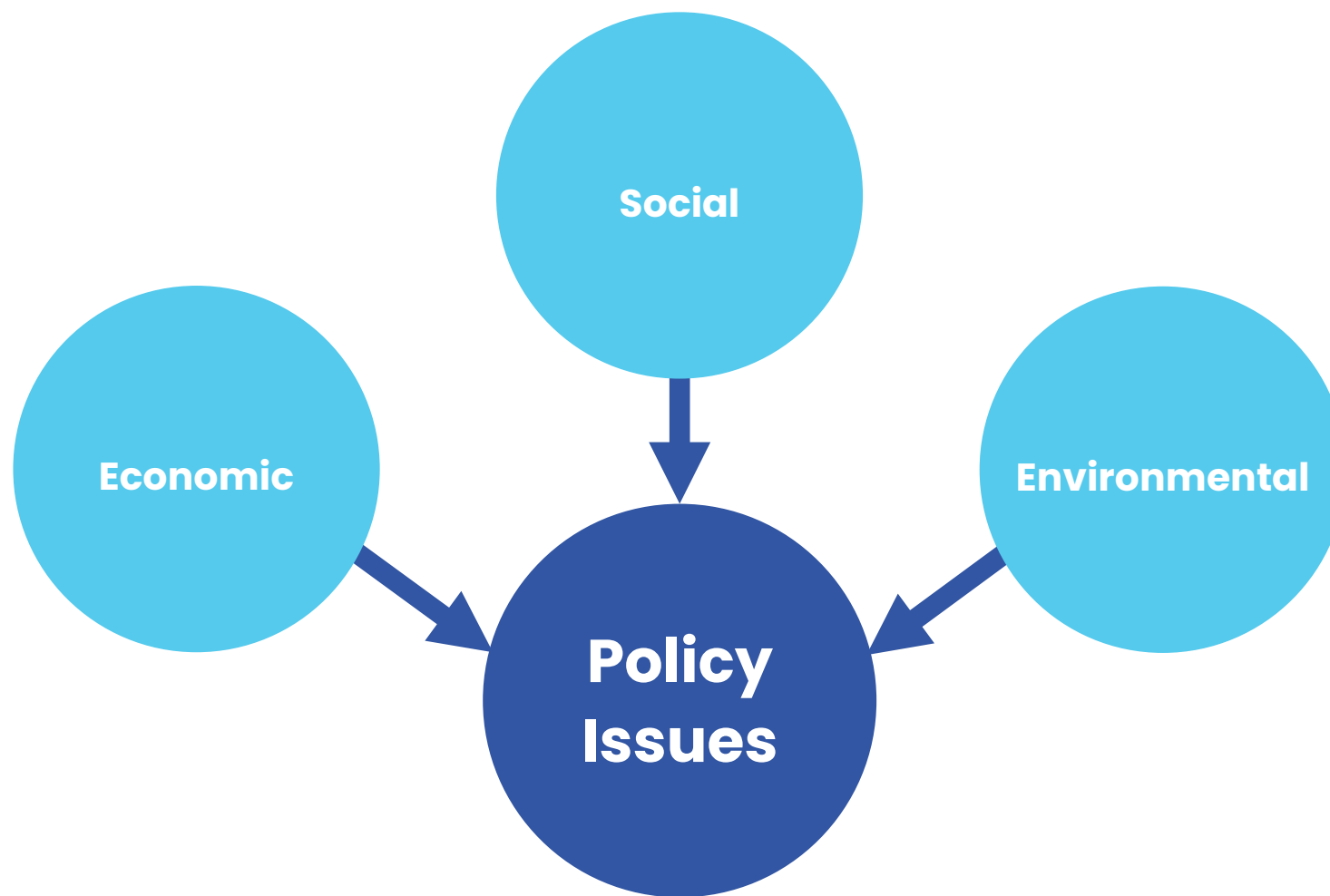
Forms Of Government

- ▶ **Council-Weak Mayor:** Everything is under the council collectively
- ▶ **Council-Strong Mayor:** The Mayor is the administrator and usually does not vote with the council
- ▶ **Council-Manager:** The council hires a professional administrator for day-to-day administration, the most prevalent kind
- ▶ **Commission:** Each official runs departments, largely disappearing from the United States
- ▶ **Hybrid:** A mix of the four types
- ▶ **Why the form matters:** Each city needs a structure and chain of command that works for that city

Municipal Services

- ▶ Land-use planning, code enforcement, zoning, police, fire, EMS, solid waste collection, water, wastewater, reuse water, stormwater, building inspection, natural gas, electric, mass transit, parks & rec, historic district, museum, public works, airport, port, marina, cemeteries, library, CRA, housing authority, animal control
- ▶ Other services?





Importance Of Strategic Planning



Vision and
Action



Update
Goals

Fiscal Policies

- ▶ Annual and Capital Budgets
- ▶ Fiscal Policies on Investments, Expenditure Procedures, Debt
- ▶ Balancing Act of Demands

City Fiscal Structures

- ▶ Property tax is granted through the Constitution
- ▶ Utility tax, business license tax, and sharing in state taxes through the Legislature
- ▶ About half of each city budget (50%) is fees, charges for services
- ▶ No fiscal Home Rule

Common City Challenges

- ▶ Balancing demands with resources
- ▶ “Doing more with less”
- ▶ Preserving home rule from preemptions and mandates
- ▶ Intergovernmental issues
- ▶ Financing outdated infrastructure; expanding for greater capacity



***“Remember, when you are dealing
with people, you are not dealing
with creatures of logic, but
creatures of emotion.”***

– Dale Carnegie

Resources

- ▶ Florida League of Cities
 - ▶ FLC 101 Workshop: Up next at 2:15 p.m.
 - ▶ Institute for Elected Municipal Officials
 - ▶ Florida Municipal Officials Manual
- ▶ Local/Regional Leagues
 - ▶ 19 across the state
- ▶ Staff: Associations for professionals
 - ▶ Managers, Finance Directors, Clerks, etc.



*Scan for the Newly Elected
Officials webpage*



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Thank you for attending the

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