

Decoding Local Government

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Types of Local Governments in Massachusetts

MA has two main forms of municipal governments

1. City

- ▶ Tend to be larger communities
- ▶ Populations: 12,488 (Palmer) – 675,647 (Boston)

2. Town

- ▶ Tend to be smaller communities
- ▶ Populations: 70 (Gosnold) – 63,191 (Brookline)

Both have executive and legislative branches

The Executive Branch

City Government: Mayor

- ▶ One individual

Town Government: Select Board

- ▶ A Board, typically with 3–5 members

The Legislative Branch

City Government: City Council, Board of Aldermen, etc

Town Government: Town Meeting

- ▶ Representative Town Meeting: elected representatives
- ▶ Open Town Meeting: any registered voter

Town meetings are a form of direct democracy, even though only a small percentage of voters participate (and non-voters are not eligible to participate).

Other bodies

Prominent Boards and Committees in Local Governments:

- ▶ Planning Board
- ▶ Board of Assessors
- ▶ Conservation Commission
- ▶ Zoning Board of Appeals
- ▶ Housing Authority Board
- ▶ Historical Districts Commission

Most communities have a wide range of issue-specific boards.

Open Meeting Law

(Nearly) All city and town bodies are subject to open meeting laws.

- ▶ Boards and committees must post agendas, with a list of topics to be discussed.
- ▶ Meeting minutes must be posted in a timely fashion

These materials are typically available from city and town websites. Let's go and find some.