

## A County Commissioner's Balancing Act

### Overview

In this group activity, students will assume the roles of County Commissioners and utilize advocacy, negotiation, and compromise to create a county budget.

### Grades

9-12

### Essential Questions:

- What is a county commissioner, what duties does a commissioner perform, and how great of an impact do commissioners have at the local level?
- How difficult is consensus building when different parties have conflicting beliefs and diverse needs?
- What is the “common good,” and what impact should it have upon elected officials’ decision making?
- Is it appropriate for real public officials to be influenced by personal experiences or needs when making decisions? Why or why not?
- Why are the decisions made by County Commissioners relevant to each of us?

### Materials:

- *Commissioner Instructions and Roles*, handouts attached
- Diddie County Government Budget, handout attached
- County Commissioner or local government official to serve as a resource person (optional)\*
  - Contact the local government official of your choice 2-4 weeks in advance of this lesson to explain the activity and to ask for assistance in coaching students during their budget meeting (it is important this person does not come to give a “speech”, but rather is prepared to engage with the students as they work on their county budgets and participate in dialogue with the class). After making an initial contact, follow up with an e-mail including the date, time, location, parking arrangements, school procedures for guests, and a complete set of materials for the activity. It is highly recommended to invite a resource person with legal knowledge to your classroom when doing this activity, not only provide valued assistance, but also to give your students a chance to interact with and learn from a local government official.
- Text book or supplemental reading on County Governments (i.e. Professor Gordon Whitaker’s Local Government in North Carolina)
  - A free copy of the 4<sup>th</sup> Edition of *Local Government in North Carolina* is available here, as of October 2016: <https://www.sog.unc.edu/publications/books/local-government-north-carolina-fourth-edition-2012-0>
- Board of County Commissioners, informational handout attached

### Duration

1 block period

### Procedure

1. Warm Up: Place students into groups of five and give them the following assignment:
  - Imagine your county has received 1 million dollars to spend, with the only stipulation being that it must benefit the “common good”. As a group, take 5 minutes to brainstorm all of the effective ways the money could be spent to improve life in your community.

2. After students have created substantial lists, tell them:
  - Unfortunately, a million bucks, when spread county wide, doesn't always go very far. Thus, from your list, you need to choose the one idea that you think would make the biggest impact in your community. You have 3 minutes to discuss and decide. Be prepared to share your idea with the rest of class.
  
3. Once students have shared, explain that where they live, many decisions such as the one just discussed are decided by their county's **Board of Commissioners**. Remind students that in North Carolina, county voters elect a board of county commissioners, and that this right was given to North Carolina residents in the **1868 Constitution**. Ask students:
  - What are the roles and responsibilities of County Commissioners? (*responsible for county government, set local property tax rate, adopts county budget, passes ordinances, resolutions, and orders to establish county policies; appoints a clerk to keep official records of meetings and decisions; provides information to citizens about the county; etc.*)
  - Why are County Commissioners important to each of us? (*Explain that since part of a commissioner's responsibility is to monitor the county's finances and budget, county commissioners often struggle with figuring out where money is most needed, and where it might make the most effective impact. Ask students to infer what difficulties this might present.*)
  
4. Explain to students that they to learn about the roles of County Commissioners, they will be participating in a County Commissioner's Budget session, and that while each commissioner has individual views on the budget, the following is common information (project the following as you explain):
  - Each of you will assume the role of a County Commissioner and hold a meeting regarding your counties budget.
  - The county has a total budget of \$23,900,000 but only has \$1 million in new revenues to meet pressing needs that have not previously been addressed.
  - If you and the other Commissioners decide that you need more than \$24,900,000 for the total budget, then you all will have to generate the revenue (such as by raising property taxes).
  - The current property tax rate is 50 cents. Assume that each one-cent increase in property tax will result in an additional \$750,000 in revenue; however, an increase in property taxes may jeopardize your chances of being re-elected.
  - Regardless, if you do not increase the budget, certain needs may not be met. The budget must include line items for the following:
    - a. **Public Schools:** school buildings, buses and teacher pay supplements
    - b. **Health/Mental Health:** immunizations, restaurant inspections, animal shelter, alcohol/drug counseling, etc.
    - c. **Social Services:** child adoption/foster care, family counseling, food stamps, emergency housing, aging services, etc.
    - d. **Environment/Waste Management:** waste disposal, recycling, stream monitoring, etc.
    - e. **Facilities:** jails, courts, libraries, landfill, etc.
  - Once you receive your Commissioner role, study it and write down notes regarding your desires and goals for the meeting. Consider what tactics and skills you will use to convince other Commissioners to see things your way.
  
5. Review your class expectations of group work, keeping students in their groups of five. Hand out the attached five *Commissioner Instructions and Roles*, and instruct students to spend 5 minutes reviewing their commissioner's views before they attend the budget session. Also hand out the *Diddie County Government Budget* (attached) to each commissioner for review.
  
6. As students read their roles, remind them to write down notes regarding what they will say at the meeting to advocate for their beliefs. Tell students to also consider what skills they will use to reach their

Commissioner's desires and goals. While students are working individually, the teacher may wish to check in with students playing Commissioner #1 and further clarify his/her role as Chair of the Board.

7. After students have completed their role study, project and explain the following task for the County Commissioners Meeting:

- Assuming the role given to you, you will now begin a meeting with fellow County Commissioners.
- Once the Chairman of the Board starts the meeting, you will share a summary of your views on how the current 2012 budget should be amended for the year 2013.
- Your group needs to discuss and come up with a final budget for 2013 that you can all agree on. Remember, if you all decide you need more than 1 million to meet your county's needs, you must determine a way to create that revenue.
- Be prepared to report back to class with your budget in 20-30 minutes. Remember your group work expectations and good luck!

8. Teachers should allow for around 20 minutes to hold the meetings, or enough time to illustrate the difficulties involved. Give time warnings to the groups of commissioners as they work. Upon finishing, ask groups to report back and discuss:

- Was it hard for your group to reach a decision? Why or why not?
- Summarize your groups discussion. During the discussion, did you start out advocating for the funding issues that reflected your personal interests? If so, did you continue to do this or did others convince that their needs were also important? If so, what techniques and ideas convinced you?
- Compare and contrast this exercise to a real county budget hearing? How would they differ or be similar?
- What factors influence commissioners in the decisions they make?
- How might a commissioner decide what is best for the county as a whole (the "common good")?
- Is it appropriate for real public officials to be influenced by personal experiences or needs when making decisions? Why or why not? How is this different from a commissioner being influenced by the experiences or needs of other commissioners? Of neighbors or friends? Of various citizens around the county?
- Do you know of examples where a public official has made an unpopular decision? If so, do you think they were trying to do the right thing or do you think that they had other motivations?
- Even when trying to make the best decision for the county, are commissioners likely to satisfy everyone in the county with that decision? Why or why not?
- Would you want to be a county or city official who makes these kinds of decisions? Why or why not?
- Why is it important for citizens of a county to participate in the election process of their County Commissioners? Why is it important to be aware of the decisions their elected Commissioners are making?
- How is the work of County Commissioners relevant to each of us?

9. Clarify with students that while county budgets vary, the breakdown of expenditures is fairly similar:

- Education: 29% - Public-school education (K-12)
- Human Services: 28% - Medicaid, foster care, hospitals, social services, public health, mental health, job training, child support, housing, transportation
- Public Safety: 13% - Sheriff's office, EMS, Fire
- Other: 13% - Parks and recreation, solid waste, libraries
- Debt: 9% - Bonds
- General: 8% - Register of Deeds, elections, building maintenance, tax administration, legal services, salaries and wages

10. Assign a reading on county government, such as Chapter 3 of Whitaker's Local Government in North Carolina. You may also use the attached summary, *The Board of County Commissioners*. Instruct students to write a page on "A Day in My Life as Commissioner <insert name>" for homework. Students should again assume the role of a county commissioner and describe what they do in a day using facts from the information they read.

#### **Culminating Activities/Assessments**

- Assign students to assume the role of a journalist and write a newspaper article summarizing the budget meeting.
- Have students further examine government revenue and create bar graphs reflecting city & county expenditures; see the lesson at:
- Attend a County Commissioner's meeting or watch a recording of one.

**A Commissioner's Balancing Act**  
**Instructions for Commissioner #1 ~ CHAIR**

**A. Read the following instructions:**

You are a County Commissioner. You and your fellow Commissioners must prepare a budget for your county of Diddie.

The county has a total budget of \$20,000,000 but only has \$1 million in new revenues. If you and the other Commissioners decide that you need more than \$21,000,000 million for the total budget, then you all will have to find a way to generate the money, such as by raising property taxes. The current property tax rate is 50 cents (per \$100 of property value), and increasing the property tax by one-cent would result in an additional \$750,000 in revenue. However, an increase in property taxes could anger citizens and make them not re-elect you.

The budget must include line items for the following:

- **Public Schools** - school buildings, buses and teacher pay supplements
- **Health/Mental Health** - immunizations, restaurant inspections, animal shelter, alcohol/drug counseling, etc.
- **Social Services** - child adoption/foster care, family counseling, food stamps, emergency housing, aging services, etc.
- **Environment/Waste Management** - waste disposal, recycling, stream monitoring, etc.
- **Facilities** - jails, courts, libraries, landfill, etc.

**B. Read the information below about yourself, and determine how you will convince your fellow commissioners to allocate the funds that you request:**

**Commissioner # 1:**

You were elected as the "education commissioner," since you are always arguing that the county budget must include plenty of money for local schools. Right now, you know that there are several schools that need upgraded. Several local schools don't even have wheelchair ramps and your daughter is wheelchair-bound! She often tells you of the humiliation and embarrassment this causes her. You feel like the community, as well as your fellow Commissioners, need to understand that above all else, schools need money first. To improve the local school buildings, the County must allocate a total of **\$6 million to the public schools**. The allocation of \$6 million includes \$4.5 million to maintain existing services and \$1.5 million in new revenue to upgrade all schools.

You are up for re-election this year and know that if the increased allocation to the schools leads to a tax increase, you may not get re-elected. Even still, you are passionate that the schools get the money they need.

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As the **Chair of the Board**, you will lead this budgetary meeting. When you begin the meeting, ask one of your fellow commissioners to take notes (particularly noting how each commissioner wants to allocate funds). Ask each commissioner to begin by sharing his/her views on the budget and how the money should be allocated. Share your own views last, and then open the floor for discussion.

As the chair, try to facilitate compromise and collaboration among the Commissioners. You may need to point out that the total money requested by all Commissioners far exceeds the revenue available, so you all must either find a way to compromise or find a way to raise additional revenue.

**C. Take notes on the back of this page. List the various things you will say to fellow Commissioners to convince them to allocate \$6 million to the schools:**

**A Commissioner's Balancing Act  
Instructions for Commissioner #2**

**A. Read the following instructions:**

You are a County Commissioner. You and your fellow Commissioners must prepare a budget for your county of Diddie.

The county has a total budget of \$20,000,000 but only has \$1 million in new revenues. If you and the other Commissioners decide that you need more than \$21,000,000 million for the total budget, then you all will have to find a way to generate the money, such as by raising property taxes. The current property tax rate is 50 cents (per \$100 of property value), and increasing the property tax by one-cent would result in an additional \$750,000 in revenue. However, an increase in property taxes could anger citizens and make them not re-elect you.

The budget must include line items for the following:

- **Public Schools** - school buildings, buses and teacher pay supplements
- **Health/Mental Health** - immunizations, restaurant inspections, animal shelter, alcohol/drug counseling, etc.
- **Social Services** - child adoption/foster care, family counseling, food stamps, emergency housing, aging services, etc.
- **Environment/Waste Management** - waste disposal, recycling, stream monitoring, etc.
- **Facilities** - jails, courts, libraries, landfill, etc.

**B. Read the information below about yourself, and determine how you will convince your fellow commissioners to allocate the funds that you request:**

**Commissioner #2:**

Before being elected as a County Commissioner, you and your spouse adopted a child. Through this experience of adoption, you learned of numerous problems in the foster-care system. Employees in the Social Services/Foster-Care system are overworked, and many of the buildings for Social Services are old and terrible. Issues such as this can cause the system to fail, and it is the innocent children who suffer...children who are waiting and hoping for parents to adopt them.

Since adopting your son, you have been a supporter of the foster-care system, because hundreds of children would receive much better care if there were additional funds allocated to foster care. Thus, for the sake of the innocent foster-care children, you feel **\$8 million** should be allocated to Social Services, including funds for new staff and enhanced facilities. This money would include \$5.7 million to maintain current services and \$2.3 million of new funds.

**C. Take notes here. List the various things you will say to fellow Commissioners to convince them to allocate \$8 million to Social Services:**

**A Commissioner's Balancing Act  
Instructions for Commissioner #3**

**A. Read the following instructions:**

You are a County Commissioner. You and your fellow Commissioners must prepare a budget for your county of Diddie.

The county has a total budget of \$20,000,000 but only has \$1 million in new revenues. If you and the other Commissioners decide that you need more than \$21,000,000 million for the total budget, then you all will have to find a way to generate the money, such as by raising property taxes. The current property tax rate is 50 cents (per \$100 of property value), and increasing the property tax by one-cent would result in an additional \$750,000 in revenue. However, an increase in property taxes could anger citizens and make them not re-elect you.

The budget must include line items for the following:

- **Public Schools** - school buildings, buses and teacher pay supplements
- **Health/Mental Health** - immunizations, restaurant inspections, animal shelter, alcohol/drug counseling, etc.
- **Social Services** - child adoption/foster care, family counseling, food stamps, emergency housing, aging services, etc.
- **Environment/Waste Management** - waste disposal, recycling, stream monitoring, etc.
- **Facilities** - jails, courts, libraries, landfill, etc.

**B. Read the information below about yourself, and determine how you will convince your fellow commissioners to allocate the funds that you request:**

**Commissioner #3**

As a Commissioner, you won the election because you promised to never increase taxes. So far, you have stood by your pledge.

Three months ago, your sister became deathly ill after eating contaminated chicken at a local restaurant. She has recovered slightly since her illness, but the bacteria found in the chicken has left her right leg partially paralyzed. You investigated how restaurant oversight could have led to your sister's illness. When speaking with employees at the Health Department, you learned that the restaurant had received bad ratings in previous inspections and was two weeks overdue for its annual inspection! Unfortunately, the restaurant inspection division has been unable to fill vacant positions due to low salaries. If the division could upgrade its pay scale, the county would be able to fill positions and inspections would stay on schedule, meaning more innocent people like your sister wouldn't get sick.

You feel the Health Department needs a total of \$4 million. This allocation includes \$3.1 million to maintain current services and \$900,000 in new funds to enhance salaries in the Restaurant inspection division. Since this involves the quality of the food county residents get when dining out, you feel everyone should be on board with your stance.

**C. Take notes here. List the various things you will say to fellow Commissioners to convince them to allocate \$4 million to Health/Mental Health:**

**A Commissioner's Balancing Act  
Instructions for Commissioner #4**

**A. Read the following instructions:**

You are a County Commissioner. You and your fellow Commissioners must prepare a budget for your county of Diddie.

The county has a total budget of \$20,000,000 but only has \$1 million in new revenues. If you and the other Commissioners decide that you need more than \$21,000,000 million for the total budget, then you all will have to find a way to generate the money, such as by raising property taxes. The current property tax rate is 50 cents (per \$100 of property value), and increasing the property tax by one-cent would result in an additional \$750,000 in revenue. However, an increase in property taxes could anger citizens and make them not re-elect you.

The budget must include line items for the following:

- **Public Schools** - school buildings, buses and teacher pay supplements
- **Health/Mental Health** - immunizations, restaurant inspections, animal shelter, alcohol/drug counseling, etc.
- **Social Services** - child adoption/foster care, family counseling, food stamps, emergency housing, aging services, etc.
- **Environment/Waste Management** - waste disposal, recycling, stream monitoring, etc.
- **Facilities** - jails, courts, libraries, landfill, etc.

**B. Read the information below about yourself, and determine how you will convince your fellow commissioners to allocate the funds that you request:**

**Commissioner #4**

Last month, you came home from a football game to find that your home had been broken into. All of your things had been stolen! Now, you no longer feel safe in your home. You later learned that the individual who robbed your house was already awaiting trial for another robbery but, due to jail overcrowding, the judge was forced to release him on bond instead of holding him at the County Jail!

You have done some research and learned that the jail has been over-crowded for a while and that the county is under pressure by the courts to expand or build a new jail. You don't want anyone to experience the pain that you have gone through, so you feel that \$6.5 million needs to be allocated to facilities, so that the sheriff's office can be improved in the interest of public safety. This allocation includes \$4.2 million to maintain current services and \$2.3 million in new funds to build a new facility.

**C. Take notes here. List the various things you will say to fellow Commissioners to convince them to allocate \$6.5 million to Facilities:**

**A Commissioner's Balancing Act  
Instructions for Commissioner #5**

**A. Read the following instructions:**

You are a County Commissioner. You and your fellow Commissioners must prepare a budget for your county of Diddie.

The county has a total budget of \$20,000,000 but only has \$1 million in new revenues. If you and the other Commissioners decide that you need more than \$21,000,000 million for the total budget, then you all will have to find a way to generate the money, such as by raising property taxes. The current property tax rate is 50 cents (per \$100 of property value), and increasing the property tax by one-cent would result in an additional \$750,000 in revenue. However, an increase in property taxes could anger citizens and make them not re-elect you.

The budget must include line items for the following:

- **Public Schools** - school buildings, buses and teacher pay supplements
- **Health/Mental Health** - immunizations, restaurant inspections, animal shelter, alcohol/drug counseling, etc.
- **Social Services** - child adoption/foster care, family counseling, food stamps, emergency housing, aging services, etc.
- **Environment/Waste Management** - waste disposal, recycling, stream monitoring, etc.
- **Facilities** - jails, courts, libraries, landfill, etc.

**B. Read the information below about yourself, and determine how you will convince your fellow commissioners to allocate the funds that you request:**

**Commissioner # 5**

In addition to serving as a county commissioner, you also work part time at the local chapter of the Sierra Club, a well-respected environmental organization. Last year you went to the Sierra Club Annual Conference and attended a session on recycling, including new methods of recycling cardboard. You were horrified to learn that your county that doesn't recycle cardboard. This means that your county is not taking care of the environment.

Upon returning from your conference, you found out your county is one of the last in the state without cardboard recycling facilities. You feel that taking care of Diddie County's environment should be everyone's priority. To maintain current levels of service and upgrade the recycling center with equipment to recycle cardboard, the recycling division of Waste Management needs \$4 million. Of this allocation, \$2.5 million will be spent on maintaining existing services and \$1.5 million in new funds will be needed for necessary upgrades.

**C. Take notes here. List the various things you will say to fellow Commissioners to convince them to allocate \$4 million to Environment/Waste Management:**



**Didie County Government**



**2016-2017 Proposed Budget**

<b>General Fund</b>	<b>FY 2016 Actual</b>	<b>FY 2017 Proposed</b>
Public Schools	\$4,500,000	
Health/Mental Health	\$3,100,000	
Social Services	\$5,700,000	
Environment/Waste Management	\$2,500,000	
Jails/Facilities	\$4,200,000	
Total Approved	\$20,000,000	

**Notes:**

## The Board of County Commissioners

A **county** is a legal entity capable of holding and managing property and possessed of many powers conferred on it by law. The county exercises its powers and discharges its responsibilities through its **board of commissioners**. G. S. 153A-12 states that "except as otherwise directed by law, each power, right, duty, function, privilege and immunity of the corporation [i.e., the county] shall be exercised by the board of commissioners."

Each county in the state has a board of commissioners, but no two boards are exactly alike. Our boards of county commissioners vary in size, term of office, method of election, method of selecting the chairman, and administrative structure. And these variations bear no correlation to the population of the county or any other objective criteria.

The following table shows the method of **election** (as of 1997) for the 100 boards of North Carolina's county commissioners:

41 boards	Elected at large
23 boards	Elected with various combinations of at large, at large with district residency requirements, and nominations by districts with election at large
22 boards	Elected at large; district residency required
10 boards	Nominated and elected entirely by districts
4 boards	Elected under limited voting plans

In nearly all counties, the **chairman of the board** is chosen by the board members themselves. However, in a few counties, the chairman is elected separately by the voters. In all counties, the board itself must choose a **vice- chairman** to act in the absence or disability of the chairman. The chairman of the board presides at all meetings. By law, this official has not only the right but also the duty to vote on all questions before the board unless excused by a standing rule of the board or by consent of the remaining members. However, the chair may not vote to break a tie vote in which he or she participated. The chair is generally recognized by law as the chief executive officer of the county and may acquire considerable prestige and influence by virtue of the position. Although as a general rule the chair has no more legal power than other members of the board, he or she does now have special authority to declare states of emergency under the state laws governing riots and civil disorders. The chair also has authority to call special meetings of the board on his own initiative.

The **county manager** form of government is very strong in North Carolina, with all but one county appointing someone to serve as the county manager or administrator. The manager/administrator supervises all county departments as the board's chief administrative officer.

All county commissioners are elected by the people in **partisan elections** held in November of even-numbered years at the same time as the elections for members of the General Assembly and other state officers. But not every county elects all members of its board every two years (about half of the state's county commissioners are elected at each general election.) Vacancies in the board of commissioners are filled by appointment of the remaining members.

Newly elected commissioners take office on the first Monday in December following their election by taking the **oath of office**: *I, ...do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and maintain the Constitution and laws of the United States, and the Constitution and laws of North Carolina not inconsistent therewith, and that I will faithfully discharge the duties of my office as County Commissioner of . . . . . County, so help me God.*

The board is required by law to hold at least one meeting each month, although it may meet as frequently as necessary. Many counties have found in recent years that two regular meetings each month are needed. The board may select any day of the month and any public place within the county for its regular meetings, but in the absence of a formal resolution of the board selecting some other time and place, the law requires the board to meet on the first Monday of the month at the courthouse. Ten o'clock in the morning is the customary time of day for commissioners' meetings, although the law has never specified the time of day. In recent years, some boards have begun to hold some of their regular meetings in the evening to allow greater public attendance.

The board of commissioners is subject to the **Open Meetings Statute**, enacted in 1971. This law forbids most public bodies, both state and local, to hold meetings that are not open to the public except when the subject of discussion falls within exceptions such as meetings involving lease/sale of property, matters concerning hospital management, conferences involving legal counsel, etc.

The law leaves most procedural matters to the discretion of the board, but it does set out a few rules that must be followed. The board may take no action unless a **quorum** is present, and the law defines a quorum as a majority of the full membership of the board without regard to vacancies. The law also places a duty on each member to **vote** on each question before the board unless she/he is excused by his/her colleagues, and excuses are permitted only when the matter before the board concerns the financial interest or official conduct of the member requesting the excuse.

The board must see to it that the **clerk to the board** keeps full and accurate minutes of its proceedings. The minute book must be open to public inspection, and the results of each vote taken by the board must be recorded in it. The board has the power to adopt its own written rules of procedure. The only legal restraint on these rules is that they must be "in the spirit of generally accepted principles of parliamentary procedure."

Except for the few special powers held by the chairman of the board, the legal powers and duties of county commissioners are vested in the board of commissioners acting as a body. An individual commissioner has no power of his own; but when he meets with his fellow commissioners in a validly called and held meeting, a majority of the board has and may exercise control of those functions of county government confided to the care of the board of commissioners. The board takes formal action in one of three forms: **orders**, **resolutions** and **ordinances**.

An **order** is usually a directive to a county administrative officer to take or refrain from taking a specified action. For example, a board of commissioners may enter an order directing the county manager to advertise for bids for a new office building. An order may also formally declare the existence of a given state of fact, such as an order declaring the results of a bond election. Finally, an order may sometimes be used to decide a question before the board, such as an order awarding a construction contract to the lowest responsible bidder.

A **resolution** usually expresses the sense of the board on a question before it. For example, the board may adopt a resolution requesting the county's legislative delegation to introduce a local bill, or it may resolve to petition the State Department of Transportation to pave a rural road.

An **ordinance** is an action of the board taken in its capacity as the county's legislative body. As such, an ordinance is analogous to an act of the General Assembly. The board of commissioners may adopt ordinances relating to such varied matters as zoning, subdivision control, dogs running at large, use of county parking lots, street numbers on rural roads, use of the county landfill, and so forth.

Commissioners will sometimes hold public hearings in which interested citizens have the opportunity to voice their opinions on the issue at hand. Laws do not set out how the hearing must be conducted. However, the law does allow the board itself to adopt reasonable rules governing the conduct of public hearings. These rules may regulate such matters as the time allotted to each speaker, designating spokesmen for groups, selecting delegates from groups when the hearing room is too small to hold everyone who wants to attend, and maintaining order and decorum.

The law dictates many, if not most, features of how the county government will be organized. The **sheriff** and **register of deeds** are elected by the people. There is a **board of education**, a **board of health**, a **board of social services**, and a **board of elections** for each county and, in many counties, a **board of alcoholic beverage control**. The **tax supervisor**, **tax collector**, **county attorney**, **county manager**, and **clerk to the board of commissioners** are appointed directly by the commissioners. Yet in every county there are a number of county departments, agencies, or offices that are directly under the administrative jurisdiction of the board. With respect to these agencies, the board of commissioners has authority to organize the county government in any way it sees fit.

Except in those counties in which the chairman of the board is a full-time administrative officer, each board of commissioners has discretionary authority to adopt the county manager form of government by appointing a manager.

The board of commissioners must have a **clerk**, who is responsible for keeping the minute book and the ordinance book. The clerk also has a wide variety of miscellaneous duties, all directly related to official actions of the board of commissioners. The clerk is appointed directly by the board and serves at its pleasure.

The board of commissioners must appoint a **county attorney**, who serves as the board's legal adviser. The exact nature of the county attorney's duties varies from county to county, as does the amount and method of his compensation. A few counties have established a full-time position of county attorney, and in those counties the county attorney may provide legal services to nearly all county agencies except the board of education (which always employs its own attorney.) The county attorney is not appointed to a definite term; he serves at the pleasure of the board.

Sources: <http://ncpedia.org/government/local/commissioners>