



Assignment Re-Imagine: Create Your Own City/Town

Goal: To learn what municipal government is, what it does for its residents and how they do it.

Part 1: Reading and Comprehension

Part 2: Mapping & World Building - Creation of “My Town”

Part 3: Writing Assignment: Re-imagining “My Town” for the future

Part 1: Reading and Comprehension

Please read the summary that explains the basic structure of municipal government and then answer the nine questions below.

1. What makes an incorporated municipality different from other places that sometimes refer to themselves as cities or towns?
2. What are some of the services incorporated municipalities provide? Do all cities and towns provide the same services to their citizens?
3. How many municipalities are there in Maryland?
4. What county has the most municipalities?
5. Which counties do not have any municipalities?
6. What is the role of a mayor?
7. What are the 4 forms of municipal government?
8. What is the primary decision-making tool for municipal governments?
9. How does municipal government get the money it needs to provide services to citizens?

Municipalities

(Incorporated Cities & Towns)

In Maryland, local government refers to county and municipal governments. A municipality (mu-nic'-i-pal'-i-ty) is a city or town that has written its own charter, which is like a constitution, that outlines the general powers it has chosen to exercise and the roles and responsibilities of the elected and key appointed officials.

A municipality is an independent government, separate from county government, with legal authority to exist granted by the State Government. The powers that municipalities and counties have are defined in the Maryland State Constitution and laws passed by the General Assembly. Citizens living in municipalities elect their own officials to pass ordinances (local rules), create a budget, and to provide services and programs that they want or need.

Not all cities and towns provide the same services to their citizens or have the same rules. The citizens living in each municipality develop their own rules and choose the kinds of services they want their city or town to provide, such as police, water and sewer, trash collection, road maintenance, parks, street lights, snow removal and planning and zoning.

Cities and towns do not have responsibility for education (schools), permanent jails, public health, or social welfare programs. State law requires county governments to provide these services to citizens.

Municipal government is often referred to as “the level of government closest to the people” because it is easier for citizens to voice their opinions and to make changes in their government when they are unhappy with it. Citizens who live in a municipality also reside in a county, pay county taxes, can vote in county elections and participate in the county political process.

There are 157 municipalities in Maryland, including Baltimore City, and 23 counties. Prince George’s County has the largest number of municipalities (27) within its borders. Baltimore and Howard Counties have no municipalities within their borders. The community you live in may not be an incorporated city or town.

Check out this [map](#) of Maryland to see all 157 cities and towns:

<https://www.mdmunicipal.org/DocumentCenter/View/6313/MD157mapLandscape85x11>

Elected Officials

Citizens are elected in each municipality to serve on the city/town council. In some cities and towns, councilpersons are called commissioners or aldermen. The mayor, in some cities or towns called president or burgess, is the chief elected official and is normally the official spokesperson for the city/town.

The mayor is usually responsible for day-to-day operations and for creating the annual budget for the municipality. The council is responsible for approving the Mayor's budget and for passing local ordinances (laws). Each city and town determine the exact roles and responsibilities of the mayor and council through its charter.

Regardless of how much power they possess, mayors are usually the persons that provide the overall direction for the city or town. The mayor attends all official functions of the municipality and is usually the person who meets with other community groups, levels of government and various agencies about

city/town issues. The dedication and enthusiasm of the mayor often has a great impact on the other elected officials and how citizens view their government.

Structure of Municipal Government

While no two municipalities in Maryland are exactly alike, they generally fall into one of the four structural categories common to all municipalities in the United States. The categories are:

Strong Mayor & Council (the mayor is a more independent supervisor)

Weak Mayor & Council (the mayor shares law making and supervisory powers with the council)

Commissioner (each elected official also supervises a municipal department, such as public works)

Council/Manager (the mayor and council hire a professional supervisor)

Most Maryland city and town government structures are a mix of these categories. Each city/town has the ability to choose the form of government that best suits its needs and the desires of its citizens. The role of the mayor and council/commission is different depending on the form of government being practiced

Municipal Budgets

The budget is the primary decision-making tool for cities and towns. It shows how the money that the city/town collects from municipal property taxes (the money collected from property owners in the city) and other sources each year will be spent to provide services to citizens such as trash and snow removal, road repairs and police protection. The budget must be approved by the elected officials every year before July 1 and normally includes a listing of services and the amount of money to be used for each service for the coming year. The elected officials will also decide on how much money they need to charge the property owners (property taxes) to pay for services that the city/town citizens want. The elected officials must let citizens know how the city/town money will be spent and how much they will be paying in property taxes by having a special meeting called a budget hearing, before they vote to approve the budget.

Part 2: Mapping & World Building: Creation of “My Town”

Now that you know a little bit about municipalities, it’s time to create your own.

Create a map depicting the elements of an imaginary city or town. Include:

- the name of your city/town,
- the street layout of houses, parks & playgrounds, churches, businesses, restaurants, and city/town hall.
- Make a legend at the bottom of the map that lists what services your city/town offers
- Write an advertisement introducing your town to the world that explains why you created this town, what makes it different from other towns and why residents should want to come live there. (150-200 words)

Note: Make it fun. Think about the geography of your town. Is it located near water, mountains, beaches etc... What your town is near often determines what type of businesses and services are available there.

Part 3: Writing Assignment: Re-imagining “My Town” for the future

Schools and businesses have had to shut down to help prevent the spread of Covid-19. Thinking about the town you just created and the services that you decided to provide for your imaginary citizens, write a 250-word essay about how you would re-imagine how those services can be offered in the future, to help your town in cases of an extreme emergency. [For example, many towns must have mandatory meetings to make decisions. They are all now planning ways to meet without doing it, in-person]

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