



Vermont Secretary of State Jim Condos

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Local Office Descriptions

Who's Who in Local Government

President Teddy Roosevelt said, almost a century ago that *“Far and away the best prize that life offers is the chance to work hard at work worth doing.”* When he included these words in his speech at the state fair in Syracuse, New York in 1903, he could have been speaking of Vermont’s many hardworking local officials. Every day, municipal officials devote their free time to everything from hearing zoning disputes and writing land use plans, to assessing the value of property in the town and collecting delinquent taxes. They serve for the chance to “work hard at work worth doing.” Without them, our communities would not function and our system of self government would come to a standstill.

Serving in local office is a great way to give something back to your community. If you are considering serving, below are the offices you can choose to from:

Local Offices

Agent to Convey Real Estate (appointed). Executes the deeds on behalf of the town. [24 V.S.A. § 1061](#)

Auditor (elected). Review and audit all town accounts and prepare the annual town report. Should be very detail oriented. Good writing skills are a plus. [17 V.S.A. § 2649](#)

Building Inspector and Deputy Inspector (appointed). Appointed only in towns that have adopted a building code. Performs inspections and enforces the local building code. [24 V.S.A. § 3102, 3103, 3108](#)

Cemetery Commissioner (elected). Responsible for the care and management of the town’s cemeteries. If no cemetery commissioners are elected, the selectboard fulfills this role. [18 V.S.A. § 5373](#)

Chairperson for Civil Defense (appointed). Responsible for the organization, administration, and operation of the local committee that is formed for emergency management in the town or city. The emergency management chairperson is under the direct control of the selectboard but may coordinate his or her emergency management efforts with neighboring towns and cities, and with the state emergency management division and the federal government. [20 V.S.A. § 6](#)

Collector of Current Taxes. A town must vote to have the Town Manager or Town Treasurer to collect current taxes. If the town fails to vote, then the Town Constable becomes the collector of current taxes. [24 V.S.A. § 1529](#)

Collector of Delinquent Taxes. A town must vote to authorize the selectboard to appoint a collector of delinquent taxes, who may be the Town Manager or Town Treasurer. [17 V.S.A. § 2651d](#) If a town fails to vote, then the Town Constable

becomes the collector of delinquent taxes.

Constable (elected). In some towns the constable is the town's local law enforcement officer, with all powers of search, seizure, and arrest within the town. In other towns, the constable only has the power to serve civil process, assist the health officer in the discharge of his or her duties, destroy unlicensed dogs, kill injured deer, remove disorderly people from town meeting, and, if the first constable, to collect taxes, if no tax collector is elected. Should be good at de-escalating and resolving conflicts. 17 V.S.A. § 2646(7).

Conservation Commission Members (appointed). Inventory the natural resources of a community and purchase and administer municipal lands for the purpose of conservation. 24 V.S.A. § 4502

Fence Viewers (appointed). Three viewers are appointed by the selectboard each year. When called upon, they examine fences and other boundaries within the town. 24 V.S.A. § 871

Health Officer (appointed). Appointed by the commissioner of health to a three-year term after recommendation by the town selectboard. Enforces the rules and regulations for the prevention and abatement of public health hazards. 18 V.S.A. § 601

Inspectors of Lumber (appointed). Appointed, upon request, to examine, measure, and classify the quality of lumber, shingles, and wood sold within the town. 24 V.S.A. § 871

Inspector of Wiring (appointed). Inspects electrical wiring in buildings on request of the selectboard. 24 V.S.A. § 1033

Justices of the Peace (elected). Although elected by a town, justices of the peace are actually county officers. 17 V.S.A. § 2103(10). For more information, see our Justice of the Peace Handbook. The duties of justices of the peace can fall into five categories of responsibilities:

1. **Elections.** Justices of the peace are members of the board of civil authority (BCA). Members of the BCA serve as election officials at town elections by Australian ballot and statewide elections. Justices also are responsible for delivering absentee ballots to voters at election time.
2. **Tax Abatement and Appeals.** Justices of the peace sit as members of the town board for abatement of taxes to determine whether a taxpayer's tax obligation should be forgiven under certain circumstances. Justices of the peace also serve an important role in the town's tax appeal process. As a member of the board of civil authority, justices sit to hear and decide appeals when citizens do not agree with the final decision of the listers.
3. **Marriages and Civil Unions.** Justices of the peace may also solemnize marriages and may certify civil unions in Vermont.
4. **Oaths and Notary.** Justices of the peace may also administer oaths in all cases where an oath is required, unless a specific law makes a different provision. A justice of the peace is a notary public ex officio and has all the acknowledgment powers of a notary public. However, the justice of the peace must file with the county clerk in order to act as a notary public (but the fee is waived).
5. **Magistrate.** Justices of the peace may also serve as a magistrate when so commissioned by the Supreme Court.

Listers (elected). Appraise property within the town for the purpose of property tax assessment. Should be able to be polite, yet firm, and not be oversensitive to criticism. 17 V.S.A. § 2646(5)

Moderator (elected). Runs the annual and special town/school meeting. Should have a good sense of humor, be good at group process, and have experience following Roberts Rules of Order. 17 V.S.A. § 2646(1)

Municipal Manager (appointed). If the manager system has been adopted by the electorate, the town manager is the official administrator of local government and has general supervisor of the affairs of the town. 24 V.S.A. § 1232

Patrolmen (elected). Patrols town highways under the direction of the selectboard — if the town so orders. (Generally not an active position.) 17 V.S.A. 2646(15)

Planning Commissioners (appointed or elected). Appointed unless town votes to elect. Duties include preparing a municipal plan; making recommendations on matters of land development, conservation, and preservation; and participating in a regional planning program. Makes site plan and subdivision permit decisions unless there is a development review board in town. Should have a good working knowledge of all aspects of the town and be able to listen to many sides of an issue. 24 V.S.A. § 4323

Poundkeeper (appointed). Cares for the animals that are impounded within the town. 24 V.S.A. § 871

Regional Planning Commission Representative (appointed). Helps develop the regional plan and assess municipal land use plans. 24 V.S.A. § 4341 et seq.

Road Commissioners (elected or appointed). Can be elected or appointed. Has no independent authority, but can assist the selectboard in overseeing town highways at the request of the board. Should have experience with town highways and be a good communicator. 17 V.S.A. § 2646(16); 17 V.S.A. § 2651

Selectboard Members (elected). General supervision and control over town; enacts ordinances, regulations, and policies for town; oversees town property and personnel; prepares, presents and manages budget; and oversees roads, including laying out, discontinuing, and reclassifying roads. Sits as local board of health, liquor control commission, and sewer commission. Should know the town well, be able to understand all sides of complex issues, and have very thick skin. 17 V.S.A. § 2646(4); 17 V.S.A. § 2649

Town Administrator (appointed). Hired by the selectboard, the town administrator, sometimes called the administrative assistant to the selectboard, assists the selectboard in managing the business of the town. The town administrator has no independent statutory authority. The scope of his or her duties is determined by the selectboard.

Town Agent (elected). The town agent used to prosecute and defend suits. The selectboard now has that authority. Thus, the town agent's duty consists merely of assisting when litigation is in progress, at the request of the selectboard. (Generally not a very active position.) 17 V.S.A. § 2646(11)

Town Clerk (elected). Records, preserves, and certifies the public records of the town. Issues dog, marriage, civil union, and hunting and fishing licenses; as well as motor vehicle renewals. Runs the local elections, serves as clerk of the board of civil authority, and hears tax abatement requests and tax appeals. Should have the patience of a saint and be a good ambassador for the town. 17 V.S.A. § 2646(2)

Town Energy Coordinator (appointed). Responsible for developing the town energy plan and conducting the town energy audit. 24 V.S.A. § 1131

Town Forest Fire Warden (appointed). Appointed by the fire commissioner with the approval of the selectboard. Prevents forest fires in the town by enforcing the laws designed to prevent forest fires. 10 V.S.A. § 2641

Town Services Officer (appointed). Appointed on or before April 15th of each year. Assists individuals within the town who require emergency food, fuel, or shelter assistance when the Vermont Department of Social Welfare is not available. 33 V.S.A. § 2102 et seq.

Town Treasurer (elected). Keeps the town and school's accounts (unless a separate school treasurer is elected), invests money (with the approval of the legislative body), keeps a record of the taxes voted, and pays orders drawn on him or her. Should be very precise, detail oriented and good at math. 17 V.S.A. § 2646(3)

Town Tree Warden (appointed). Plans and implements a shade tree preservation program for the purpose of shading and beautifying public places. Removes diseased, dying, or dead trees; which create a hazard to public safety or threaten the effectiveness of disease or insect control programs. 24 V.S.A. § 871

Trustee of Public Funds (elected). Manages, invests, and reports on real and personal property held in trust by the town. This includes cemetery trust funds. Should like investing money. 17 V.S.A. § 2646(12); 24 V.S.A. § 2431 et seq.

Trustee of Public Money (elected). Oversees “United States Public Money” received under the Act of 1836 held by the town. (It is unlikely any Vermont town still has these funds.) 17 V.S.A. § 2646(13)

Water Commissioners (elected or appointed). Water commissioners supervise the town’s water department by establishing water rates, and all the rules and regulations for the control and operation of the department. Should be a good manager and detail oriented. 17 V.S.A. § 2646(17); 17 V.S.A. § 2652

Weighers of Coal (appointed). Serves as a referee over weights of contested loads of coal. 24 V.S.A. § 871

Zoning Administrator (appointed). Appointed by the planning commission with the approval of the selectboard. Approves or denies applications for zoning permits. Administers the municipal bylaws literally. Enforces regulations pertaining to the zoning ordinance. 24 V.S.A. § 4448

Zoning Board of Adjustment or Development Review Board Members (appointed). Holds hearings and makes decisions on land use permit applications and appeals from decisions of the zoning administrator. 24 V.S.A. § 4460

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