**Introduction to Johnson City Government**

Source: City of Johnson City, Communications & Marketing

**CITY COMMISSION**

Five commissioners are elected for four-year, overlapping terms, with at least two commissioners elected every two years. In November 2014, voters approved moving the municipal election date to coincide with the state general election date beginning November 2016. The state general election is held in even years on the first Tuesday after the first Monday in November. New commissioners are sworn in on the first Monday in December.

To be eligible for the office of commissioner, a person must be a qualified voter of the city, a freeholder in the city (property owner), and cannot have been convicted of malfeasance in office, bribery or other corrupt practice. All city elections are held under the supervision of the Washington County Election Commission, in accordance with the laws governing all state and county elections.

Following each election, the commission elects one of its members to serve as mayor for a two-year term and chooses a member to serve as vice mayor in the temporary absence of the mayor. The mayor serves as the ceremonial head of the City, presides at all City Commission meetings, and represents the City at a variety of community and public functions. City commissioners participate on a variety of boards, commissions and committees. Their involvement provides an important link between citizens, businesses, non-profits and municipal government.

The City Commission ensures the provision of community services the people of Johnson City need and want. In carrying out its duties, the City Commission must address citizens’ concerns while planning for the community’s long-term growth and development. To this end, it is the responsibility of the City Commission to oversee costs and be as efficient as possible while managing the city’s infrastructure, projects and investments.

In 1939, the Johnson City Board of commissioners adopted the City charter establishing the council-manager form of government under which we operate today. In the City of Johnson City the elected officials are referred to as the Board of Commissioners, rather than a council. This form of government combines the advantages of democratic government in an elected body of five commission members with the efficiency and productivity of a professional administrator in the city manager. The commission exercises legislative powers by passing ordinances and resolutions. All executive functions are directed by the city manager, who has the responsibility to carry out all policies and programs enacted by the commission. The city manager is appointed by, and is directly responsible to, the commission.

**CITY CHARTER**

The city charter is a document that defines the organization, powers, functions and essential procedures of the city government.

The charter provides that regular meetings of the Board of Commissioners will be held on the first and third Thursday of each month at 6 p.m. in the Commission Chambers of the Municipal and Safety Building. Special sessions may be called when the city manager, the mayor, or any two commissioners feel that the public welfare demands such a meeting. Twelve hours’ notice must be given for all special sessions, and all such sessions must be open to the public. Each call for a special meeting must set forth the character of business to be discussed at such meeting. No other business may be considered at that time.

**PASSING ORDINANCES**

The charter provides a guide as to how the governing body will create and enforce city laws. In Tennessee, regardless of the type of city government, these laws, or ordinances, must be initiated and passed into law following a strict procedure. For instance, the passage of an ordinance in Johnson City requires the ordinance be placed on the agenda three times. Ordinances regarding taxation, zoning and budgeting of city money require that one reading, usually the second or third, be set aside as a public hearing, offering citizens an opportunity to express their opinions and offer information relevant to the proposed ordinance. All ordinances are recorded in, and become a part of the city code, which is a complete set of all ordinances enforced by the city. Once passed, an ordinance can be amended or repealed only by passage of another ordinance, or by a charter amendment which may affect ordinances already in force. Charter amendments require a majority vote of the citizens of the city.

The Johnson City Code of Ordinances can be found here: <https://www.johnsoncitytn.org/government/codes_and_charter.php>

**PASSING RESOLUTIONS**

In addition to ordinances, the Commission also considers resolutions. Resolutions are used to approve city services to the community. For example, it is necessary for the commission to approve use of funds budgeted for a particular project, such as installation of water lines. This does not necessitate an ordinance, for the budget ordinance has already provided the money. However, action of the specific project is necessary to ensure that the monies to be spent are being properly allocated. The commission uses resolutions to implement action allowed or called for by existing ordinances and charter provisions.

**MEETING SCHEDULE**

City Commission meetings are currently being held electronically pursuant to Executive Order 71 issued by Gov. Bill on Dec. 22, 2020. When meetings are held in person those meetings are livestreamed and available to the public on the City’s YouTube channel, [www.johnsoncitytn.org/meetings](http://www.johnsoncitytn.org/meetings).

Meeting agendas for upcoming meetings as well as meeting minutes and videos from past meetings are available on the City’s website, [www.johnsoncitytn.org/citycommissionagendas](http://www.johnsoncitytn.org/citycommissionagendas).

**VOLUNTEER BOARDS AND COMMITTEES**

The City of Johnson City has a variety of committees that are working constantly to serve the community better. The Boards and Committees involve residents of the City of Johnson City and regional area who volunteer their time and expertise for the benefit of the community. Appointments for the Johnson City Volunteer Boards and Committees take place semi-annually in January and July, with applications being accepted prior to the appointment month. Information about the various boards can be found on the website, [www.johnsoncitytn.org/boards](http://www.johnsoncitytn.org/boards).

**STRATEGIC PLAN**

The City Commission adopted the 2020-2025 Strategic Plan last year. The five-year plan outlines goals in four areas: Economic vitality, quality of place, future ready infrastructure and excellence in city government. The plan was developed using information from the City’s citizen surveys and input gathered in a branding study that was conducted as part of our brand relaunch several years ago. The plan is available on the City website, [www.johnsoncitytn.org/strategicplan](https://e.issuu.com/embed.html?backgroundColor=%23316094&d=strategicplan2021&u=kshoun).

**CURRENT ISSUES** (relevant to 10-12 year olds)

1. City departments are currently preparing their budget requests for Fiscal Year 2022 (July 2021 – June 2022). Budget discussions will be ongoing for months and the final proposed budget will eventually come in front of the City Commission in April and May for approval.
2. The City of Johnson City announced in November 2020 its pursuit of recognition as a UNICEF Child Friendly City (CFCI). Part of this initiative is conducting a situational analysis of child well-being in the City of Johnson City. Based on the findings, the City will implement an action plan that prioritizes the best interests of children and youth within local policies. The CFCI Framework for Action has five goal areas: safety and inclusion, children’s participation, equitable social services, safe living environments and play and leisure. Members of the CFCI steering committee provide updates to the City Commission periodically and these presentations will be listed on the agenda.
3. The Sesquicentennial Legacy Project (Natural Adventure Area and Legacy Plaza) are nearing completion and we will be holding a ribbon cutting this spring. These were projects that were started in 2019 when the City celebrated its 150th anniversary. Both spaces are located downtown in or near King Commons. The Natural Adventure Area features an outdoor classroom and music play structures, as well as more traditional playground activities. The Legacy Plaza includes a history circle featuring important dates and information about Johnson City’s history. A “Tri-Star” area pays tribute to the Tennessee flag, which was designed by Johnson City resident Col. LeRoy Reeves.

**SUGGESTIONS FOR HOW YOUTH CAN PARTICIPATE IN CIVIC MATTERS**

We have the JC 101 program for adults and have recently engaged with Science Hill High School to conduct Gov. All. Out. program for juniors and seniors but don’t currently have anything developed for younger youth. We are always open to suggestions on ways we can assist the City’s youth with becoming more engaged in government operations. If you or the youth you work with have suggestions we would love to hear them.

Our suggestions for increasing youth participation in civic matters are:

* Be aware of events. This can be done by watching a City Commission meeting or reading meeting minutes. Local news organizations may also be a good resource.
* Discuss current events with family members, friends and members of local organizations (volunteer and government).
* Find ways to volunteer to support an issue you care about.
* Learn how to contact and engage with local elected leaders.