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MISSOURI CITY CLERKS



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SAINT LOUIS MO 63137-1818
 9641 BELLEFONTAINE RD
 CITY OF BELLEFONTAINE NEIGHBORS
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Periodical

SUPERHEROES OF LOCAL GOVERNMENT

VIRTUAL MEETINGS | MoCCFOA CERTIFICATION PROGRAM | THE CYBERSECURITY WAR | TOURISM



Missouri City Clerks And Finance Officers Association (MoCCFOA)

Have you heard that old saying “ask the city clerk, they will know the answer”? I bet you have asked and they were able to answer, too. Have you ever wondered why that is the case? Here is part of the reason why.....

The city clerk is one of the oldest positions in local government. Historically this position has served as the keeper of all of the town’s records ... and, by memory (imagine that)! Even though we now have technologies and various resources available to us, this is still true today!! Your city clerk is one of the most important members of your team. From the array of duties, the wealth of knowledge, the eagerness to serve – I could go on. It is likely that they have gained the majority of their training through the Missouri City Clerks and Finance Officers Association (MoCCFOA).

The 2021-2022 Executive Board consists of:

President, Octavia Pittman (Ferguson); President Elect, Melissa Burton (Overland); Secretary, Amy Edwards (Platte City); Treasurer, Deanna Jones (Berkeley); and Immediate Past President, Renée Kingston (Camdenton)

The MoCCFOA was established in 1951 as a professional organization providing opportunities and resources for professional development and continuing education designed to assist members in the performance of their daily responsibilities. With curriculum guidance through Missouri State University, the MoCCFOA offers the following annual training sessions in central locations throughout the state:

- Spring Education Institute
- Academies at the Missouri Municipal League Annual Conference
- Fall Regional Education Sessions, and more through one of nine divisions.

MoCCFOA members also are able to earn professional certifications that reflect the amount of training and level of knowledge they have been able to obtain.

Formal training is just one aspect of MoCCFOA professional development. The network built through membership in MoCCFOA is a valuable component. Through the MoCCFOA Mentor Committee, new clerks are matched with more experienced clerks from similar size or class of municipal government to provide guidance and support for someone new to the position. There are very few situations that are a completely new experience in a local government and members can often seek guidance from another member for solid advice or direction to find appropriate resources.

MoCCFOA currently boasts a membership of approximately 400 municipalities, representing the smallest village or fourth-class city with a single employee, to some of the largest cities in the state. No matter the size of the municipality and the level of experience, the MoCCFOA is a place every city clerk can go for professional development and camaraderie.

We have all experienced a bit of difficulty this past year, and while we are not yet in the clear, it is a relief to know that we are making progress, and the MoCCFOA is excited for the year to come. We will continue to look at innovative ways of making our association accessible while we navigate the changes of our new normal.

Is your city clerk a member? For more information and/or to contact a member, visit www.mocccofoa.org. We look forward to continuing work with Missouri city clerks and finance officers for years to come. 🐾

Other Duties As Assigned



Years ago, during a “Nuts and Bolts” class in a very small town, a citizen sheepishly came into the room at city hall and pulled the clerk aside. The clerk excused herself, saying that she needed to deal with something right away. Everyone was a bit concerned and very curious. It turned out that the restroom in the park was out of toilet paper. That provides a true understanding of the wide variety of clerks’ duties.

Most people involved in municipal government have a good general perception of what a clerk does. There is no lack of understanding that a clerk manages elections, liquor licensing, and records. The city council would have no agenda packet, minutes or public notice for meetings without the clerk.

What some may not know is the extent to which there are either additional or subsidiary activities involved in a clerk’s role. The smaller the municipality, the broader the tasks are.

Clerks can be responsible for things as diverse as cemetery management, finance, human resources, utility billing, boards and commissions, general reception and even land use.

Just consider for a moment the skills and knowledge that are required for being an expert in all of these unrelated areas, and then throw in the very real need for toilet paper on top of that.

Consider what it means to provide government transparency. There was a time when agenda packets and open meeting notices were posted only in hard copy on a bulletin board at city hall. Now the expectation is for these items to be on the website and social media. Makes perfect sense, and clerks routinely update websites with this and other information. But what about when the website itself needs a complete overhaul, or the URL needs to be redirected? Clerks are the ones expected to jump in, learn the skills and make it happen.

Not all citizens are willing to actively seek out information electronically. Perhaps a newsletter is in order. Then there are news releases, and social media expectations. Now the clerk has become a public information officer.

A function such as records management sounds pretty straightforward; but, does everyone who touches records manage them in a consistent way? And what about that new records management

software that was just purchased? To be a records manager, a clerk must also be a software expert, motivator and trainer.

Speaking of training, do elected officials appear with a full knowledge about local government and their specific municipalities? Do they even know how and when to get their agenda packets? The clerk is the first link that officials have when they even consider running for office. From that time forward, the clerk is their go-to person to guide them through what can be a daunting process.

Many clerks conduct training for candidates before they pick up a petition. This is valuable because it helps the candidates understand the jobs they are running for, and guides them in navigating the election process but, it is after the election that the real training begins. This is the opportunity to get into the details of how elected officials need to prepare for meetings, act during meetings, understand their roles and limitations, and be responsive to their citizens. Often the clerk will enlist other training resources, such as the Missouri Municipal League (MML), the Missouri City Clerks and Finance

Officers Association (MoCCFOA) or outside trainers.

Serving as support for elected officials can carry a broader range of duties than one might realize. First, the clerk must learn the personality and expectations of each individual alderman or council member. Does the mayor draft his or her own correspondence, or is the clerk expected to be a ghostwriter? When traveling, will elected officials make their own reservations or expect this to be done by the clerk? There is no one universal process, and the clerk can easily fall into the role of travel agent and social organizer.

Clerks, by their nature, easily get tasked with those duties that involve care and nurturing. When an employee experiences a death in the family, it is usually the clerk who sends the card or flowers. Employee and community events have attractive invitations and decorations often because of the clerk.

And speaking of events, the clerk's job can include the entirety of event management. Large events involve multiple layers of municipal roles — liquor licensing, business/vendor licensing, public property use permits, street closures, traffic control, trash pick-up, recycling, advertising, cleanup and debriefing. While this clearly involves staff other than the clerk in most cases, someone must serve as the point person to coordinate all the efforts. While some municipalities have an event coordinator on staff, in many cases the clerk fills this role.

The financial duties mentioned earlier can be significant. For those who serve as clerk/treasurer, this is obvious and clearly part of the job. For those who do not serve as treasurer, there still may be finance-related activities that fall to the clerk. This can include anything that needs a separate person to accomplish separation of duties, such as payroll, cash receiving, bank reconciliations and making deposits.

Grant record-keeping falls to the clerk as records manager, but it is not uncommon for the financial management and reporting to also be within the clerk's role. And sometimes the clerk is the one to write the grant and manage the project. General administrative functions are a big part of the clerk's job

and can be quite varied. Most manage facilities rentals, while some manage the entirety of recreational programs. Many provide front-line reception services that include telephone, walk-ins and mail tasks.

When considering all of the unrelated skills required to be a clerk, one thing they all have in common is the ability to read and implement statutes and code. A clerk serving in a home rule municipality should know its charter thoroughly and how that charter interacts with other laws.

While an ordinance is law and therefore should be written by an attorney, often the clerk creates the first draft that the attorney then reviews and approves. Because clerks also maintain the codification of ordinances (and usually can quote article and section for every subject), they are subject experts for all things code, including state laws.

Resolutions, proclamations and policies often are created by the clerk. When it comes to internal policies, the clerk is the driving force when it comes to recognizing the need for the policy, drafting it and carrying it through the appropriate approval process.

There was a time when a contract involved a handshake, not a request for qualifications, a request for proposal, scope of services, and amendments. Risk

management meant watching your not a series of trainings that are documented and site inspections of insurance companies. Hiring an employee did not involve a two-week list of things to do prior to letting person start working. As a society one expected instantaneous response. As laws change, expectations rise, bureaucracy grows; the clerk's job become not only more time-intensive but it also carries a greater need expertise.

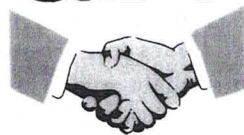
The role of clerk is a unique profession that most clerks get the job first then get the education to support job. You do not hear children say "I want to be a city clerk when I grow up!" But, clerks who find their niche are passionate about the profession. They have a strong professional network and amazing training opportunities.

While the specific duties can vary greatly from one municipality to the next, clerks fill an unspoken role as the link between citizens and elected officials.

And, they never want you to run out of toilet paper.

This article originally appeared in the October 2018 edition of Colorado Municipalities. Reprinted with permission from the Colorado Municipal League, with edits to reflect Missouri-specific terms.

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Virtual Meetings:

The Good, The Bad, And The Lessons Learned



A very useful piece of technology for the city of Camdenton has been the Meeting Owl, a 360-degree camera and microphone that follows the speaker.

During my swearing in as president of MoCCFOA in March 2020, I had challenged our Missouri clerks to “Go Be Extraordinary” – to really step outside their comfort zones and be extraordinary leaders. Little did I know that we would be in the middle of a pandemic a week later and asked to be those extraordinary clerks I knew we were. I am proud of all Missouri Clerks for stepping up and keeping our cities moving in the right direction. We learned skills in social distancing, working from home, Zoom, Go To Meetings, WebX, and how to live stream meetings, to name a few.

For the city of Camdenton, the first Zoom meeting right after the COVID-19 pandemic began was anything but smooth. You might say it was in the bad category (thankfully, it was not on Facebook Live!) We simply did not have the right pieces of technology in place or the experience to make it all happen smoothly. As the saying goes, “we have come a long way, baby.”

With funds made available through the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act, we were able to procure Chromebooks for each alderman, as well as a very useful piece of technology (in our opinion), a Meeting Owl.

The Meeting Owl is a 360-degree camera and microphone that follows the speaker. The camera will spotlight the speaker wherever they are in the room, as well as display the front of the room and the back of the room across the top.

While we have returned to in-person meetings, the City continues to broadcast meetings to the City’s Facebook page live. We may only have two or three followers watch it live, although we do have one fan who is faithful to watch every meeting live and will usually comment. Several others watch the meetings later.

I reached out to some fellow clerks for their help in providing some tips they learned while adjusting to virtual meetings. Here are a few of the lessons learned.

- Do not eat during a meeting; otherwise a citizen will point it out.
- Business up top ... pajama pants on the bottom ... just remember to always stay sitting down.
- Any facial expression shown is now more noticeable on Zoom – see next tip!

- Masks are great for hiding facial expressions.
- Zoom can teach you to be a better listener – you cannot talk over anyone, or you cut each other off. Practice patience and listening before speaking.
- Virtual meetings make you appreciate people and the importance of face-to-face contact; personal interaction is so important – Zoom makes reading body language harder.
- Remember to unmute yourself before speaking and re-mute yourself when you are done speaking.
- Keep children and pets in another room during meetings.
- Equipment that works on one platform does not always work well on another – expensive and complex audio equipment might be better left to the musician’s scene.
- Be mindful of your background.
- Do not join a virtual call if you are traveling in a vehicle, especially if you are driving. Is it possible? Yes. Advisable? No.



- Do not do anything you would be embarrassed about if you were caught doing it during an in-person meeting.
- Enable session lockdown to keep out uninvited guests.

Renée Kingston has worked for the city of Camdenton, Missouri for 24 years and is currently the assistant city administrator/city clerk.

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