

What Does a Mayor Do?

Mayors have been around since 14th Century England and are at the head of the 242 incorporated cities in Oregon, from Portland (pop. 601,510) to Greenhorn (pop. 2). The mayor is the most prominent elected official in these municipal governments all across Oregon. There is only one mayor, one person who is the leader for the community, elected by the people – or in a few cases appointed by their city’s councilors – to hold the top spot in their local governments.

In their topmost spot, a mayor is the figurehead for the city, painting the picture of the culture, style, ideas and image of their community – what it is and what it wants to be. How does the community look at itself and what does it see? Mayors read these signs and share this imagery with the world. They, better than anyone, have their finger on the pulse of their communities and “get it.” Thus, the mayor is the primary spokesperson for the city and its most visible image.

Routinely, mayors preside over the elected city councils in their cities. Like a chairman of the board, they structure the meetings, bringing city business to the table and executing it with honor, integrity and dispatch, typically with good humor. Councils meet frequently and cover a wide range of community business including making the city’s laws and regulations. Some mayors vote along with the council, others simply preside, but typically can veto important laws called ordinances.

Mayors are collaborative, working together through such organizations as the Oregon Mayors Association as well as coordinating closely with the leadership of other cities, counties and the State of Oregon. Though their work is important and time-consuming, almost all mayors in Oregon serve their communities as unpaid volunteers, as do their councils.

Mayors often give an annual “State of the City” address to the community, summing up the consequential events of the preceding year. This represents a report card on the city. What mattered? What changed? How were problems faced? And finally, what opportunities and challenges lie ahead in the new year and how will they be addressed?

So the mayor is a busy person, an important person, but important and busy only in the service of the citizens of his or her community. Mayors bring ideas, energy and wisdom together at the top to make their communities a better place to live, better for all.