
The County Administrator

Reference: Wis. Stats. 59.17 et. seq.

Last Update: June 2009

The county administrator is the board's "right-hand" person in terms of carrying out decisions of the board and overseeing the day-to-day operations of the county. It is important that supervisors understand the position and their options for administrative organization.

Why do we have a county administrator?

State law requires that Wisconsin counties establish a county executive, county administrator or administrative coordinator. The duties and powers of each office vary, but, in general, the law vests the most authority in a county executive and the least in an administrative coordinator. A county executive is elected by voters in a countywide election. Appointments to the positions of county administrator and administrative coordinator are approved by the county board. Milwaukee County is required by state law to have a county executive. All other Wisconsin counties must adopt one of the three forms of organization. The Walworth County Board created the full-time position of administrative coordinator in 1995. In January of 2002, the Board abolished the office of administrative coordinator and established the current county administrator structure.

What does the county administrator do?

The county administrator is the county's chief administrative officer. The county administrator shall take care that every county ordinance and state and federal law is observed. Duties of the county administrator are set forth in Section 59.18 of the Wisconsin Statutes.

How is the county administrator appointed?

The county administrator is appointed by a majority vote of the county board. The current administrator works under an employment contract that was approved by the Board in October 2002 and runs through November 2010. The Board can terminate the contract any time within the term of the agreement upon a majority vote. In the event the contract is terminated without cause prior to its expiration date, the contract provides for a severance payment.

Is the administrator's performance reviewed?

The current contract requires the administrator's performance to be reviewed annually. The executive committee, in conjunction with the county board chairperson, is responsible performing this review. The review normally takes place in a closed session, but all supervisors are encouraged to attend. The review is based, in part, upon the administrator's progress on established goals and accomplishments during the year. Upon conclusion of the review, the executive committee also provides input concerning the administrator's goals for the next rating period.

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