



Association *of* Minnesota Counties

County Government 101

Julie Ring
Executive Director
ring@mncounties.org
651-789-4330

Let's Talk Counties!



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Minnesota County History



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In 1849, Territorial Governor Alexander Ramsey proclaimed that Minnesota would be governed by the same laws as Wisconsin.

- The first Minnesota counties were Benton, Isanti, Ramsey, Wabasha, and Washington established on October 27, 1849.
- 57 of the present 87 counties were established during the territorial period that ended in 1857.
- Lake of the Woods County is the youngest Minnesota county, established on November 28, 1922.

County Government Organization

- **Cooley Doctrine**
Counties can do anything not prohibited by state/federal government.
- **Dillion Rule**
Counties can only do things expressly granted by the state.

Minnesota is a Dillon Rule state



Minnesota County History



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Counties were organized to be administrative agencies of the state as well as local governments.

- *Counties are a local government unit meeting the needs of the community.*
- *Counties serve as an administrative arm of the state by providing services on its behalf.*

County Role Today



- Corrections
- Economic Development
- Elections
- Library Services
- Hospitals and Nursing Homes
- Housing/Homelessness
- Human/Social Services
- Law Enforcement
- Public Health
- Planning and Zoning
- Parks and Recreation
- Solid Waste Management
- Water Quality

Elected County Officials



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County Sheriff



County Attorney



County Auditor



County Treasurer



County Recorder

Counties by the Numbers



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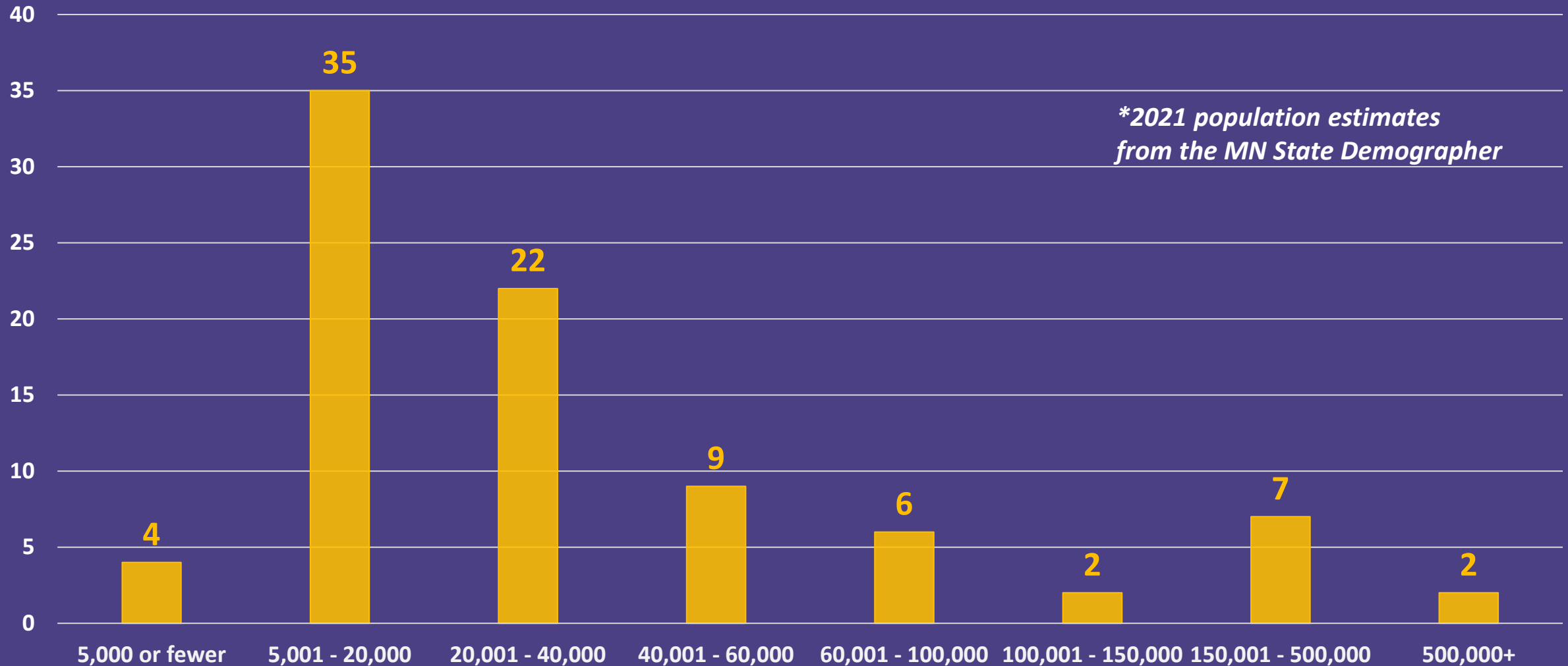
- 87 counties
- 447 county commissioners
 - 81 boards have five county commissioners.
 - 6 boards have seven county commissioners.
- Total county expenditures per year range from \$13.51 million to \$2.46 billion (2022 estimates)



Counties by Population



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County Funding



In Minnesota, counties derive most of their funding from property taxes and state and federal sources.

- Fees, fines, forfeitures, sale of public lands, investments, and special assessments are generally minor revenue sources.
- Most counties receive between **30 and 50 percent** of their revenues from **property tax collections**. All property except that owned by governments, churches, charitable institutions and certain other tax-exempt entities, is subject to the “ad valorem” property tax.

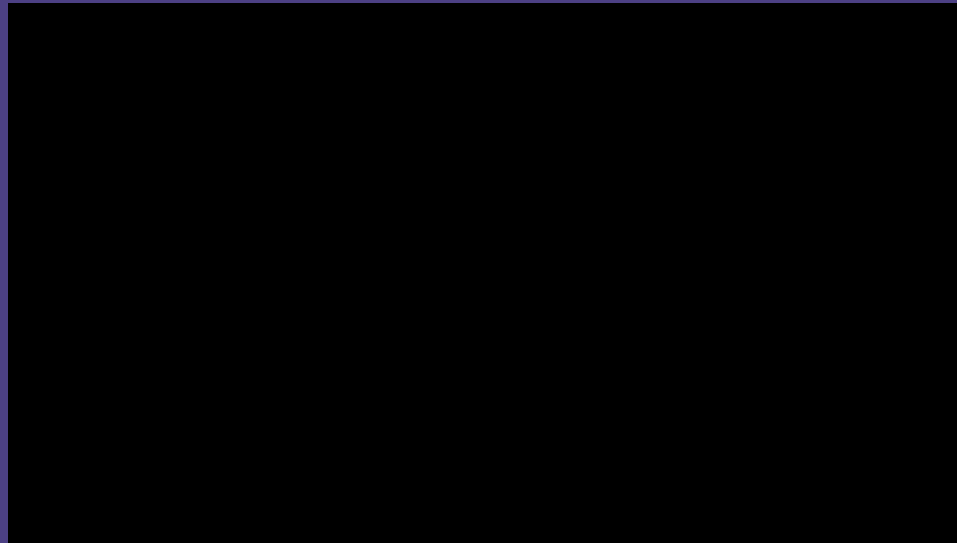
Anoka County Video:

Pie, With a Side of Property Taxes



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**What does a pie have to do with property taxes?
Learn the two things that directly affect how much people pay.**



Basic Responsibilities of Commissioners



- Attend all required meetings of the Board & assigned committees.
- Accountable to your district and the larger constituency of the county.
- Accurately represent policy to public.
- Gather information before making decisions.
- Be constructive in problem solving.
- Maintain high level of ethical conduct.

Board Roles & Responsibilities



- County commissioners, county administration, department heads, and staff have different responsibilities.
- The County Board serves primarily in a governance – or legislative – role.
- Administration, department heads and staff serve in an operational and advisory role.

County Board Sets Policy



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- Related to the overall mission and purpose
- Requires vision
- Longer-term
- Addresses key issues
- Strategic development

County Board Sets Policy



Plans

- Comprehensive, strategic, capital improvement, parks, farmland preservation, transportation etc.

Policies

- Ordinances, resolutions, policies.

Budgets

- Determines what services are provided, how they are funded, and the level of funding.

Administration Oversees Operations



- Implementation of policies and strategies
- Day to day operations
- Related to operational functions
- Addresses department or individual issues
- Requires attention to detail
- Requires specialized knowledge and/or training

Policy vs. Administration



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Policy (Board) = “What” and “Why”

Administrative/Operations (Staff) =
“Where” and “When” and “How”

Example

Policy (Board)

- “What” – *Should the county establish a bike trail system?*
- “Why” – *Will the trail system benefit county residents?*

Operations (Staff)

- “How” – *How will we build and maintain the system?*
- “When” – *When will we build the system? (implementation timeline)*
- “Where” – *Where will the system be located?*

Types of Governance

Fiduciary Mode

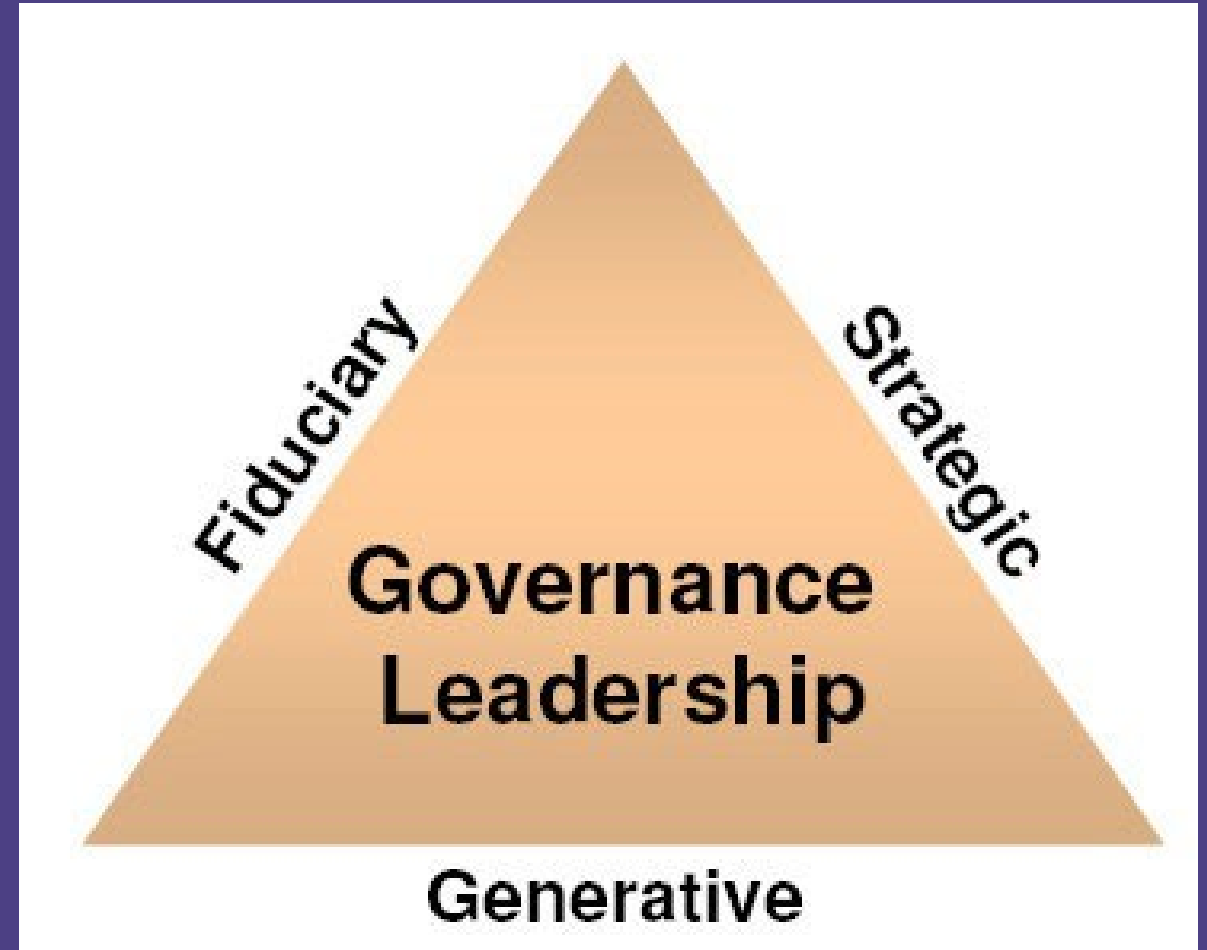
- How are we doing to date?
- Are we in compliance?
- Anything wrong?

Strategic Mode

- What should we be doing?
- Where are we going?
- What's the plan?

Generative Mode

- What are the new possibilities?
- What's coming next?
- What are the new questions?



Effective Governance



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- Effective board operations are based on **mutual understanding and respect** for each other's position and viewpoint.
- Effective board members **support the majority's decision** once a final decision has been made. Only the **board as a whole** has authority over governance, individual commissioners do not.
- Effective board operations **promote the public's best interests** and its confidence in the decision-making process.
- Effective governance will include **long term strategic planning** and a shared vision of what the county looks like, and how it functions in the future.

Focusing Attention on the Right Things



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- What results are we trying to achieve?
- How would we know if we were achieving them?
- What strategies are we using to achieve those results?
- Are these strategies working?
- What do we need to do differently to achieve those results?
- **If you as Board members aren't asking these questions, who is?**

Board Authority



- Authority rests at the board level.
- Individual county commissioners do not have independent authority, unless delegated by the full board.
- Individual commissioners do have leadership responsibility.



Effective Leadership



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- Model the way – set an example for others.
- Inspire a shared vision.
- Challenge the process for positive outcomes.
- Enable others to act.
- Maintain a positive work environment for county staff.
- Hold others accountable to promote the best interests of the county over personal goals or ambitions.

Building Relations with All Levels of Government



Good governance requires relationships

- **Local level** – with all your fellow community and elected leaders
- **State level** – with your legislators and statewide elected leaders
- **Federal level** – with the White House, federal agencies and departments, House and Senate elected leaders and their staff and Supreme Court



Thank You!



Julie Ring, Executive Director

651-789-4330 (direct)

651-224-3344 (receptionist)

ring@mncounties.org

Twitter: @mncounties

Facebook: Association of Minnesota Counties