

Guide to Countywide Officials

Learn about the details
behind pivotal leadership
roles that facilitate your
local government



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Contact Our Team



Brenda Matherly

Director of Local Government

309-557-3151
bmatherly@ilfb.org



Ryan Whitehouse

Associate Director of Local Government and Political Engagement

309-557-2308
rwhitehouse@ilfb.org



Ryan Tate

Associate Director of Local Government

309-557-3274
rtate@ilfb.org



Chale Masters

Administrative Assistant

309-557-3554
cmasters@ilfb.org



Our Mission

To improve county Farm Bureau® influence in local government issues and advance county Farm Bureau leaders' awareness, capability, and involvement in local government through information and assistance in understanding and planning on local government issues.

Call to Action

We encourage you to share LINK with county Farm Bureau leadership and membership.

We encourage you to share this publication with your local officials. This information may be a LINK to their success.

Upcoming Dates & Events

January 17-19:

From Food to Flowers:
Everything Local Conference

January 18-19:

Illinois Association of
Drainage Districts Conference

February 20:

Governmental Affairs
Leadership Conference (GALC)

February 28-29:

Rural Economic Development Conference





Introduction

A Guide to Countywide Officials

By Brenda Matherly

In Illinois, we have no shortage of elected and appointed government officials serving at the local level.



Brenda Matherly

However, what we may have is a lack of understanding about what these officials do and how they impact communities, counties and our quality of life.

In this edition of LINK, we'll focus on countywide executive officials serving as the head of their department and addressing the needs of every resident in the county.

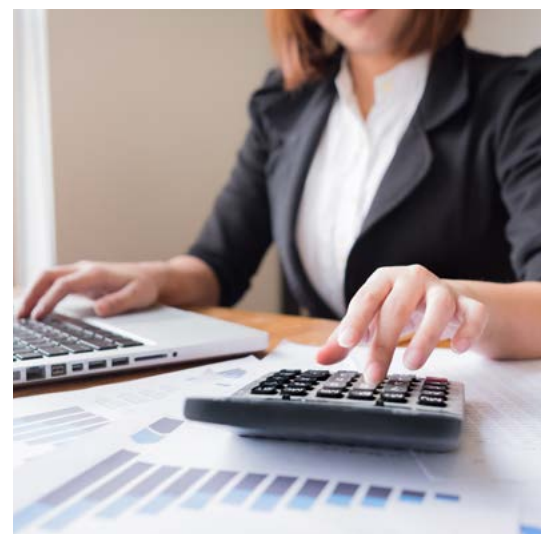
The 1870 Illinois Constitution limited the governance power of a single individual at the county level by creating a plural executive form of government. This structure was designed to limit the powers of one executive and instead spread them across several local officials. As a result, we now have multiple countywide executives, including, but not limited to, Chief County Assessment Officer, county clerk, county engineer, sheriff and treasurer.

In this LINK publication, we will highlight a few of these countywide executives by partnering with the Illinois Association of County Board Members (IACBM) and sharing

information from its publication, *Inside the Courthouse*.

The IACBM is a not-for-profit organization that assists all 102 counties in providing effective county governance. The association also offers education for county officials and information sharing with Illinois citizens. *Inside the Courthouse* includes a description and summary of the primary duties of our countywide officials.

Take a look through this LINK for excerpts from *Inside the Courthouse*. Visit IACBM's [website](#) for more information and the full version of [Inside the Courthouse](#).



AFBF President Zippy Duvall Encourages Understanding of Local Government: Farm Bureau Members Need to Advocate Close to Home

By Zippy Duvall, President of the American Farm Bureau Federation

When was the last time you read about your county board meeting? Or a city council meeting? Do you make it a point to meet with your city council member or reach out to your mayor?

Local government has a huge impact on our day-to-day life and the development of our communities. And yet, too often, we take them for granted or leave it to others to participate. We truly cannot afford to do that.

There's a reason many of the services we rely on most — from utilities and waste collection to schools and emergency services — are governed at the local level. It's because we know our local communities better than anyone else, and the people who live and work in the community should be making the decisions that will impact us directly. We should never discount the big difference we can make by engaging with our elected leaders at the local level.

As I've traveled across the country, I hear from farmers and ranchers frustrated about changing zoning laws, roads that can't handle farm equipment and the challenges that come with urban expansion. These challenges, and many more, require solutions developed at the local level.

Unfortunately, we sometimes encounter officials on local boards and commissions who don't understand agriculture, even with farms a few miles down the road. Often these officials have good intentions, but they just don't realize how new ordinances or regulations could drive a family farm out of business.



As you consider the value of learning more about the duties and authorities of countywide officials serving you, your community and agriculture, read what AFBF president Zippy Duvall has to say about local government awareness and involvement.

I encourage you to look up when the next city council or county board meeting is scheduled and attend. Make it routine.

I'm confident it won't be long before an issue arises that has implications for agriculture. That's your chance to explain how such policies affect your ability to farm.

If you can't attend a meeting, send an email or letter to members of the council or commission. Local government leaders are often easily accessible and familiar with your community. When issues arise, it's important to convey how much we care about our communities, just like they do.

Oftentimes, we also have the opportunity to explain how agriculture is part of the solution, not part of the problem, and remind them that our ultimate goal is to feed families in the community and across this great country.

Local governments are responsible for zoning laws, land use regulations and fixing roads. And rural water districts, electric boards and irrigation districts have a tremendous impact on how we farm and develop our communities. Making our voices heard at the local level can also prevent bad policies from bubbling up to the state and even federal levels.

When I speak with members of Congress or officials in the administration, I make clear that a one-size-fits-all "solution" to almost any problem just doesn't work for agriculture. Every state and region is different. Heck, every farm is different!

The bottom line is that we cannot expect our elected leaders to make decisions that are supportive of agriculture if we fail to engage and help them understand how issues impact our farms.



Understanding Leadership Roles

Source: *Inside the Courthouse*

Assessment Officer

Primary Duties:

The Chief County Assessment Officer (CCAO) or supervisor of assessments oversees the assessment process for the county. The CCAO is responsible for assessing the value of most real property within their jurisdiction for the purpose of real estate taxation. The assessment process plays an important role in local government. Equitable assessments assure property owners pay their fair share of the costs of operating schools, providing police and fire protection, road construction and maintenance, and other basic public services.

The CCAO is concerned with value, not taxes. The CCAO does not collect taxes, calculate taxes or determine the tax rate. Taxing jurisdictions, such as schools, counties, cities and townships, adopt budgets, which determine the tax levy. The actual dollar amount of your tax bill is determined by how much money these local taxing districts need to operate. These property tax dollars remain in the local area to help fund local government.

Property is assessed as of Jan. 1 each year. The CCAO, in conjunction with township assessors, in counties organized under the township form of government, determines a full or partial value of new construction or improvements. A legal assessment is 33 1/3% of a property's determined value. The CCAO generally uses three approaches to determine value:

1. **Market value approach.** Under this approach, the process is to review the sale of properties in the area and consider those sales when assessing comparable properties.
2. **Cost approach.** Under this approach, the process is to determine a value based on the estimated cost of how much money it would take to replace the property with one similar to it.
3. **Income approach.** This approach is used to assess property that produces income, such as an apartment, office building or farmland.

State law requires most real property to be reassessed every four years. However, by law, farmland must be reassessed every year. After the CCAO places a value on the property, the property owner can accept the value or file an appeal with the county board of review, which hears complaints and rules on the outcome of the values.



Other Responsibilities

The CCAO is the clerk of the county board of review and is present at all hearings. The board of review hears complaints from taxpayers concerning real estate assessments and renders decisions regarding property values. The CCAO also prepares and maintains up-to-date property and land-use maps, soil types on farmland, lists of property owners' names and addresses, and property record cards.



Training

CCAOs must meet training requirements to be eligible for office and must complete continuing education requirements throughout their term.



Term

CCAOs are elected or appointed by the county board and serve a four-year term.

Understanding Leadership Roles

Source: *Inside the Courthouse*

County Clerk

Primary Duties:

The county clerk is the keeper of all county records. Duties of the office range from administering elections to conducting a great deal of the state's taxation duties. The county clerk has many responsibilities due to the complexity of the recording process, volume of work and the many different types of functions required to be performed by this office.

Major functions of the clerk's office:

Keeper of County Records: As the keeper of county records, the clerk's office is responsible for the care and custody of all the records, books and papers filed or deposited in the respective offices of the county. Records in the clerk's office include notary public applications, liquor licenses, mobile home files, business registrations, prevailing wage rates, lawsuits, delinquent tax records, tax levies and voter lists, to name a few. The county clerk is responsible for developing a records-management program and ensuring the preservation of these essential records.

Clerk of the County Board: As clerk of the county board, the county clerk attends all county board meetings and is responsible for keeping an accurate record of all the proceedings of the board. The clerk also preserves all bills of account acted upon by the board. All claims for county expenses are processed in the county clerk's office.

Registrar of Vital Records: The county clerk is the only official in the county authorized to issue, record and maintain birth and death certificates and issue marriage licenses. Access to such records is granted in specific circumstances.

Tax Extender: The county clerk calculates and extends the tax rates on all real estate in the county. The clerk files the annual budgets and levies of all taxing bodies, computes the tax rates for each unit, extends the taxes by applying the tax rates to the equalized assessed valuation and certifies the information to the county treasurer. The clerk also collects delinquent tax payments and calculates Enterprise Zone abatements.

Elections: Elections are to be conducted by the election authority. The election authority is the county clerk, unless a board of election commissioners has been established. In that case, the board of election commissioners is the election authority for that city or county.



Other Responsibilities

The clerk's office provides numerous services to the public, including genealogical searches, county assistance to those visiting the courthouse, instructions on obtaining licenses and passports, and notary public registry. Except in counties with jury commissions, the county clerk has certain duties in relationship to the selection of grand and petit jurors. The county clerk is also the keeper of the seal of the county.



Training

The office of County Clerk is open to lay persons.



Term

County clerk is an elected office serving a four-year term.

Understanding Leadership Roles

Source: *Inside the Courthouse*

County Engineer

Primary Duties:

The county engineer is the caretaker of the county's network of roads. The engineer is responsible for the maintenance, repair, widening, resurfacing and construction of all roads and bridges on the county highway system. In counties with a population over 3 million, the position is called "county superintendent of highways."

County highways are roads that meet the criteria for secondary arterial highways as established by state law, having been designated by the county board and approved by the State of Illinois. Similar to state highways, county highways crisscross each of the 102 counties in the state and extend through municipalities.

Under the direction of the county board, the engineer works to carry out a wide variety of obligations, including preparing plans for the use of motor fuel tax funds. In addition, the engineer is fully responsible for bridges on both county and township highway systems.

The county engineer performs an annual inspection and evaluation of the condition and load-carrying capacity of each bridge. The county engineer works closely with townships and municipalities to assist with maintenance of streets within their boundaries. The county engineer serves as the engineering advisor to the township trustees for the maintenance and repair of their highways. Maintenance duties include traffic control, safety projects, guardrail repair and replacement, mowing, and snow removal. County engineers are required to keep records of all township road contracts in excess of \$5,000. The engineer also serves as representative of the county's interest with the Illinois Department of Transportation (IDOT).

Any two or more counties may, with the approval of IDOT, appoint the same person as county engineer or superintendent of highways for each of the counties and may, by agreement, provide for the proportionate share of the salary and expenses of the appointee to be borne by each county.



Other Responsibilities

The county engineer is the tax map draftsman for the county and generally serves on the local regional planning commission. Regional planning commissions provide advocacy, planning, technical assistance and project development in areas such as transportation, housing, land use and solid waste. In some counties, the engineer serves as the county sanitary engineer, working with the county board to supervise the construction of sewer and water lines. Approval and operation of landfills may also be a function of the engineer's office.



Training

Illinois requires county engineers to be licensed professional engineers. This accreditation requires a minimum of a college degree in engineering. In addition, many county engineers are also licensed registered professional surveyors.



Term

Appointed by the county board to a six-year term and must be approved by IDOT.

Understanding Leadership Roles

Source: *Inside the Courthouse*

County Recorder

Primary Duties:

The county recorder is the official land records manager for the county. They are responsible for recording, archiving and retrieving documents submitted by the public to be recorded, the most prominent being mortgages, deeds and liens. Originally, the office was known as the recorder of deeds, but due to the wider range of documents filed in the office, it is now known simply as the Office of Recorder.

The recorder's main responsibility is to record all documents transferring land to establish legal ownership. When property is purchased, the seller gives the new owner a deed to the property. This deed is recorded and placed on record in the recorder's office. Mortgage and trust deeds, assigned when an owner borrows money, are also recorded. The documents are carefully indexed and cross-referenced, so they can be retrieved by knowing the approximate transaction date or the name of the buyer or seller. The office also keeps records of subdivisions platted within the county.

Various other types of documents filed by the recorder include:

- Copy of Judgment (Supreme Court Rule)
- Military Certificates of Discharge
- Mechanic's Lien
- Tax Sale Certificates
- Release of Mortgages
- Organization of Sanitary Districts
- Statement to Dissolve a Corporation
- Filing Town Tax Collector's Bond
- Consolidation of Corporations

All records kept in the office are subject to the Freedom of Information Act and public inspection. Therefore, it is essential that all documents be indexed for efficient retrieval. As soon as a recorder receives any document in writing entitled to be recorded, they assign it a document number and certify the date, time, recorder's name and county. The information is entered into a computer-based indexing system, imaged and microfilmed for permanent archival storage. Each month, the recorder makes available to other county officials and the township assessor (in counties under the township form of government) copies of all documents, plats and deeds conveying real estate filed in the recorder's office during that month.

The recorder's office comprises the largest library of permanent property records within a county and consistently houses over 100 different types of documents. The average recorder's office processes between 500 and 1,200 transactions daily.



Other Responsibilities

The recorder is the keeper of county field notes and plats of the U.S. surveys. All records belonging to the county surveyor are deposited with the recorder. In some counties, the board designates the recorder to establish a permanent real estate index numbering system and map-making department, which are commonly used for tax-collection purposes.



Training

The Office of the Recorder is open to lay persons.



Term

The Office of the Recorder is not a mandatory office. The county clerk is the recorder in many counties having a population of fewer than 60,000. In counties having a population of 60,000 or more, there is an elected recorder. Elected recorders serve a four-year term.

Understanding Leadership Roles

Source: Inside the Courthouse

Sheriff

Primary Duties:

The sheriff is the primary law enforcement officer in the county. As the conservator of the peace, the sheriff strives to prevent crime and maintain safety and order of citizens in the county. Although the sheriff may enforce laws within the entire county, by professional courtesy, they do not do so within municipalities, which have their own law enforcement agency. As an "arm" of the judiciary, the sheriff is responsible for the service of civil documents by order of the court, such as subpoenas, summonses and judgments.

The sheriff has the authority to appoint deputies who may perform all duties of the sheriff. In addition to regular deputies, the sheriff may appoint special deputies and auxiliary deputies. Special deputies perform specified duties, such as serving summonses, while auxiliary deputies perform limited duties, such as traffic control and emergency aid. In counties with fewer than 3 million inhabitants, the sheriff may also hire court security officers. These officers have arrest power solely connected to their function in the courthouse and may carry weapons if appropriately trained, with the consent of the sheriff.

The sheriff's office strives to improve services to the community through innovative programs and additional services. Some familiar programs include D.A.R.E., which provides education in schools to teach kids the dangers of drug abuse and how to prevent it; Crime Stoppers, which provides an anonymous way to report crime and fugitives; K-9 programs, which provides canine drug detection and tracking abilities for both law enforcement and search and rescue operations; and I Live Alone, which provides home visits and crime prevention for the elderly.

Custodian of Courthouse and Jail: The custody and care of the courthouse and jail are under the jurisdiction of the sheriff. The sheriff is authorized to impose reasonable rules to control access to the county building(s) on holidays, weekends and during hours when it is closed to the public. The sheriff, having custody and care of the courthouse, has the power to employ courthouse janitors and all other custodial personnel. The county board has no authority to deprive the sheriff of such power by ordinance. While the sheriff exercises possession of the courthouse in a custodial capacity, the county board controls occupancy and judges assign courtrooms. The sheriff shall, in person or by deputy, county corrections officers or court security office attend all courts in their county when in session.



Other Responsibilities

The office of supervisor of safety is held by the sheriff. This office has the duty of enforcing all Illinois laws relating to the regulation of motor vehicle traffic and promotion of safety on public highways. Responsibilities also include foreclosures, property sales and auctions.



Training

The Office of the Sheriff is open to people without a law enforcement background. Sheriffs must obtain at least 20 hours of training approved by the Illinois Law Enforcement Training Standards Board each year.



Term

An elected office serving a four-year term.

Understanding Leadership Roles

Source: *Inside the Courthouse*

Treasurer

Primary Duties:

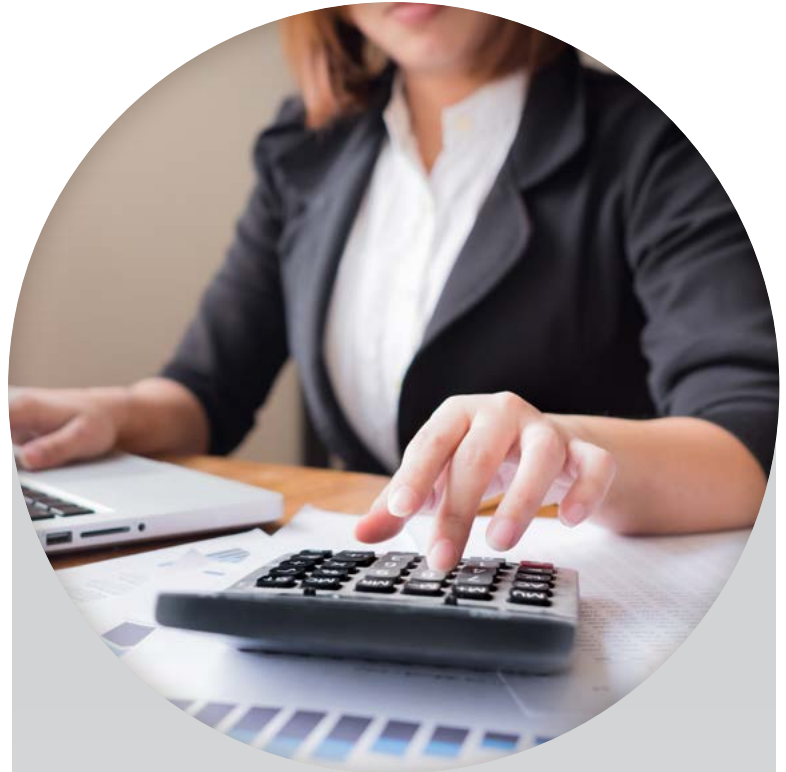
The county treasurer serves as the county's banker, responsible for the safekeeping and prudent investing of public funds. As the lawful custodian of county funds, the treasurer has the responsibility to receive and distribute the revenue and public monies of the county.

The treasurer must keep an account of all monies received by the county and all monies paid out, stating the time, to whom payment is made and on what account payment has been made. Payments must be specifically authorized by law or by the county board. The treasurer must invest and reinvest any funds that are not used within 30 days. Investments are made in savings accounts, treasury bills, certificate of deposits and other interest-bearing bank accounts that allow for the liquidity, safety of principal and maximum return on investment. Each month, the treasurer's books of account are subject to the provisions of the Local Records Act and are available for inspection by any person wishing to examine them.

The Public Funds Investment Act requires counties to have a written investment policy to address safety of principal, liquidity of funds and return on investment. This policy is to be adopted by the county treasurer and presented to the county board.

The county treasurer also serves as county collector of taxes. The county collector is responsible for the preparation of tax bills and the collection and distribution of property taxes. Upon receipt of the tax monies, the county collector disburses these funds to the various taxing districts.

The county collector holds a tax sale at the end of every tax year to sell the tax on parcels that remain unpaid. The county collector gives notice of the intended judgment of sale of delinquent lands and lots by publishing a notice in the local newspaper. Properties for which the taxes haven't been paid for two or more years are subject to a scavenger sale. The purpose of the scavenger sale is to return delinquent and deteriorating property to productive use as quickly as possible. For this reason, the amount required to be paid by the tax purchaser is less than the accumulated tax delinquencies.



Other Responsibilities

County treasurers assist senior citizens in filing for real estate tax deferral. The Senior Citizens Real Estate Tax Deferral Program provides tax relief for qualified senior citizens by allowing them to defer all or part of their property tax and special assessment payments on their principal residence. The deferral is similar to a loan against the property's fair market value. Deferred amounts are borrowed from the state, which then pays the tax bill.



Training

The Office of County Treasurer is open to lay persons. Within 60 days of assuming office, a treasurer must apply to the state comptroller for admission to the comptroller's county treasurer training program. The program must be completed within one year after applying for admission. Each treasurer must complete the program at least once during their term.



Term

County treasurer is an elected office serving a four-year term.



Congratulations

2023 Think LINK Graduates!

We applaud the accomplishments of our recent Think LINK participants! November marked the graduation of our ninth class who completed their involvement in the program with flying colors. We'd like to say congratulations to:

- Grace Clark, DeWitt County Farm Bureau
- Alexis Shreves, Massac County Farm Bureau & Pulaski-Alexander Farm Bureau
- Jenna Preston, Mercer County Farm Bureau

Each of these managers did an outstanding job and successfully completed the program that focuses on local government awareness and involvement. Make sure to congratulate each of them on a job well done!

Think LINK targets relatively new county Farm Bureau managers and is intended to raise their awareness, understanding and comfort level with local government—and ultimately their involvement. To help achieve these goals, Illinois Farm Bureau® staff spends time working with the participants on issues impacting at the local level and building relationships and engagement opportunities with local officials.

COMING SOON

Rural Economic Development Conference

The 35th Annual Rural Economic Development Conference will be held at the President Abraham Lincoln Hotel in Springfield on Feb. 28 and 29. The conference is presented by the Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs at Western Illinois University in conjunction with the Governor's Rural Affairs Council and Rural Partners.

The conference will highlight current topics that focus on converting opportunities into trends. Speakers will discuss innovative ideas on small business, revitalizing communities, and improving rural quality of life. For more information and to view the agenda, please visit <https://iira.org/conferences-trainings-and-workshops/rcedc/participant-conference-registration/>.

The early bird registration fee will be \$225 per person if registered by Feb. 2, 2024.

After February 2 and for registrations at the door, the rate is \$275 per person. The registration fee includes networking opportunities Tuesday (February 27) and Wednesday (February 28) evenings, lunch on Wednesday, a continental breakfast on Thursday (February 29), and breaks on both days. Please register at <https://iira.org/events/rcedc/>.

A block of hotel rooms is available at the Presidential Abraham Lincoln Hotel for \$107 per night. Room reservations are subject to availability; to receive the reduced rate, reservations must be made by February 6. For reservations please call (217) 544-8800 or reserve online at <https://www.hilton.com/en/attend-my-event/ilinstituteformruralaffairs/>. Be sure to ask for the Rural Community Economic Development Conference rate.

The Illinois Institute for Rural Affairs will provide a free parking pass for those staying at the President Abraham Lincoln Hotel, if you park in the self-parking garage adjoined to the hotel.

If you have any questions, please contact Sandy Wittig, sk-wittig@wiu.edu.