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# Metropolitan Government Charters

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We hope this information will be useful to you; reference to it will assist you with many of the questions that will arise in your tenure with county government. However, the *Tennessee Code Annotated* and other relevant laws or regulations should always be consulted before any action is taken based upon the contents of this document.

Please feel free to contact us if you have questions or comments regarding this information or any other CTAS website material.

Sincerely,

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# Metropolitan Government Charters

Reference Number: CTAS-477

The metropolitan form of government combines the powers of a county with those of cities generally. T.C.A. § 7-2-108. Therefore, a metropolitan government can exercise more powers than a county charter government and can exercise these powers throughout the county, with some limitation regarding smaller municipalities within the county that retain their charters. Key features of a metropolitan government include the following:

1. A general services district for the entire county;
2. An urban services district;
3. Possible special service districts;
4. A unified school system;
5. Wide discretion on allocation of duties among officials, including those of constitutional officers, as determined by the charter;
6. The size of the legislative body (metro council) is determined in the charter (up to 20 voting members);
7. The existence, nature and extent of the executive and/or administrative offices are determined in the charter;
8. Optional control over and consolidation of utility districts; and
9. Full ordinance powers.

Although the metropolitan government may not act in contravention of general law, the wide powers granted to the metropolitan government by the legislature means that this form of government comes closest to "home rule" as is permitted under our current law.

The process to form a metropolitan government begins with the selection of a charter commission. A charter commission may be created by one of three methods. The most commonly used method is one in which the charter commission is created by a majority vote on a resolution approved by the governing bodies of both the most populous city (or, in certain circumstances, the county seat) and the county. A second method is by private act of the General Assembly. The third method is by petition signed by qualified voters in the county in a number equaling at least 10 percent of the votes cast in the county for governor in the last gubernatorial election. The commission members are either appointed by the county mayor and the mayor of the county's major city or elected by the voters as determined by the resolution or petition, if those methods are used, or by resolution if the petition does not specify a method of selecting charter members. If a private act is used, the private act determines the method of selection. If the resolution method is used, the county mayor appoints 10 members and the mayor of the most populous city appoints five members to a 15-member charter commission.

The charter must contain provisions for general services and urban services districts, for a metropolitan council and election of members to terms of office, for the selection of administrative and executive officers, for an education department, and for other administrative departments. Smaller (less populous) cities within the county may retain their charters if their governing bodies choose not to send representatives to the charter commission to write an appendix to the charter for inclusion of the smaller cities. Several cities and counties have formed charter commissions and voted on consolidation under the metropolitan government statutes, but only Nashville-Davidson County, Lynchburg-Moore County and Hartsville-Trousdale County have adopted a consolidated form of government as of this writing. One obvious difficulty in adopting a metropolitan form of government is the requirement that the metropolitan government charter receive a majority of the referendum votes both within the city and outside the city that is to consolidate with the county.

The Tennessee Advisory Commission on Intergovernmental Relations (TACIR) has produced an excellent publication entitled *Forming a Metropolitan Government*.

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