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Guest Column

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County Government

Are you a fan of the County's zoning laws? Do you think the County's permit and service fees are too low? Too high? Does the County's public health department meet your needs?

County zoning ordinances regulate the use of a particular property by controlling the types of development allowed and they control the dimensions of allowable development (such as lot size, density, setbacks, etc.). Fees impact your life, too; everything from building permits to transportation to noxious weed control to solid waste disposal. Public health also touches each county resident; as its mission is "to protect and promote health and the environment of the people of Kittitas County."

Counties in Washington state can be organized under one of two forms of government: Commission (Article 11, section 5 of the Washington Constitution makes this the most common form of county government) or Home Rule Charter. Kittitas County is governed by an elected three-member commission that functions as its legislative, executive and, at times, judicial branches of government. Commissioners are the de facto chief executives of the county.

According to Municipal Research & Services Center (MRSC), "Commissioners are authorized and required to make policy for the county." County commissioners also set the county budget. In theory, the broad policy goals are used as a framework for developing the budget.

County commissioners must balance the needs of its diverse residents, businesses, and interest groups against long range goals and limited resources, while preserving the environment for future generations. They also distribute monies for conservation projects, tourism, affordable housing, mental health care, and more.

As with other county-wide elected offices, county commissioners are typically elected in partisan contests for 4 year terms during even years. There is a Kittitas county commissioner race this year because the current incumbent was appointed, not elected.

County Services include:

- Childhood immunizations
- Air quality monitoring
- Water banking
- Food & Drinking water safety
- Recycling
- Police & Courts
- Emergency response & preparedness
- much more

How are counties funded?

1. Permit & service fees
2. Taxes, bonds, levies
3. State & federal funds
4. Grants

Your vote matters

The county in which you live regulates much of what can be done with the land, what fees are required for services, which services it will make available, and who can access them. The county, in a very real sense, describes the breadth and scope of your life. You, as a voter, can ensure that county government meets your needs. But only if you vote.

Your vote for commissioner will help shape not only what services the county provides, its fees or taxes, the very future of the county itself and the quality of your own life.

Be an informed voter. Learn about the candidates and their goals in serving as your county commissioner. Make an informed decision this November.

Not registered? Go to [VoteWA](#) to register online by October 28th or register in person at the Kittitas County Auditor's office.

Vote. It matters.