



**City of Gainesville
Clerk of the Commission
Office of the City Commission**

PO Box 490, Station 19
Gainesville, FL 32627-0490
200 E. University Avenue
P: (352) 334-5015
F: (352) 334-2036

City of Gainesville Policy Program Preliminary Research & Analysis

TOPIC: Commission Office Staffing Structure

PREPARED BY: Morgan Spicer and Zeria K. Folston, Policy Research Team

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REQUESTED BY: Commissioner Hayes Santos

OBJECTIVE

Explore the options for commission office staffing structures in Florida cities and those allowed through the Gainesville City Charter.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Currently, city commissioners in the City of Gainesville have no personal or legislative staff, and instead share administrative assistants who help with the commissioners' schedules and other tasks. Currently, there are four administrative assistants who work in the Clerk of the Commission's office which divide duties between the six commissioners and the mayor. The current staff assigned to the City Commissioners per the City Charter are the six charter officers, the City Manager, the General Utilities Manager, the City Attorney, the City Auditor, the City Clerk, and the Equal Opportunity Director. The City of Gainesville is structured in this manner to ensure that all City Commission needs are handled directly through the charter officers.

Most cities in the State of Florida of similar size to Gainesville and smaller follow a similar structure, where the city commissioners do not have any personal staff but rather share one or multiple administrative assistants which are staffed through the clerk's or city manager's office. However, as cities get larger than Gainesville, they begin to allow their city commissioners to establish at least one independent staffer or aide for each commissioner. These aides are primarily responsible for constituent services, and their duties may extend to fiscal and legislative support. However, all of the cities which allow their commissioners to appoint independent staff allow this in their City Charter, which Gainesville does not.

According to the Gainesville City Attorney's Office, any effort to give city commissioners the power to appoint and supervise their own personal staff would require an amendment to the City Charter.

HISTORY/BACKGROUND INFORMATION

City of Gainesville

Currently, the Gainesville city commissioners have no personal staff, and instead share four administrative assistants. The mayor has one independent administrative assistant and the commissioners each share one administrative assistant among two commissioners. The administrative assistants work in the Clerk of the Commission's office, and assist commissioners with scheduling and agenda setting. Additionally, at least one previous mayor had a personal assistant, although this position did occasionally bring about criticism as the personal assistant as a former campaign official.¹² The Gainesville City Charter expressly allows for the City Commission to appoint the charter officers (including the City Manager, City Attorney, Clerk of the Commission, General Manager for Utilities, City Internal Auditor, and Equal Opportunity Director). The City Commission is also granted the ability to "create advisory boards and committees as it deems necessary". Finally, the City Commission is granted the authority to appoint a city charter review commission (CCRC). No additional appointments are explicitly allowed through the City Charter.³

Additionally, 2.10 of the City Charter states that **the Commission must deal with "all employees of the City solely through their respective Charter Officer"**, making it clear, according to the City Attorney, that all employees of the City report to a Charter Officer, not the City Commission. Under Gainesville's form of government, the Commissioners act as a board of directors, and under this structure, they have no individual management or job responsibilities that would require them to have their own staff, beyond the administrative assistance that is provided through the Clerk of the Commission.⁴ According to the Gainesville City Attorney, a change to this structure would require the adoption of an ordinance which puts a Charter Amendment to a referendum vote.

Advantages and Disadvantages of Independent City Commission Staff

The primary advantage to allowing city commissioners to have independent staff, as opposed to shared staff, is to allow for a greater breadth of constituent and legislative services and to lessen the workload of commissioners and existing executive assistants. When a commissioner has an independent staff person, that individual can serve as a representative for the commissioner in meetings or conferences and then brief that commissioner, while when commissioners share staff members that may not be possible. Additionally, when commissioners are not able to attend speaking events and allow for a fellow commissioner to attend those events in their place, instead of a staff person, there is a loss of information and communication for that commissioner due to Florida Sunshine Laws. Finally, independent staffers can ensure that all emails and calls are answered to the highest capacity, something that may be diminished when shared executive assistants have multiple schedules and agendas to handle.

However, one of the disadvantages is that bringing on more staff can be costly to the city (the addition of three executive assistants would cost at least \$150,000 plus the costs of providing benefits for those individuals), and there may be concern that there is not a sufficient need for this increase. Due to the fact that there is existing staff to assist the commission in many aspects of their jobs (i.e. the Clerk's office to assist with scheduling and agendas, the Clerk's policy department to assist with front-end policy

¹ <https://www.gainesville.com/article/LK/20120307/News/604133500/GS>

² <https://www.gainesville.com/news/20101205/craig-low-why-i-need-an-aide>

³ https://library.municode.com/fl/gainesville/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=PTICHLA_ARTIICICO

⁴ Gainesville City Attorney's Office

research, and the City Manager's office to assist with operational policy decisions), four executive assistants shared amongst the six commissioners and mayor may sufficiently meet the needs of the commissioners and thus there not be a need to expand the budget to lead to this increase.

Finally, one of the concerns for independent staffers is the potential politicization of the aide position, as the aides would likely report directly to the elected official rather than the Clerk's office. This may mean that the work done by the aide is more likely to specifically help the elected official and their potential political prospects, rather than assist the city and commission as a whole. This is compared to when an aide works for more than one commissioner and thus is more likely to be working towards the goals and smooth operation of the commission as a whole.⁵

The staffing structures of city commissions around the state and country vary significantly, and there are no established best practices for commission staffing from the National League of Cities. According to the Alliance for Innovation, cities with comparable population sizes to Gainesville primarily had shared staff teams, either with one or two staffers for the entire commission, or a shared staffer between one or two commissioners, like the City of Gainesville. Larger cities with a strong mayor form of government tend to allow their elected officials to have independent aides.⁶

The general consensus is that cities should adopt the practice that best suits them – cities larger than Gainesville, such as Miramar and Tallahassee do tend to allow their commissioners an independent staffer, while cities smaller than Gainesville such as Lakeland and Coral Springs have their commissioners share staff. There are exceptions to this, for instance Pembroke Pines, which is larger than Gainesville, has shared staff among the commission and no independent staff. Ultimately, if there are concerns among existing administrative assistants and commissioners that their workload is too strenuous and that constituent services are not able to be properly responded to, then the addition of an independent staffer for each commissioner may be useful.

PRELIMINARY RESEARCH AND FINDINGS

City Commissions with Independent Staffers

Jacksonville, Florida

The City of Jacksonville has an extensive staffing structure under the Office of the City Council. Each of the 19 commissioners have an independent assistant, who assists them with scheduling and constituent services.⁷ These staff members receive around \$55,000-\$60,000 annually.⁸ Additionally, there is a Secretary to the Council President and an Executive Council Assistant.

Under the Council Secretary (essentially the Clerk of Commission), there is an Information Systems Administrator, an Administrative Assistant to the Council Secretary, a Chief of Research, a Chief of Administrative Services, a Chief of Legislative Services, and Value Adjustment Board Legislative Assistants. Finally, there are two legislative services assistants, three administrative services assistants, and a research assistant. With this structure, the independent assistants to the commissioners do not

⁵ Dr. Robert Lee, Center for Local Government Excellence

⁶ Alliance for Innovation, Samantha Corrales

⁷ https://www.coj.net/city-council.aspx#digital_river_frame_1

⁸ <https://floridapolitics.com/archives/193364-jax-city-council-looks-to-boost-staff-pay-personal-compensation>

handle tasks such as research or legislative assistance.⁹ The Council Members can choose to appoint an independent assistant to handle their scheduling and constituent services or they can choose to receive assistance from the Council Secretary, however they cannot receive both. This structure is outlined in the Jacksonville City Charter.¹⁰

The annual salary of council members in Jacksonville is \$49,000, and the council president receives a \$65,500 salary.¹¹ The city has a population of 903,889, and is thus substantially larger than Gainesville.¹²
Miami, Florida

The Miami Mayor has a Chief of Staff, a Deputy Director of Communications, an Economic Development and Resiliency Advisor to the Mayor, an Aide to the Mayor for Community Programs, a receptionist, and three special aides. In total, the Mayor has a budget of approximately \$1,000,000 to spend on personnel expenses.¹³ Each Mayor is able to choose how to staff their office, as long as it is within the personnel budget.

The five city commissioners are each able to choose how to staff their office upon election. The total personnel budget for the five commissioners is \$3,553,000.¹⁴ Each commissioner receives a portion of this total, and is able to staff their office within the budget as they see fit. Most commissioners have District Liaisons, Policy Advisors, and Office Aides.¹⁵ For instance, the District 1 Commissioner has a Chief of Staff, Communications Aide, Receptionist, and three Community Liaisons. The District 2 Commissioner has a Chief of Staff, a District Liaison, a Policy Advisor, a District Director, a Project manager, an Office Manager, and a Staff Services Assistant. The District 4 Commissioner has a Chief of Staff, a Chief Legislative and Policy Advisor, a Community Liaison, a Special Projects Coordinator, and three aides.¹⁶

Tampa, Florida

In Tampa, Florida, each of the seven city council members have a legislative aide, who is responsible for administrative, office, and research support for the member of the council.¹⁷ Legislative aides' duties include information searches and compilation of data surrounding city initiatives; serving as an administrative liaison for the council member and meeting with representatives of the media, government officials, and the general public; screening callers and visitors; maintaining schedules of appointments, meetings, and other events for the council member; composing correspondence and

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http://apps2.coj.net/City_Council_Public_Notices_Repository/2019%2010%2001%20Dept_APPROVED.pdf

¹⁰

https://library.municode.com/fl/jacksonville/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=TITILEBR_CH10ORC

¹¹ <https://www.jacksonville.com/news/metro/2017-09-26/jacksonville-city-council-approves-budget-mayor-curry-s-priorities-intact#:~:text=Council%20members%20lowered%20their%20pay,rose%20from%20%2458%2C800%20to%20%2465%2C500>.

¹² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Jacksonville,_Florida

¹³

<http://archive.miamigov.com/Budget/docs/FY20/Adopted%20Budget%20Book%20with%20TOC%20Hyperlinks.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://www.miamigov.com/Government/City-Officials>

¹⁵ Personal Communication, Daniel Delgado Human Resources

¹⁶ <https://www.miamigov.com/Government/City-Officials>

¹⁷ <https://www.tampagov.net/city-council/about-us>

writing reports and administrative reforms; and attending meetings and conferences as a representative for the council member.¹⁸

The ability of the Tampa City Council to create these independent staff positions is outlined in the Tampa City Charter.¹⁹

The salary range for this position is \$56,867-\$85,092.²⁰ Tampa City Council members make \$43,567 a year²¹, and the city's population is 392,890.²²

Fort Lauderdale, Florida

In Fort Lauderdale, each of the four city commissioners and the mayor have a personal commission assistant, and there is one additional commission assistant which oversees the entire commission.²³ This structure is explicitly allowed by the Fort Lauderdale City Charter which states that the city commissioners have the authority to appoint and oversee their personal commission assistants.²⁴ The commission assistants serve as the first point of contact for the city commissioners, and assist commissioners in clerical duties such as constituent services, preparing the fiscal budget, monitoring office expenses, purchasing office supplies, and additional duties in support of the commissioner such as public outreach and public relations. Additionally, the commission assistants assigned to specific commissioners can handle legislative research for the commissioner, and serve as a liaison for the commissioner. The salary range for the position is \$59,000-\$92,000 annually.²⁵

Fort Lauderdale has a population of roughly 180,000, and in 2019, the commission salaries increased from \$30,000-35,000 annually to roughly \$70,000 annually. The job has no official hours, and so it is up to the individual commissioners as to whether the role is part or full-time.²⁶

Tallahassee, Florida

Tallahassee City Commissioners each have an individual "aide" which assist them with administrative and research tasks. The Tallahassee Mayor has a staff of three. The aides for the commissioners interface with constituents, write and research materials to advance the commissioners' priorities, maintain the office's online presence, and handle each commissioners' responsibilities of the day to day operations

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<https://www.jobapscloud.com/Tampa/specs/classspecdisplay.asp?ClassNumber=008065&LinkSpec=RecruitNum2&R1=&R3=>

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https://library.municode.com/fl/tampa/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=CHRELA_PTACH_ARTIILE_S2.04ST

²⁰ <https://www.jobapscloud.com/Tampa/auditor/salarytable.asp>

²¹ <https://www.bizjournals.com/tampabay/news/2016/11/18/salariessee-how-much-money-your-tampa-metro-city.html>

²² https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tampa,_Florida

²³ <https://www.fortlauderdale.gov/government/city-commission/office-of-the-mayor-city-commission>

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https://library.municode.com/fl/fort_lauderdale/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=CHFOLAFL_ARTVICISESY_S6.02CLNOS_E

²⁵ <https://www.fortlauderdale.gov/departments/human-resources/employment-with-the-city-of-fort-lauderdale/job-descriptions>

²⁶ <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/local/broward/fort-lauderdale/fl-ne-fort-lauderdale-salaries-20190618-j4nfcli56jbklknjyv2xdumcma-story.html>

of the City Commission. The position receives anywhere from a minimum pay of \$17.35/hour to a maximum pay of \$39.83.²⁷

The Tallahassee City Charter does reference commission appointed aides several times throughout the document. Aside from these references to aides, the Tallahassee City Charter is structured in a similar manner to the Gainesville City Charter, where the city commissioners are only explicitly granted the power to appoint charter officers.

However, per the Tallahassee City Attorney, Section 10 of the City of Tallahassee Charter grants the City Commissioners all powers of the city unless prohibited by Charter or other law. They cannot employ or appoint, per the charter, the employees of the appointed officials, but can employ their own aides as this is not prohibited by the charter.²⁸ This, as stated earlier, is the primary difference between Gainesville and Tallahassee, and this is what enables Tallahassee City Commissioners to appoint their own personal staff, as they are not prohibited from doing so by their charter or any other law.

The primary distinction between the City of Tallahassee, which allows its commissioners to appoint personal staff, and the City of Gainesville, is that Tallahassee's charter states that "All powers of the city except as otherwise provided by this Charter, or by the Constitution of the state are hereby vested in the city commission; and, except as otherwise provided by this Charter, or by the Constitution of the state, the city commission may by ordinance or resolution prescribe the manner in which any power of the city shall be exercised". **The Gainesville City Charter does not allow this authority, and thus while Tallahassee's City Commission has all powers that are not explicitly prohibited by the charter, the Gainesville City Commission only has powers that are explicitly given to them by the charter.**

The Tallahassee City Commissioners' positions are not specifically listed as part-time or full-time, and in 2020 the commissioners' salary will amount to \$40,145 annually. There are currently ongoing efforts to increase the commissioners' salary to be more commensurate with the workload.²⁹ The City of Tallahassee is larger than Gainesville, with a population of 195,000.

Miramar, Florida

In Miramar, a city slightly bigger than the City of Gainesville with a population of 138,000 allows each city commissioner to have a legislative aide, while the mayor has an executive assistant in place of a legislative aide.³⁰ The legislative aides are primarily responsible for clerical duties, such as planning meetings, taking minutes and dictation, proofreading and reviewing mail, taking phone calls, and filing records.³¹

This power was originally established in the Miramar City Charter, which states that "The City Commission shall have the power to appoint the City Manager, City Attorney, and commission secretary and members of all municipal boards, except civil service boards". However, that power was expanded to include the appointment of individual secretaries for each commissioner by resolution.³²

²⁷ <https://www.talgov.com/employment/hr-job-descriptions.aspx>

²⁸ Tallahassee City Attorney

²⁹ <https://www.wctv.tv/content/news/City-Commission-votes-3-2-to-look-at-allowing-citizens-to-vote-on-their-salaries-567852601.html>

³⁰ <https://www.miramarfl.gov/261/Office-of-the-Commission>

³¹ <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/local/broward/miramar/fl-reg-miramar-commission-aides-20171011-story.html>

³² https://library.municode.com/fl/miramar/codes/code_of_ordinances?nodeId=PTICH_ARTIICICOMA_S2.05APPOCO

According to this resolution, the Miramar City Charter authorizes the City Commission as a whole to appoint a Commission Secretary, and states that the supervision, control, direction, and removal of that secretary falls to the City Commission rather than the City Manager. This resolution delegates the additional power to the Commission to allow for individual commissioners to appoint their own independent secretary or secretaries, and control all aspects of their employment.³³

Since the passage of the resolution, the city commission has switched from the term “commission secretary” to “legislative aide”. The legislative aide job description consists of primarily secretarial tasks, including planning meetings, taking minutes and dictation, proofreading, reviewing mail, taking phone calls, and filing records. Prior to 2015, the city commission had one administrative assistant which conducted those tasks for the entirety of the commission, however in September 2015 the commission voted to give themselves complete authority to hire, discipline, and fire legislative aides, and to set their pay at a maximum of \$83,000. The city commissioners have a salary of roughly \$35,000 annually.³⁴

The commission has received criticism from this move, with critics arguing it is a waste of taxpayer money and that the commissioners should share aides rather than each having their own independent aide, however the commissioners say that the job has become much more complex with the city’s recent growth. The aides additionally review and analyze policy initiatives.³⁵

City/County Commissions Without Independent Staffers

Alachua County, Florida

The Alachua County Commissioners do not have any independent staff to assist with administrative support. Instead, there are two staff members housed under the Assistant County Manager (the Executive Coordinator and Executive Staff Assistant) who provide administrative support to all five county commissioners.³⁶

The Executive Coordinator receives a salary of \$45,000-\$69,000 annually, and provides constituent services to the County Manager, Deputy County Manager, Assistant County managers, Communications Office, and Board of County Commissioners.³⁷ The Executive Staff Assistant has a salary ranging from \$33,000-\$49,000, and helps with agenda preparation, scheduling, and office paperwork.³⁸

Athens-Clarke County, Georgia

The Athens-Clarke County Commissioners are part time employees, and do not have any independent employees. Instead, the Clerk of Commission has one employee, a Deputy Clerk of Commission, and both of those employees work for all ten commissioners.³⁹ Athens-Clarke County has a population of roughly 130,000, and houses the University of Georgia. There is no independent city commission for the City of Athens, it is instead governed by the Athens-Clarke County Commission.⁴⁰

³³ https://www.miramarfl.gov/AgendaCenter/ViewFile/Agenda/_09022015-53

³⁴ <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/local/broward/miramar/fl-reg-miramar-commission-aides-20171011-story.html>

³⁵ <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/local/broward/miramar/fl-reg-miramar-commission-aides-20171011-story.html>

³⁶ Personal Correspondence with Gina Peebles, Assistant County Manager – Chief of Staff

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<https://www.governmentjobs.com/careers/alachua/classspecs/31362?keywords=executive%20coordinator&pagetype=classSpecifications>

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<https://www.governmentjobs.com/careers/alachua/classspecs/31446?keywords=executive%20staff%20assistant&pagetype=classSpecifications>

³⁹ Personal Correspondence with Christine Howard, Deputy Clerk of Commission

⁴⁰ <https://www.accgov.com/27/About-U>

Pembroke Pines, Florida

Pembroke Pines has approximately 167,000 residents, and has two full-time and one part-time executive assistants who serve the entire five-member commission, city manager, and assistant city manager.⁴¹ These individuals are staffed under the clerk's office

The city commissioners make roughly \$25,000 annually.⁴²

Fort Collins, Colorado

In Fort Collins, Colorado, there are no dedicated staffers to each Councilmember. Instead, there is a staff member from the City manager's office which supports the Council and Mayor on a part-time basis with administrative support, and there are other areas (such as constituent request tracking) which are handled by designated members of the City Manager's Office administrative team. All of these support positions work directly for the City Manager's Office administrative team, and the City Manager delegates their roles to assist the Council and Mayor depending on the City Manager's discretion – the staff members do not report to the City Council. There are additionally two members of the City Manager's Office who assist with policy support, but these individuals do not report to the City Council.⁴³

Fort Collins has a population of 167,830.

Boulder, Colorado

The City Commissioners for Boulder, Colorado do not have any independent staff working for them. Instead, the entire commission shares one staff member, the Assistant to the City Council, who serves the entire body and assists with administrative and communication tasks, support at council meetings, special projects research, and policy advisor support.⁴⁴

Boulder, Colorado has a population of 107,353.

Coral Springs, Florida

The four city commissioners and the mayor all share a single administrative manager, staffed by the clerk's office. The executive assistant is paid \$41,000 annually, and the city has approximately 130,000 residents.⁴⁵

The city commissioners make roughly \$19,000 annually.⁴⁶

Lakeland, Florida

⁴¹ <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/local/broward/miramar/fl-reg-miramar-commission-aides-20171011-story.html>

⁴² <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/local/broward/fort-lauderdale/fl-ne-fort-lauderdale-salaries-20190618-j4nfcli56jbklknjyv2xdumcma-story.html>

⁴³ Personal Communication, Sarah Kane – City Manager's Office

⁴⁴ Personal Communication with Pam Davis, Acting City Clerk and Taylor Reiman, Assistant to the City Council

⁴⁵ <https://www.coralsprings.org/government/city-clerk/your-representatives>

⁴⁶ <https://www.sun-sentinel.com/local/broward/fort-lauderdale/fl-ne-fort-lauderdale-salaries-20190618-j4nfcli56jbklknjyv2xdumcma-story.html>

In Lakeland, the Mayor and City Commission share staff. They have a Senior Administrative Assistant, and an Office Associate. The elected officials and their 2 staff members share an office space with the City Manager's Office, and so the City Manager's clerical staff can assist when needed. There are no staffers who work individually for the elected officials.⁴⁷ In Lakeland, the city also owns its own utility, and has a population of roughly 115,000.

PRELIMINARY COST/BENEFIT ANALYSIS

Costs

- This change could require an increase in commission personal services budget.
- Current executive assistant reassignment.
- Would likely require a charter amendment to grant the City Commissioners the authority to appoint their own staff.
- Potential politicization of the aide/assistant position.
- Public perception.

Benefit

- Could result in better exchange in ideas with neighbors.
- This staffing structure is associated with larger cities, and thus could create a more professional and efficient environment within the City Commission.

PRELIMINARY AND ILLUSTRATIVE LIST OF POTENTIAL STAKEHOLDERS

- City Attorney's Office
- Clerk of the Commission's Office
- City Commission

⁴⁷ Personal Communication, Lakeland City Clerk Kelly Koos