

RESEARCH GUIDES

Where to Find Local Government Charters, Ordinances & Forms of Government

Charters

Local governments are created by acts of the General Assembly, which define their boundaries and approve their charters. These charters can be changed by legislative action or, in certain cases, by so-called "home rule" amendments adopted by the local governments. Local government charters and legislative amendments can be found in the Session Laws of North Carolina. All "home rule" changes to local government charters and forms of government must be filed with the Secretary of State and the Legislative Library, according to [G.S. 160A-111](#) and [G.S. 160A-496](#) (municipalities) and [153A-64](#) (counties). Many of these "home rule" amendments can be found at the Secretary of State's [Land Records Management webpage](#).

The Legislative Library maintains the printed volumes of Session Laws dating back to the mid 1800s with cumulative index volumes covering session years 1900-1967. Local legislation can be searched [online](#) for sessions beginning in 1959. Links to individual volumes from 1777 through 2015 can be found [here](#). The Index volume for 1900-1945 session laws is [here](#) and the 1947-1967 index can be found [here](#). The library also maintains a file of home rule charter amendments in a "Home Rule Amendments" binder.

For historical information on local government charters and incorporations of cities and towns, the North Carolina Supreme Court Library maintains the "W.P.A. Files." These files result from a project sponsored by the N. C. League of Municipalities during the early Works Project Administration years (1935-1943), to collect and index all North Carolina laws affecting municipalities. The files contain municipal acts of the General Assembly from 1715 through 1937. In researching charters and incorporations, the researcher may begin with the "List of Laws for Municipalities" file, which lists citations by city/town name. The "Municipality- County" files can then be referred to for a copy of the actual legislation.

Ordinances

[Municipal Code Corporation](#) and [American Legal Publishing Corporation](#) have links to city and county ordinances.

North Carolina Department of the Secretary of State, Land Records Management Section receives and files [municipal annexation ordinances](#) as submitted by N. C. cities and towns. GS 160A-29 and GS 160A-58.61 require that whenever the limits of a municipality are enlarged, a map of the annexed territory and a copy of the ordinance be filed with the Secretary of State.

Forms of Government

UNC School of Government maintains a searchable [database](#) of forms of North Carolina municipal government.

Updated 02-25-2022/jbc