

Hi, this is Chris Micheli with the Sacramento governmental relations firm of Aperia & Micheli and an adjunct professor at McGeorge School of Law. Today's podcast is a short one providing an overview of city government in the state of California.

The over 475 cities in the state of California provide a wide range of municipal services including police, fire, parks, and libraries. The city government is headed by an elected or appointed Mayor to whom department heads are generally responsible. The City Council usually appoints a City Manager to oversee the city services.

Cities in California are either charter or general law cities. General law cities have their powers set forth in the California Government Code while charter cities have more powers and their cities are governed by charters which can be changed by a vote of the electorate. Incorporated cities have the power of taxation and law enforcement, as well as zoning, parks, and other municipal services.

California cities are provided for in Article XI, Section 3 of the California State Constitution as well as the California Government Code. This also includes the process for the creation of city governments. Essentially cities in the state derive their authority from either the Government Code or from the electorate's adoption of a city charter.

Pursuant to California law, there are three types of cities, again, general law cities, charter cities, and a consolidated city and county - which is in San Francisco. The general law cities, again, are governed by the Government Code. Charter cities, on the other hand, are governed by the adoption of their charters. The consolidated city and county is a city and a county that have been merged into one single jurisdiction. It's governed by its own charter, and San Francisco is the only consolidated city and county in the state.

While counties are political subdivisions of the state, cities generally have greater authority than counties because they are voluntarily formed and they perform essential services which affect their citizens. Again, the California Constitution, in Article XI, and the Government Code, primarily in Section 34871, specify the differences between these general law and charter cities.

Thanks for joining.