

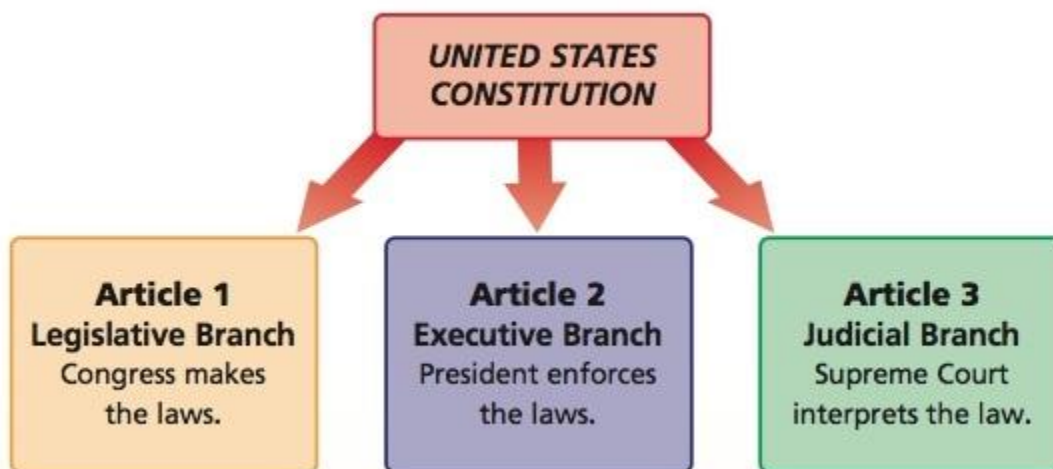


This document is a guide to understanding the inner workings of the Shelby county commissioners and city council. Including but not limited to; operating schedule, powers and abilities, important facts.

After being under informed and misled by both Shelby county commissioners and city council, and seeing as though this is NOT something taught in school, we at T.A.P find it advantageous to create an educational document dissecting the functionality of each local legislature, to avoid further confusion. It is evident that there will be no grace given, or efforts extended to inform our youthful organization on how these things work.

*"The revolution has always been in the hands of the young. The young always inherit the revolution."
-Huey P. Newton*

Separation of Powers



Glossary of Terms

- **Ordinance** – a law passed by city/county.
- **Resolution** – not a law, but a statement of support or direction.
- **Committee** – smaller group that discusses proposals before full vote.
- **Public Comment** – chance for the public to speak.
- **Zoning** – laws about what land can be used for (residential, commercial, etc.)
- **Executive Session** – closed meeting, usually for legal/personal stuff.



Both the Shelby county commissioners and City Council are **legislative bodies**, they vote on laws, budgets, and resolutions. **But the Mayor (city or county) is the executive power, they enforce what's passed.** (*Mayor Lee is to Shelby county commissioners as Mayor young is to City council.*)

City Council (Memphis) [City council link](#)

- Handles **city laws, budgets, zoning**, and **city agencies** (like MPD, MATA, sanitation).
- 13 members: 7 districts
- Usually meets on **Tuesdays**.
- Can pass city ordinances and resolutions.
- Approves the city budget, police funding, city taxes, etc.

Shelby County Commission [Shelby County commissioners link](#)

- Governs the **whole county**, including Memphis + suburbs + rural areas.
- Handles **county-wide issues**: health department, courts, jails, sheriff, schools (through budget), property taxes.
- 13 commissioners.
- Usually meets on **Mondays**.
- Approves county budget, oversees the Health Department and the Jail.
- Appoints members to **boards**, including **Air Pollution Control Board**.

Agendas drop before meetings (can be found online). They include what's getting voted on; ordinances, resolutions, etc. **First readings, committee votes, and full body votes** are all events you can track and show up for.



How to Speak out

Speaking on a Specific Resolution/Ordinance

- **What it is:** You're addressing a **particular item** on the meeting's agenda—like Resolution #17 about police funding, or an ordinance to approve a landfill permit.
- **When it happens:** During the meeting *when that specific item comes up*.
- **Time limit:** Same (1–3 minutes), but it's more targeted.
- **Purpose:** To *sway the vote*, offer support, or opposition. Your comment becomes part of the record *for that decision*.

Example: “I urge you to vote **NO** on Resolution #12 because it funds surveillance drones for MPD without community input.”

Public Comment

- **What it is:** A general open mic. You can speak on *any* issue, even if it's *not* on the agenda.
- **When it happens:** Usually at the beginning or end of a meeting.
- **Time limit:** Usually 1–3 minutes per speaker.
- **Purpose:** Just to be heard. It's not attached to a vote. You can bring awareness, pressure reps, or spark something that gets added later.

Example: “I’m here to speak about the increase in illegal dumping in District 6. We need enforcement and cleanup.”

Even if nothing on the agenda mentions dumping, you can still say your piece




Feature	Public Comment🗨️	Specific Resolution📜
Topic	Anything	One item on the agenda
Timing	Set time (start or end)	When that item is discussed
Impact	General influence	Direct input on a vote
Strategy	Raise issues, demand attention	Pressure them <i>right before</i> the vote



Your Rights at City Council & County Commission Meetings


Right to Attend (Open Meetings Law)

- Under Tennessee's **Sunshine Law** (Tenn. Code § 8-44-101), **all government meetings must be open to the public** unless there's a very specific legal reason (like litigation or personnel).
- You have the **legal right** to:
 - Walk into council or commission meetings.
 - Sit and observe.
 - Take notes, record, livestream, or document anything happening.

 If they close the doors, deny you entry, or tell you a public meeting is “full,” ask for the legal citation and film it.

2. Right to Speak (Public Participation)

- **City Council** and **County Commission** both allow **public comment**, but rules differ:
 - Some meetings limit comments to people who live in the district—**but that can be challenged** if the issue affects the public at large.
 - Time limits (usually 1–3 mins) must be applied **equally to everyone**.

 You have the **right to speak freely**, even if your comment is critical, angry, or political. (*as long as it's not a threat or disruption.*)



3. Right to Speak on a Specific Resolution or Ordinance

- When the council/commission is debating a specific item (like “Resolution 14: Approving Police Budget Increase”), **you have the right to request to speak on that item.**
- This is *different* from general public comment—it’s targeted.
- Usually, you sign up for this at the meeting by submitting a card
- **They can’t exclude you for opposing their agenda**—that’s *viewpoint discrimination* and it’s unconstitutional.



If they let supporters speak but shut out opposition? That’s a potential lawsuit.



4. Right to Record the Meeting

- Tennessee law allows you to:
 - Record audio/video of public meetings.
 - Livestream meetings on your own channel/page.
 - Take photos.
- Officials **cannot stop you** from recording unless your gear is disrupting the meeting (like loud equipment or blocking views).



“Ma’am, I’m well within my rights to record this public meeting. Are you attempting to violate Tennessee Code § 8-44-103?”



5. Right Against Unfair Removal



- If you are “disrupting” a meeting (yelling, interrupting, refusing to sit down), they **can ask you to leave**—but:
 - They must give a **clear warning**.
 - They **can’t remove you for content** (saying something they don’t like).
 - They **can’t remove you for wearing a shirt, holding a sign**, or silent protest. (unless disrupting the meeting)

🧠 If you're removed for just *speaking hard truths* or holding a protest sign, ask for the **official reason** and get it on video.

6. Right to Public Information

- You can request:
 - Past agendas, minutes, voting records, emails, communications.
 - Meeting attendance logs.
 - Budgets and contracts discussed or voted on.

Under the **Tennessee Public Records Act**, they must respond within **7 business days** and give you an explanation if they deny it.

🔍 “Under Tenn. Code § 10-7-503, I’m requesting a digital copy of the meeting minutes and any related documents for Resolution #22.”