How Things Work in Holden

Governmental Structure

In this first installment of "How Things Work in Holden," we will review and revisit basic Civics lessons.

In the federal government, there are three major bodies:

- Executive (President)
- Legislative (Congress – House of Representatives and Senate)
- Judicial (Supreme Court and other courts)

Each legislative body has certain powers and responsibilities. In a perfect world, they would not crossover. Everyone would stay in their lane. It was established with a balance of power, with no branch given too much authority so it provides for a system of checks and balances. Every branch would balance out the others and hold them accountable.

In city government, it is remarkably similar.

The Mayor serves in a role similar to the President; and has administrative responsibility over all of the functions of the city; but does not have the power to make laws. The Mayor also makes sure the rules (ordinances) are applied and enforced. City Council serves in roles similar to Congress. They make the ordinances and determine the direction of the city. There isn't a judicial body within Holden; however, the residents of Holden still have legal recourse in the county's judicial courts.

All of these city functions come with their own authority AND have certain restrictions placed on them. They have the power to do SOME things; but their authority does have an end. They must abide by State governing rules made specifically for the size of our town. And they must also abide by the Ordinances (laws) passed by previous city administrations.

The city's administration also has restrictions on what it can impose. For instance, the city does not have authority to resolve disputes between neighbors. That is for the civil courts to decide. The city also cannot simply fix or tear down buildings or residences; they must go through a process to work with the property owner to resolve the issues.

What the city DOES have an interest in is in enforcing current ordinances, maintaining the safety and health of our residents, and attracting businesses and visitors to the community.

We are considered a 3rd Class city. This is not a derogatory term; it simply describes the size of town we are. The State Legislature has made statutes (laws) for communities based on the "class" of town they are. Holden cannot expect to follow the same rules in every instance as Kansas City or St. Louis, so the State developed a "Class System" based on a community's size. This is important to the residents of Holden because when we look up the State of Missouri statutes, we need to be sure that the statute applies to our class level. You can find out more information about classes at this link. https://www.sos.mo.gov/CMSImages/Publications/municipalities05.pdf

Holden was established as a 3rd Class city and our ordinances reflect that even though technically speaking, IF we were to be established today, the State would consider us 4th Class based on the information on the Secretary of State website. However, since we have stated we are a 3rd Class city, AND it is in our ordinances, then the State of Missouri also considers us a 3rd Class city.

Because we are a 3rd Class city, the state determines the type of government we can have which are: Mayor/council; Mayor/city administrator/council; Council/manager; or Commission. Holden has selected the Mayor/Council form of government.

This means all bills must get the approval of the City Council and signed by the Mayor BEFORE they are considered or enforced as a law. However, there is at least one exception to this. The City Council does not have the authority to impose more TAXES on the community; those require a vote of the people.

We will discuss in a later article on how bills get introduced within Holden, but it is important to know that the Mayor does not have the authority to make laws (ordinances); and the City Council must have a majority of members voting 'yes' for a bill for it to be recorded as an ordinance (law). The members of City Council do not individually have independent authority; they must work as a group in order to get ordinances passed. We will also discuss how ordinances can be revoked or repealed in a later article.

It is important to note that Holden also has a Ward system. This allows for two (2) Ward members in each of Holden's four (4) quadrants. Each Ward has two (2) Council Members that MUST live in that Ward.

The Wards are defined as such:

- Ward One: North of 6th Street and East of Market
- Ward Two: North of 6th Street and West of Market
- Ward Three: South of 6th Street and West of Market
- Ward Four: South of 6th Street and East of Market

The people elected to your Ward are your representatives and if you have questions or concerns, then knowing who they are will be beneficial to you as a citizen. Speak with them, get to know them, discuss your ideas, concerns, and issues with them and let them serve your interests. Holden residents can provide feedback to their council members either by phone calls, emails or speaking with them. If you do not have direct contact information for your council members, please contact City Hall to get that information.

The City Council also encourages Holden residents to attend their City Council meetings on the 3rd Thursday of every month at 7 pm at City Hall. If you want to know about the finances of the City, then the Finance Meeting is held the 2nd Thursday of every month at the City Hall. These are the two methods that the City has set up to provide transparency and accountability to the residents of Holden. Word of mouth and rumors are not a good method in determining what is happening in our community. Show up to these meetings so you can gain first-hand knowledge.

Understanding our city's system of government is the first step to mastering How Things Work in Holden.