

## Foundational aspects of charter cities

### What is the Constitutional Framework for Charter Cities?

Article XI, section 3(a) of the California Constitution authorizes the adoption of a city charter and provides such a charter has the force and effect of state law. Article XI, section 5(a), the "home rule" provision, affirmatively grants to charter cities supremacy over "municipal affairs." However, the California Constitution does not define the term "municipal affair."

### What are "Municipal Affairs?"

The home rule provision of the California Constitution authorizes a charter city to exercise plenary authority over municipal affairs, free from any constraint imposed by the general law and subject only to constitutional limitations. See Cal. Const. art. XI § 5(a); *Ex Parte Braun*, 141 Cal. 204, 209 (1903); *Bishop v. City of San Jose*, 1 Cal. 3d 56, 61 (1969); *Comm. of Seven Thousand v. Super. Ct. (City of Irvine)*, 45 Cal.3d 491 (1988).

### How Do the Courts Distinguish Between Municipal and Statewide Concerns?

Whether a given activity is a municipal affair over which a city has sovereignty, or a statewide concern, over which the legislature has authority, is a legal determination for the courts to resolve. Thus, the determination of whether a given activity is a municipal affair or statewide concern is done on a case-by-case basis. The court's determination will depend on the particular facts and circumstances of each case. See *In Re Hubbard*, 62 Cal. 2d 119, 128 (1964). Keep in mind that the concept of "municipal affairs" is a fluid one that changes over time as local issues become statewide concerns. See *Issac v. City of Los Angeles*, 66 Cal. App. 4th 586 (1998).

### What Activities Have the Courts Classified As Municipal Affairs?

There are some areas that the courts have consistently classified as municipal affairs. Examples include the following:

- Municipal Election Matters. See *Mackey v. Thiel*, 262 Cal. App. 2d 362 (1968).
- Procedures for Initiative, Referendum and Recall. See *Lawing v. Faul*, 227 Cal. App. 2d 23, 29 (1964).
- Procedures for Adopting Ordinances. See *Brougher v. Board of Public Works*, 205 Cal. 426 (1928).
- Compensation of City Officers and Employees. Cal. Const. art. XI, § 5(b); See *Sonoma County Organization of Public Employees v. County of Sonoma*, 23 Cal. 3d 296 (1979); but see *San Leandro Police Officers Association v. City of San Leandro*, 55 Cal. App. 3d 553 (1976) (labor relations is not a municipal affair; Charter cities are subject to the Meyers-Milias Brown Act. Cal. Gov't Code § 3500).
- Processes Associated with City Contracts. See *First Street Plaza Partners v. City of Los Angeles*, 65 Cal. App. 4th 650 (1998); but see *Domar Electric, Inc. v. City of Los Angeles*, 41 Cal. App. 4th 810 (1995) (state law establishing employment policy may preempt local regulation of bidding criteria).

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- Financing Public Improvements. See *City of Santa Monica v. Grubb*, 245 Cal. App. 2d 718 (1996).
- Making Charitable Gifts of Public Funds for Public Purposes. See Cal. Const. art. XVI, § 6; *Tevis v. City and County of San Francisco*, 43 Cal. 2d 190 (1954).
- Term Limits for Council Members. See *Cawdrey v. City of Redondo Beach*, 15 Cal. App. 4th 1212 (1993); but see Cal. Gov't Code § 36502(b) (regulating term limits).
- Land Use and Zoning Decisions (with a few exceptions). See *Brougher v. Bd. of Pub. Works*, 205 Cal. 426 (1928).

### **What Activities Have the Courts Classified as Statewide Concerns?**

The following have consistently been classified by the courts as matters of statewide concern:

- School Systems. *Whisman v. San Francisco Unified Sch. Dist.*, 86 Cal. App. 3d 782, 789 (1978).
- Traffic and Vehicle Regulation. Cal. Veh. Code § 21.
- Licensing of Members of a Trade or Profession. *City and County of San Francisco v. Boss*, 83 Cal. App. 2d 445 (1948).
- Tort Claims Against a Governmental Entity. *Helbach v. City of Long Beach*, 50 Cal. App. 2d 242, 247 (1942).
- Open and Public Meetings. Ralph M. Brown Act. Cal. Gov't Code §§ 54951, 54953(a).
- Exercise of the Power of Eminent Domain. *Wilson v Beville*, 47 Cal. 2d 852, 856 (1957).

