



Sussex County, New Jersey County Government Structure

Sussex County is governed by five (5) freeholders who are elected by the voters of Sussex County. Each serves on the county's Board of Chosen Freeholders for a term of three (3) years, after which time they can seek re-election or retire.

The Freeholder Board meets on the second and fourth Wednesday of each month at 5:00 p.m. Meetings are "open to the public," which means anyone can attend to observe the meeting. Two periods are set aside for public comment during regular board meetings. The meetings are held at the County Administrative Center, One Spring Street, Newton, NJ.

Members of the Board of Chosen Freeholders for Sussex County New Jersey

(As of January 2011 through December 2011)

Richard Zeoli, Director

Susan M. Zellman, Deputy Director

Phillip R. Crabb

Parker Space

Richard Vohden

Clerk of the Board of Chosen Freeholders: Elaine A. Morgan

Sussex County Counsel: Dennis R. McConnell

What is a “Freeholder”?

A Freeholder is the elected county government representative in New Jersey who serves on the county’s main governing body, the Board of Chosen Freeholders.

The Sussex County Board of Chosen Freeholders sets policy for the county’s departments and divisions, plus a number of boards, commissions, authorities and committees. The Freeholders appoint a county administrator to supervise the actual day-to-day operation of county government. **Sussex County’s Administrator is John H. Eskilson.**

The word “Freeholder” traces its origin to medieval England. It was introduced here by the British colonists who brought with them the concept of the county as the local unit of government. When the British settled in the “new world,” they also brought with them the idea that only those who owned land free of any debt could hold public office – hence those qualified to hold office became known as “free-holders” and those who were elected to office were the “chosen free-holders.”

The basic law establishing the freeholder form of county government in New Jersey was enacted in 1798. In the beginning, each corporate municipality was represented by a freeholder on the county governing board. But as the number of municipalities increased to the point where some boards were bogged down by sheer weight of numbers, the law was changed. In 1912, the “Small Board” Act was adopted, permitting counties to elect freeholders from the county at large. The exact number of freeholders making up each county board was to be determined by the respective county’s population. The law was permissive and subject to approval by the voters at a referendum.

Since its enactment, 17 of New Jersey’s 21 counties have taken advantage of this Act. Only four counties: Gloucester, Salem, Atlantic, and Cumberland, retain the historic form with one freeholder elected from each governing body or subdivision. Sussex County has five freeholders. A county may have between three and nine freeholders, depending on its population and classification.

The freeholders are elected at-large to serve three-year staggered terms. The five freeholders elect a director from among themselves to run their meetings and to serve as a spokesperson for the board.

New Jersey is the only state whose elected county representatives are called freeholders.

Sussex County is represented in the **Federal Government** by two Senators and two Congressmen:

SENATE:

U.S. Senator Frank R. Lautenberg (Democrat)

U.S. Senator Robert Menendez (Democrat)

CONGRESS:

U.S. Rep. for the 11th Congressional District – Rodney P. Frelinghuysen (Republican)

U.S. Rep. for the 5th Congressional District – E. Scott Garrett (Republican)

Sussex County is represented in **NJ State Government** by its Governor, one member of the State Senate and two members of the General Assembly:

Governor Chris Christie (Republican)

State Senator Steven V. Oroho (Republican) – 24th Legislative District

Assemblyman Gary R. Chiusano (Republican) – 24th Legislative District

Assemblywoman Alison Littell McHose – 24th Legislative District

Sussex County's **Constitutional Officers*** are:

Brian McNeilly, Acting **County Clerk** (Republican)

Michael Strada, **Sheriff** (Republican)

Nancy D. Fitzgibbons, **Surrogate** (Republican)

* Each of New Jersey's 21 counties has three constitutional officers which are elected by the citizens of their respective county. They are the County Clerk and/or Register, County Sheriff, and County Surrogate. *See next page for more information on the functions of these officers.*

Functions of the County Clerk:

Responsible for the administration of a broad range of services, including:

- The recording of all documents affecting real estate ownership
- The processing of U.S. Passport applications
- Assisting persons who apply to become a Notary Public
- Issuance of ID cards
- Filing of Business Trade names
- Filing of military discharges
- Issuance of veteran's peddler licenses

The County Clerk also plays a key role in the conduct of elections:

- Accepts nominating petitions (as election official)
- Draws for ballot position (as election official)
- Designs layout of ballot (as election official)
- Processes the Mail-In ballot
- Certifies election results & issues candidate certificates of election (as election official)

Functions of the County Sheriff:

- Makes arrests
- Controls traffic, conducts accident investigations, transports prisoners
- Conducts routine patrols
- Maintains and operates county jail, other facilities
- Sponsors community crime prevention programs

Functions of the County Surrogate:

- Probates wills
- Processes adoptions
- Processes contested probate matters
- Processes alleged incompetents
- Films and records all probate proceedings
- Invests minor's funds
- Appoints guardians of minors