



UNIFIED GOVERNMENT OF WYANDOTTE COUNTY,
KANSAS CITY, KANSAS

CHIEF LEGAL COUNSEL



Unified Government of Wyandotte County, Kansas City, Kansas

CHIEF LEGAL COUNSEL

Unified Government of Wyandotte County, Kansas City, Kansas (pop. 169,245) is conducting a national search for an experienced Chief Legal Counsel with strong communication, public law experience, and departmental leadership skills.

The Unified Government is a merged city/county that was innovatively created by the Kansas legislature in 1997 with a County Administrator overseeing both functions. The County encompasses four cities (Kansas City, City Bonner Springs, Edwardsville, and part of Lake Quivira). The Unified Government/Wyandotte County is a unique, dynamic, and transforming public service entity that is ready to embrace new legal team leadership and staff mentorship.

The ideal Chief Legal Counsel candidate will be a proven and articulate local government attorney who is adept at managing and mentoring full-service legal teams and interacting within a diverse elected official and appointed top leadership environment. The ideal candidate will be capable of explaining Kansas state and local government law to the County Administrator and the Mayor and Commission, sometimes on short notice and often within a public setting, with written follow-up later.

The ideal candidate will be a proven local government legal expert who will be adept at attracting a successful law department team and building organizational culture.





THE REGION

Wyandotte County/Kansas City, Kansas is part of a greater metropolitan area of nearly two million people. The bi-state region encompasses Kansas City, Missouri, and surrounding communities on both sides of the state line. Wyandotte County/Kansas City, Kansas is located in "the heart of America" at the confluence of the Kansas and Missouri Rivers and at the crossroads of two transcontinental interstate highways. The Unified Government's offices are located 24 miles from the Kansas City International Airport (MCI) and four miles from Kansas City, Missouri.

Wyandotte County has a population of over 169,000 and covers 156 square miles. Wyandotte County is the fourth-most populous county in Kansas and hosts the University of Kansas Medical Center, the Kansas City, Kansas Community College, Donnelly College, and the Sumner Academy of Arts and Sciences/Magnet school, the highest ranked high school in Kansas. The General Motors Fairfax plant provides 2,100 jobs and manufactures the Chevrolet Malibu and Cadillac XT4. Kansas City, Kansas is the third largest city in the state of Kansas and is the county seat.



[View Livable Neighborhoods Video](#)

COMMUNITY: RECREATION, SCHOOLS & QUALITY OF LIFE

Wyandotte County is a community of choice and a major tourist destination with multiple attractions, recreation opportunities, and event venues. Many cities are known for their expanding skylines, action-packed nightlife, and bustling downtowns, Wyandotte County/Kansas City, Kansas offers both big city amenities and retains a charming, small-town appeal.

The County is home to the popular Wyandotte County Lake and 91 parks and dozens of miles of trails. When these recreation opportunities are combined with an uncongested transportation system, quality schools, and friendly people, it is easy to conclude why Wyandotte County is growing.

Community members are authentic and are fiercely proud of their community and its heritage, neighborhoods, and schools. New residents can choose from urban, suburban, or rural living. [More information on Housing.](#)

This diverse and family-oriented community is known as a place that is "easy to stay in and hard to leave." Its citizens enjoy a healthy lifestyle, a variety of recreational and cultural activities, and ample employment opportunities. Newly recruited Wyandotte County leaders from recent national searches affirm the above statements and cite their own warm welcomes received from the community.

Niche ranked Wyandotte County the fifth best county for young professionals in Kansas and one of the best counties for outdoor activities in Kansas. Kansas City, Kansas was also named one of America's Promise Alliance's 100 Best Communities for Young People.

The Wyandotte County region boasts abundant recreational and leisure amenities for residents and visitors alike including sports leagues, community events, craft shows, and outdoor concerts at Providence Medical Center Amphitheater. Sports fans can catch a professional sports team in action and take in a Sporting Club Soccer game and enjoy the thrill of NASCAR racing at Kansas Speedway. Outdoor enthusiasts enjoy boating and fishing at the popular 400-acre Wyandotte County Lake and Kaw Point Riverfront Park.

A variety of shopping and entertainment offerings can be found at Village West and Hollywood Casino, and cultural attractions include the Wyandotte County Museum, Strawberry Hill Museum, Grinter Heritage Center, and the Quindaro Ruins. Annual community events include the Renaissance Festival, Great American Barbecue Festival, and St. Patrick's Day Festival. Shopping at the Legends, a premier retail and entertainment destination with 100 shops, dining, and entertainment options, is always enjoyable.





Multiple school choices exist, some of which are recognized as top of their class within the State -- such as Sumner Academy and its international baccalaureate program. Starting in June 2024, Kansas students may go to any public school district in the state, space permitting. Many schools are within safe walking distance. There is tremendous pride in each school.

The city's four school districts, Unified School District #500 (Kansas City), Unified School District #202 (Turner), Unified School District #203 (Piper), and Unified School District #204 (Bonner Springs), provide quality education to students in grades K through 12. There are several private schools available in the area, and Kansas City, Kansas is also home to the Kansas School for the Blind.

Lifelong education is easily available in UG Wyandotte County. From Kansas City Kansas Community College in Wyandotte County to the University of Kansas branch four miles away or the University of Missouri nine miles away, educational excellence is at your doorstep.

Wyandotte County embraces diversity of people, institutions, and food. Kansas City, Kansas is a melting pot of culture demonstrated through art, its emphasis on historical and social justice organizations, and an international food scene. Barbecue may be known as the cuisine of nearby Kansas City, but in "KCK," you will find many specialties from south of the border. Multiple restaurants feature Central and South American cuisine. The Visitors Bureau hosts a regular Taco Trail competition with 50 participating taquerias.



UNIFIED GOVERNMENT BY THE NUMBERS

Population: **169,245**

Top Industries and Number of Jobs:

Healthcare (18,558)

Transportation (13,532)

Manufacturing (9,916)

Unemployment Rate: **3.3%**

Number of Unified Government Employees: **2,300**

Unified Government Budget Outcomes & Mill

Levy: **77.820** (2022) & **75.820** (2023) [See PowerPoint Presentation \(wycokck.org\)](#)

% of Consolidated General Funds for Public Safety:

57%

Estimated Unrestricted unallocated reserve:

19.3% in 2023 & **11.9%** in 2024

Housing Units: **68,239**

Income, Median Household: **\$48,093** (2020)

Home Values, Median: **\$200,000**

up **11.1%** over 2021 (Redfin)

Median Age: **34**

DEMOGRAPHICS:

40% White

22% Black or African American,

31% Hispanic or Latino

6% Asian

1% Other

Bachelor's Degree: **18%**

Poverty level: **16.9%** (2020)

Award Winning Water & Electric Utilities: Water Gold Award for from AWWA (Only 7 in USA)

It's an exciting time for Wyandotte County. [Check out these videos](#) from Wyandotte County Economic Development Council to see how fresh, progressive and dynamic our community is.





ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

Wyandotte County has a strong and diverse economy. The region's pro-business environment, motivated labor pool, and affordable wage rates are key attractors. With an unemployment rate of 3.3%, \$6 billion in new development in the last ten years, and 6,000 current job openings across multiple sectors, Wyandotte County's economic recovery exceeds the nations.

Wyandotte County is one of the most urbanized and diverse counties in the state; 58% of UG Wyandotte County residents are Hispanic, Black, Asian, or mixed races. Individuals who identify as Hispanic are the largest ethnic group at 30% of the total population. Wyandotte County fully embraces diversity of culture, people, and the economy.

Wyandotte County/Kansas City, Kansas enjoyed tremendous growth in economic development over the past 20 years and is poised to continue this trajectory. Wyandotte County citizens set the stage for today's economic development successes in 1997 when they overwhelmingly agreed to consolidate the county government and City of Kansas City, Kansas government. This new form of government was the beginning of a landmark renaissance in the community and the synergistic effect allowed the community to take new, bold approaches to many issues, particularly economic development.

Soon after the Unified Government was launched, the economic development opportunity of a lifetime landed in Wyandotte County with the Kansas Speedway and Village West. These developments are the most successful economic developments ever built in the State of Kansas, turning mostly undeveloped land into one of the most popular tourist, shopping, and entertainment attractions in the Midwest.

Village West has 116 businesses, including 29 restaurants, which employ nearly 5,700 people – jobs which just five years ago did not exist. The development generated over \$703 million in retail sales in 2014, producing a substantial amount of local sales tax revenue. Great Wolf Lodge, an indoor waterpark resort, was the first hotel in Village West, soon followed by other hotels. Amazon, which opened in 2017, is a 855,000 plus square-foot- fulfillment center located in Wyandotte County and generated over 1,000 positions for employment. Retail stores include Cabela's, Nebraska Furniture Mart, and a host of other establishments.

A recent \$400 million project resulted in a major expansion of the Cerner Corporation, an 18,000-seat multipurpose soccer stadium for the Sporting Club, Kansas City's major league soccer team, and the \$386 million Hollywood Casino.

The Unified Government has received high rankings for its business-friendly reputation. In addition, the Kansas City Startup Village is dubbed "silicon prairie." The development of this area was driven by Google Fiber.

Sara Lee Corporation, General Motors, and Kellogg are just a few of the nation's leading and state-of-the-art companies that have chosen Wyandotte County/Kansas City, Kansas as their home. The area's top employers include University of Kansas Hospital, University of Kansas Medical Center, General Motors, Kansas City, Kansas Public Schools, Burlington Northern-Santa Fe Railroad, and the Cerner Corporation, Amazon.

Being a key member of the Wyandotte County/Kansas City team that fosters continued economic development growth is a key desired attribute of the next Chief Legal Counsel.



GOVERNANCE & ORGANIZATION

The Chief Legal Counsel is appointed by the County Administrator. Advice and counsel are primarily intended for his office, the Mayor/CEO, and the Commission.

The Unified Government of Wyandotte County/Kansas City, Kansas was formed on October 1, 1997, based on a citizen vote to consolidate the operations of the City of Kansas City, Kansas and Wyandotte County, Kansas. The County provides a full range of public services including legislative, judicial, public works, public safety, corrections, health, welfare, cultural, recreation, transportation, public improvements, and general administration.

The Unified Government is classified as a Mayor/Chief Executive; Commission; County Administrator form of government. The Unified Government Board of Commissioners is composed of a Mayor/CEO elected at-large and (10) Commission members. All elected positions are non-partisan. Eight (8) of the Commission members are elected from districts. Two (2) Commissioners are elected at-large. The Board of Commission is the policy-making authority, sets goals, conducts the County Administrator's evaluation, and operates with the assistance of eight standing committees.

The Mayor's office is responsible for the Board of Commissioners' agenda in consultation with the County Administrator, appointing committees, breaking ties, and providing leadership to the Unified Government in the development of long-range plans and addressing the recommendations of the County Administrator in conjunction with the Board of Commissioners. Elections are held in odd-numbered years with staggered terms of four years. The County Administrator is appointed and serves at the pleasure of the Commission. With the Mayor/CEO's election in 2021, a new opportunity to focus on changing County services and relationships exists.

[Learn more.](#)

VISION AND MISSION STATEMENT

We are a vibrant, resilient community of compassionate and diverse neighbors, united for an equitable, healthy, prosperous future that is proudly Wyandotte.

The Mission of the Unified Government is to deliver high quality, efficient services and be a resource to our residents. We are innovative, inspired public servants focused on our community's wants and needs.



**David Johnston,
the County's third
Administrator.
Appointed in
March 2023.**





UNIFIED GOVERNANCE & CHIEF LEGAL COUNSEL RESPONSIBILITIES

The Chief Legal Counsel is an executive-level position that reports directly to the County Administrator. This position is responsible for providing effective and efficient comprehensive legal services for the Unified Government.

The Chief Legal Counsel is appointed by the County Administrator and is charged with oversight and direction of the Unified Government legal department. The Chief Counsel provides legal advice to the County Administrator, Mayor, Board of Commissioner and staff on policy formulation and other Unified Government actions. As a department head, the Chief Legal Counsel provides overall guidance, supervision of the Unified Government's attorneys and legal staff, and implements and develops overall Unified Government legal strategy.

Specific duties include: representing Unified Government in all legal matters; providing solid verbal advice to questions raised at Board meetings regarding procedure and policy formulation, followed up by written opinions; determining applicable laws, rules and regulations; providing guidance to staff attorneys; determining trial and appellate strategy and advisability of settlement; preparing formal legal opinions; drafting documents; reviewing contracts; investigating claims; assisting in making administrative decisions; advising and consulting on new initiatives and special projects; drafting, reviewing and negotiating legal documents; assisting in development of administrative policies; and attending Board meetings and various other public meetings.

The County Administrator is the chief administrative officer and is responsible to the Board of Commissioners for administration of all Unified Government affairs within the County Administrator's charge. The County Administrator directs and supervises the day-to-day operations of all county and city departments and agencies, as well as the appointment of non-elected department heads, including the Chief Legal Counsel. The County Administrator's Office is responsible for preparation and submission of the annual Unified Government budget to the Mayor and Commission. The County Administrator serves as the Board of Commissioners' official liaison to the elected constitutional officers, the judiciary, and state and regional agencies. The Mayor's office is responsible for the Board of Commissioners' agenda in consultation with the County Administrator, appointing committees, breaking ties, providing leadership to the Unified Government in the development of long-range plans and policies and the development of priorities for actions and in planning for economic growth and stability of The Unified Government and addressing the recommendations of the County Administrator in conjunction with the Board of Commissioners.

The Unified Government employs approximately 2,300 staff covering a full range of city and county services. Employees are represented by 13 bargaining units. The operations budget totals \$432 million and includes a General Fund of \$165 million for Kansas City, Kansas and \$80 million for Wyandotte County. The Chief Legal Counsel manages a budget of over \$7 million.

CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

The Unified Government strives for best-in-class outcomes. The Board of Commissioners and the Mayor/CEO are developing new cooperative relationships. Competing elected official prescriptions for policy outcomes need legal review delivered with political savviness for maximum effectiveness. Legal support and trainings to help explain necessary governmental functions is often important, such as understanding prior legal opinions and state sunshine laws. Further,

- Taking interest in professional growth and being active in professional organizations is encouraged.
- The next Chief Legal Counsel will enjoy a track record of excellent relationships within the Kansas City, Kansas municipal and Wyandotte County court systems.
- Economic development experience would be helpful, especially in relation to state-offered incentives. While currently fiscally strong and rich with assets, the Unified Government faces increasing financial pressures. In future budgets, the Unified Government will need to identify additional revenue sources or changes in service delivery/ expenditures to ensure fiscal sustainability. The Chief Legal Counsel will be a contributing team member for review and advice on a variety of fiscal measures and economic development tools.
- Given the financial needs and dynamic politics, experience as a seasoned legal counsel is important; Kansas law experience is desired yet is not essential if having successfully served a similar government elsewhere.
- Being approachable and knowledgeable in helping the governance team get to "yes" is required. Commission members often have pressing legal questions in advance of Commission meetings which require short answers with clear legal support delivered with diplomacy and fortitude.
- Organizational leadership of the legal department is needed. Four vacancies exist given staff turnover due to leadership changes last year. Now that a new County Administrator is in place, and stability has returned, the next Chief Legal Counsel will choose the new team members and oversee, provide guidance, and mentoring for their team. <https://www.wycokck.org/Departments/Legal>
- The next Chief Legal Counsel will need to be expert with procurement and contract law, especially design/build legal relationships, and be rigorously principled and ethical. A centralized contract database is desired by the organization.
- Multiple night governing board meetings will require Chief Legal Counsel attendance, yet work/life balance is possible given flexible hour policies.

RECENT ACCOLADES

- Certificate of Achievement of Excellence in Financial Reporting from the Government Finance Officers Association for 16 consecutive years
- Distinguished Budget Presentation Award from the Government Finance Officers Association
- U.S. Department of Health and Human Services award in 2015 for the Healthy Families Wyandotte program



REQUIREMENTS

- Juris Doctorate
- 7 to 10 years of experience in municipal law litigation and administration, or related work experience, or an equivalent combination of education and experience sufficient to successfully perform the essential duties of the job
- Knowledge of Kansas law, federal law, and organizational structure and services provided by local government.
- Membership in the Kansas State Bar, or demonstrated ability to do so within six months
- License to practice law in the State of Kansas and admission to state and federal court, or a demonstrated ability to do so rapidly
- Supervisory experience with demonstrated ability to effectively plan, organize, and supervise the work of others
- Demonstrate knowledge of:
 - Municipal legal principles;
 - County commission rules and procedures;
 - Planning commission bylaws;
 - Litigation tactics;
 - Rules of civil procedures and evidence;
 - Trial strategies;
 - Kansas constitutional home rule and statutory home rule for counties and case Law, or the ability to become proficient within six months
- Experience with state economic development tools
- Knowledge of procurement and contract law
- Demonstrated ethics and sound judgment
- Demonstrated ability to articulate legal opinions in public meetings followed up by well-researched written opinions
- Ability to develop and maintain effective working relationships with your team, employees of other departments, representatives of other organizations, City officials, and the public.
- Strong skills in collaboration and intergovernmental cooperation
- Residency within one year

PREFERENCES

- Seasoned legal professional with city or county local government experience in an organization of comparable size and complexity
- Skilled in Kansas labor relations law



COMPENSATION & BENEFITS

The annual salary range is \$175,000 to \$200,000 DOQ/E. The Unified Government/Wyandotte County offers a generous benefits package, including medical, dental, vision, life insurance, a deferred compensation 457 plan, possible relocation assistance, and all other provisions of the [Unified Government Human Resources Guide](#).

TO APPLY

Submit a cover letter, resume, and five professional references. Position is open until filled. Apply here: [Careers Page GovHR - GovHR USA](#) or visit www.GovHRjobs.com. For questions, email: rcotton@govhrusa.com or call 847-380-3240, ext. 114. Candidates' applications remain confidential until the finalist stage.

The Unified Government of Wyandotte County/Kansas City, Kansas values diversity & inclusion in its workforce. Equal Opportunity/ADA Employer.



ADDITIONAL RESOURCES

[Unified Government of Wyandotte County and Kansas City, Kansas](#)

[Kansas City, Kansas Convention and Visitors Bureau](#)

[Wyandotte Economic Development Council](#)

[Kansas City, Kansas Area Chamber of Commerce](#)



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