

**Washington Special Purpose Districts Overview**

Prepared by Municipal Research and Services Center of Washington, Updated June 2009

Includes Separate Listing of Assessment Districts That Are Not Political Subdivisions

District & Designation <sup>1</sup>	Date of Law	Enabling Statute (RCW)	Purpose	Formation	Governance	Funding <sup>2</sup>	Number <sup>3</sup>
<b>Air Pollution Control Authorities (Municipal Corporation)</b>	1957, 1967	Ch. 70.94 RCW	State-wide program of air pollution prevention and control	To activate - Petition - 100 property owners or motion by county; hearing	Board of directors, appointed; composition designated by statute	Excess levy RCW 70.94.091	7
<b>Airport District, County (Municipality)</b>	1945	RCW 14.08.290-.330	Establish and operate airports or other air navigational facilities	Application - 100 voters; election; resolution	Board of county commissioners or 3 elected airport commissioners	Regular levies, RCW 14.08.290, Voter authorization required; revenue bonds, fees & charges	2
<b>Cemetery Districts (Municipal Corporation)</b>	1947	Ch. 68.52 RCW	Acquire, establish, maintain, manage, improve and operate cemeteries and conduct businesses of a cemetery	Petition - 10% voters; hearing; election or County ordinance or resolution providing for ballot measure	Cemetery board, 3 elected cemetery commissioners	Regular and excess levy; RCW 68.52.290 and 68.52.310; G.O. bond, fees	103
<b>Conservation Districts (Public body corporate and politic)</b>	1939	Ch. 89.08 RCW	Conserve soil resources, prevent flood water and sediment damages....	Petition - 10% voters; hearing by Conservation Commission; election	Board of 5 supervisors, 3 elected, 2 appointed by state commission	Special assessment; RCW 89.08.400; grants	47
<b>Cultural Arts, Stadium, and Convention Districts (Quasi Municipal Corporation)</b>	1982	Ch. 67.38 RCW	Construction, modification, renovation, and operation of facilities for cultural	Resolution or petition -10%; hearing; election	Outlined in resolution; statutes specify who should be represented	Regular and excess levy, RCW 68.52.290 and 68.52.310 ; voter authorization every 6 yrs, G.O. bond	0

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<b>Diking and Drainage Districts (Powers of a corporation for public purpose s)</b>							
<b>Diking and Drainage Districts</b> ( <i>Powers of a corporation for public purpose</i> ) Statute applies to: diking district; drainage district; diking, drainage, and/or sewerage improvement district; intercounty diking and drainage district; consolidated diking district, drainage district, diking improvement district, and/or drainage improvement district; or flood control district.	1961 Re-codification	Title 85 RCW, Ch. 85.38 - Creation and Operation	Construct. straighten, widen, deepen, and improve all rivers, watercourses or streams causing overflow damage to land in district	Resolution or petition -10%; investigation by county engineer; hearing; election	Governing body composed of 3 elected members		107*
Diking & Drainage Districts in Two or More Counties (Intercounty Diking and Drainage Districts)	1909	Ch.. 85.24 RCW	Establish diking and drainage systems or erect flood dams to prevent inundations on land located in two or more counties		Board of 3 district commissioners, initially appointed; elected per 85.38 RCW	Regular and Excess levy RCW 85.24.250; special assessments, special assessment bonds	
Diking Districts	1895	Ch. 85.05 RCW	Straighten, widen, deepen and improve all rivers, watercourses or streams, construct diking system to protect land from overflow	Resolution or petition of 10 property owners; feasibility determination by county engineer; hearing; election pursuant to Ch. 85.38 RCW	Board of 3 elected dike commissioners		
Diking, Drainage and Irrigation Improvement District; Drainage and Irrigation Improvement district - Improvement Districts - 1933 Act	1933	Ch. 85.22 RCW		Petition signed by district commissioners; election	3 elected supervisors; commissioners of old district become supervisors of new district		

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Diking, Drainage, Sewerage Improvement Districts Funding methods revised by Diking, Drainage, and Sewerage Improvement Districts - 1967 Act	1913	Ch. 85.08 RCW, Ch. 85.15 RCW		Petition, resolution or petition of 10 property owners; feasibility determination by county engineer; hearing; election pursuant to Ch. 85.38 RCW. If less than 500 acres petition of 50% of acreage	Board of 3 elected supervisors, initially appointed then elected by ch. 85.38.RCW; if less than 500 acres county engineer will be sole supervisor of the district	Benefit assessments against the property and the county or counties, cities and towns within the district	
Drainage District	1895	Ch. 85.06 RCW	Establish drainage system.	Resolution or petition of 10 property owners; feasibility determination by county engineer; hearing; election pursuant to Ch. 85.38 RCW	Board of 3 elected commissioners; consolidated districts could retain 5 member board	Benefit assessments	
Drainage Improvement District; Diking Improvement District - Improvement Districts - 1917 Act (reorganization of Diking or Drainage Dist)	1917	Ch. 85.20 RCW		Petition signed by district commissioners; election	Board of commissioners becomes board of supervisors		
Diking, Drainage, Sewerage Improvement Districts Funding methods revised by Diking, Drainage, and Sewerage Improvement Districts - 1967 Act		Ch. 85.08 RCW, Ch. 85.15 RCW		Petition, resolution or petition of 10 property owners; feasibility determination by county engineer; hearing; election pursuant to Ch. 85.38 RCW. If less than 500 acres petition of 50% of acreage	Board of 3 elected supervisors, initially appointed then elected by ch. 85.38.RCW; if less than 500 acres county engineer will be sole supervisor of the district		

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<b>Emergency Medical Service Districts (Quasi Municipal Corporation)</b>	1979	36.32.480 RCW	Emergency medical services and funding	Hearing; ordinance	County legislative authority or interlocal agreement	Regular levies, RCW 84.52.069, Voter authorization required. May have 6-year, 10-year, or permanent levy.	6
Urban Emergency Medical Service Districts (Quasi Municipal Corporation)	1994	RCW 35.21.762	Emergency medical services and funding for city or town located in two count	Hearing; ordinance	City or town council, acting in an ex officio capacity and independently	See EMS district	1
<b>Emergency Service Communication Districts (Quasi Municipal Corporation)</b>	1987	RCW 82.14B.070-.100	Funding and provision of emergency communications services in-lieu of a county-wide system	Legislative authority establishes (ordinance or resolution)	County legislative authority	Excise tax (911), RCW 82.14B.030	2
<b>Fire Protection Districts (Municipal Corporation)</b>	1933	Title 52 RCW	Eliminate fire hazards and protect life and property outside cities/towns except where cities/towns have annexed	Petition -10%; hearing; election	Board of fire commissioners; 3 or 5 elected commissioners	Regular and excess levies RCW 52.16.130, 52.16.140, 52.16.160; G.O. bonds, benefit charges, LIDs	371
Regional Fire Protection Service Authorities (Municipal Corporation)	2004	Ch. 52.26 RCW	Provides for regional fire protection service delivery, enhanced funding options, and new authority to address critical fire protection projects and emergency services	Any two or more adjacent fire protection jurisdictions convene a planning committee and create a plan; resulting plan submitted to voters	Designated by the fire protection services authority plan	Regular and excess levies RCW 52.26.060, 52.26.140, 52.26.180; Service plan vote; benefit charges, G.O. bond, LID	4

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<b>Flood Control</b>							
Flood Control Districts - ( <i>Body corporate, powers of a corporation for public purposes</i> )		See Ch. 85.38 for Formation and Organization of District		Resolution or petition -10%; investigation by county engineer; hearing; election	Governing body composed of 3 elected members	Ch. 85.38 RCW Benefit assessments, rates and charges, special assessment bonds	12*
Flood Control by Counties Jointly - 1913 Act (Intercounty)	1913	Ch. 86.13 RCW	To help counties control flooding on a river that is or shall be the boundary line between two counties or its tributaries or outlet flows through parts of two counties and has a history of flooding	Resolution; interlocal contract	Boards of county commissioners; interlocal contract	Regular levy RCW 86.13.010, 86.13.030; Within county levy limits	
Flood Control Districts - 1935 Act	1935, Repealed 1965, Existing districts continue	Ch.86.05 RCW		NA	Board of 3 district commissioners, initially appointed; elected per Ch. 85.38 RCW	Regular levy and excess bond levy, RCW 86.05.920; May be raised to \$1.25 with voter approval. Repealed 1970 with Savings Clause (see 1935 c160; 1949 c82; & 1953 c20)	
Flood Control Districts - 1937 Act	1937	Ch. 86.09 RCW	Protection of life and property, the preservation of the public health and the conservation and development of the natural resources	Formation specified in ch 86.09 RCW See Flood Control Districts Above	Governed by ch 86.09 RCW See Flood Control Districts Above	Benefit assessment; utility revenue bonds	

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Flood Control Zone Districts ( <i>Quasi Municipal Corporation</i> )	1961	Ch. 86.15 RCW	Undertaking, operating, or maintaining flood control projects/storm water control projects for areas of the county	Action of board or petition - 25% vote cast in proposed zone at last county general election	Board of county commissioners; option to elect 3 zone supervisors if district over 2000 residents	Regular and excess levies, RCW 86.15.160	10
<b>Health Districts</b>	1945	Ch. 70.46 RCW	Provide health services within the district	Resolution or ordinance of county legislative authority	Board of health - composition set by statute	Funds from county and state; License and permit fees	11
<b>Irrigation Districts</b>							<b>98*</b>
Irrigation Districts ( <i>Municipal Corporation</i> )	1890	Ch. 87.03 RCW	Provide irrigation of land, develop electrical generating facilities, purchase and sell electricity, provide street lighting, sewer and domestic water system	Petition - 50 or majority of land owners; investigation by Department of Ecology; hearing; election	Board of directors, 3 or 5 elected directors	Generally - Benefit assessments, G.O. bonds, revenue bonds, LIDs, rates and fees	
Irrigation and Rehabilitation Districts	1961	Ch. 87.84 RCW	Conversion of certain irrigation districts to further recreational potential of larger lakes, improve inland lakes and shorelines	Petition - 50 land owners; hearing; election	Same as irrigation district	RCW 87.84.070; Special benefit assessment limited to \$0.25 of land value unless authorized by the voters	
Reclamation Districts of one million acres	1927	Ch. 89.30 RCW	Reclamation and improvement of arid and semiarid lands and for the generation and/or sale of hydroelectric energy	Petition - 50 land owners; commission created to hear petition; election	Board of directors, number equal to number of counties participating	Regular levy, RCW 89.30.391; Voter authorization required	
Boards of Joint Control of Irrigation Districts (Irrigation districts and other entities)	1949	Ch. 87.80 RCW	Water supply administration for two or more irrigation entities	Petition, county review, hearing, resolution	Contained in petition, county appoints first board		1
<b>Library Districts</b>							<b>23*</b>

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Inter-County Rural Library Districts ( <i>Municipal Corporation</i> )	1947	RCW 27.12.090	Municipal corporation organized to provide library service for all areas outside of incorporated cities and towns within two or more counties	Resolutions or joint session of counties or petition - 10%; election	Board of trustees; 5 or 7 appointed by county commissioners	Regular and excess levies, RCW 27.12.150, 27.12.222	
Island Library District ( <i>Municipal Corporation</i> )	1982	RCW 27.12.400 - .450	Provide library service for all areas outside of incorporated cities and towns on a single island only	Petition - 10%; hearing; election	Board of 5 trustees appointed by county commissioners	Regular and excess levies, RCW 27.12.222, 27.12.420	
Library Capital Facility Area ( <i>Quasi Municipal</i> )	1995	Ch 27.15 RCW	Provides funding for construction of capital library facilities	Request from library trustees to county commissioners; election	Three members from each county legislative body or less by agreement	RCW 27.15.050, G.O. bonds	11
Regional Library Districts	1935	RCW 27.12.080	Free public library maintained by two or more counties or other governmental units	Interlocal contract - two or more counties	Board of 5 or 7 trustees appointed by joint action of legislative authorities	Expenses apportioned between or among the contracting parties	
Rural County Library Districts ( <i>Municipal Corporation</i> )	1941	RCW 27.12.040 - .070	Library serving all the area of a county not included within the area of incorporated cities and towns	Petition -10%; hearing; election	Board of 5 trustees appointed by county commissioners	Regular and excess levies, RCW 27.12.050, 27.12.222	
Rural Partial Library District	1993	RCW 27.12.470	Library district in a portion of the unincorporated area of a county	Petition -10%; hearing; election	Board of 5 trustees appointed by county commissioners	Regular and excess levies, RCW 27.12.050, 27.12.222	
Legal Authorities (Hydroelectric) - Irrigation Districts - ( <i>Separate legal entity capable of exercising in its own name the powers granted it</i> )	1983	RCW 87.03.825 - .840	Enables cooperative development of hydroelectric generating resources by cities and irrigation districts, cities towns, irrigation districts and PUDs	Two or more districts form authority through interlocal contract	Contained in interlocal contract		1

















## Notes and References

### Notes

<sup>1</sup> Statutes creating special districts may state that the district is municipality, municipal corporation, quasi municipal corporation, a public corporation, a public body corporate and politic, or some other designation. Many of these terms are not defined by statute. The enabling statute may also contains the clauses that the district is an independent taxing "authority" within the meaning of Article VII, section 1 of the state Constitution, and a "taxing district" within the meaning of Article VII, section 2 of the state Constitution; and that the district is a body corporate and possesses all the usual powers of a corporation for public purposes as well as all other powers that may now or hereafter be specifically conferred by statute, including, but not limited to, the authority to hire employees, staff, and services, to enter into contracts, and to sue and be sued and can be sued.

<sup>2</sup> Not all funding sources have been listed. Excess levies are voter approved and include levies for bonds..

<sup>3</sup>Totals taken from combination of sources: list of State Auditor, county auditor elections results, assessors tax rolls, membership associations including insurance pools, and county documents. The total is an approximation based on districts known to exist from the sources used. Accuracy depends on the availability of county records from the county auditors and assessors.

\*The district's name is not an indication of what statutes the districts are operating under, totals include all types under the general category

### References:

*The Closest Governments to the People*, Steve Lundin, Washington State University, 2007

*Property Tax Levies Operations Manual (Word)*, Washington Department of Revenue , Property Tax Division, 2008

*Special Purpose Districts in Washington State*, Report No. 58, Municipal Research & Services, 2003

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