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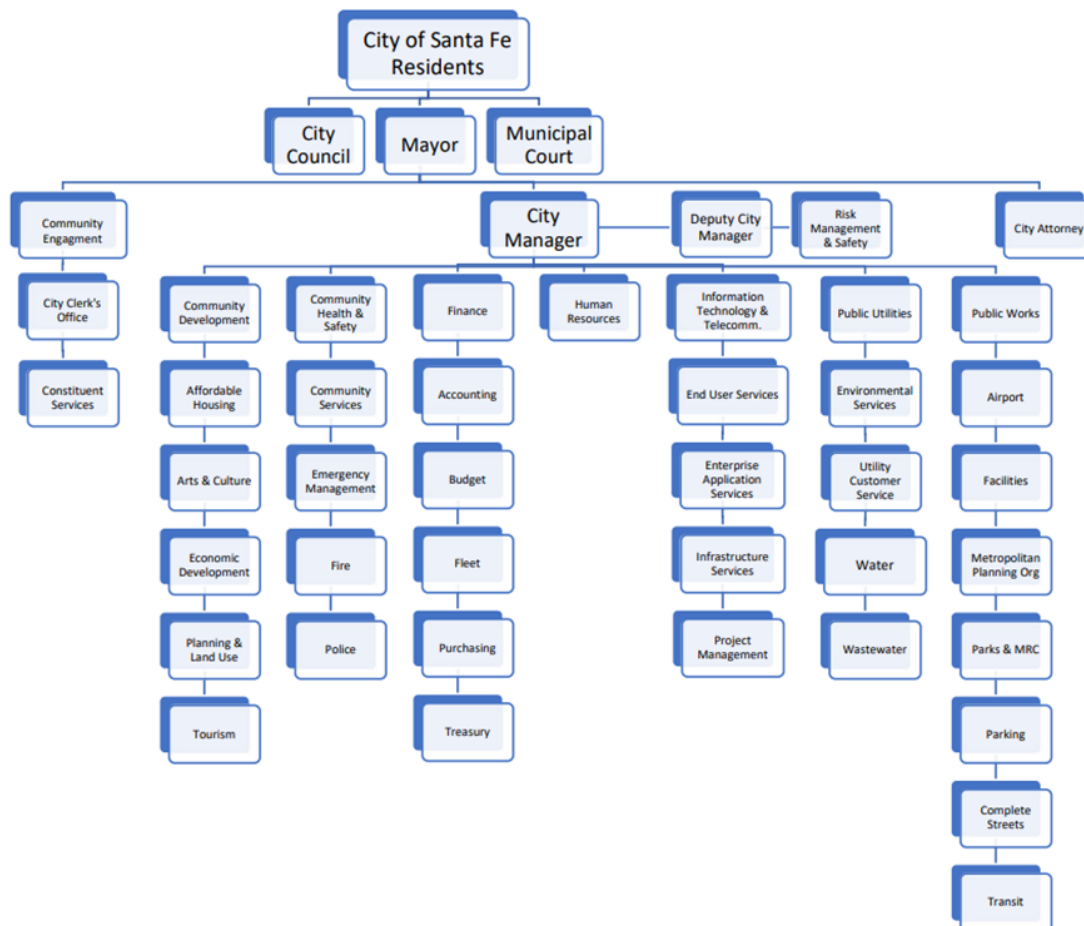
15.0 Governance

15.1 City

15.1.1 Structure

The City of Santa Fe operates under a mayor-council form of government. The governing body consists of the mayor, elected at-large, and eight city councilors, with two representing each of the city's four districts. This structure ensures representation across different areas of the city. The mayor serves as the chief executive officer, overseeing the city's administration, while the city council functions as the legislative body, responsible for enacting ordinances, approving budgets, and setting policy directions. The city manager is appointed by the mayor and approved by city council. The city manager is responsible for directing the various departments and providing guidance in the implementation of the mandates of the governing body. Figure 15-1 displays the City of Santa Fe organizational chart.

Figure 15-1. City of Santa Fe Organizational Chart



Source: Fiscal Year 2025 Adopted Budget

15.1.2 Municipal Charter

The Municipal Charter of the City of Santa Fe was adopted by the voters of the City of Santa Fe, New Mexico, at a Special Municipal Election held on December 9, 1997; and most recently, amended by the governing body on March 11, 2020.¹ The Municipal Charter established a home rule form of government that grants the City greater local autonomy and self-governance. Under home rule, a city can create its own charter and pass ordinances or regulations on local matters without needing specific approval from the state legislature. The purpose of the Charter is to formalize the City's structure, powers, and operational framework, while preserving and enhancing democracy, transparency, and responsiveness to community needs.

A notable feature of the Santa Fe Municipal Charter is its emphasis on increased public participation and ethical governance. The Charter outlines the powers and duties of elected officials, the city manager, and other administrative officers, and provides mechanisms for initiative, referendum, and recall, giving residents a voice in local government.

15.1.3 Municipal Code

The City of Santa Fe implements its policies and regulations primarily through the Santa Fe Municipal Code, which sets the legal framework for governance, land use, development, public safety, and community services within the city. The code is adopted and amended by the city council and enforced by various City departments. It serves as the primary tool for translating the goals of the City's plans and policies into enforceable rules and procedures that guide day-to-day operations and long-term growth.

15.1.4 Fiscal

The Finance Department manages the City's financial operations, including accounting, budgeting, purchasing, and treasury functions. Its mission is to provide accurate financial reporting and maintain public trust through sound financial management.

For the adopted fiscal year 2025, the funds expenditures budget of \$440.1 million reflects a decrease of \$43.9 million, or 9.1 percent, when compared to fiscal year 2024 midyear budgeted levels.² This includes \$10.7 million allocated for debt service and capital costs. This budget reflects the City's commitment to maintaining its financial obligations while investing in infrastructure and services. The adopted budget also invests heavily in the City's workforce, focusing on implementing the recommendations provided by the 2023 Compensation and Classification Study. The City is also scheduled to receive \$28 million in state appropriations to support various capital needs citywide.

The City's financial position is detailed in its annual financial statements, which provide insights into assets, liabilities, revenues, and expenditures. These statement can be found online on the City's Finance Department webpage.³ These statements are essential for transparency and accountability, offering a comprehensive view of the City's fiscal health.

¹ The Charter of the City of Santa Fe was amended by the voters of the City of Santa Fe at Regular Municipal Elections held on March 4, 2008 and March 4, 2014, at a General Election held on November 6, 2018, and amended by the governing body on March 11, 2020.

² <https://santafenm.gov/finance-2/budget-1>

³ <https://santafenm.gov/finance-2>

15.2 Regional

15.2.1 Santa Fe County

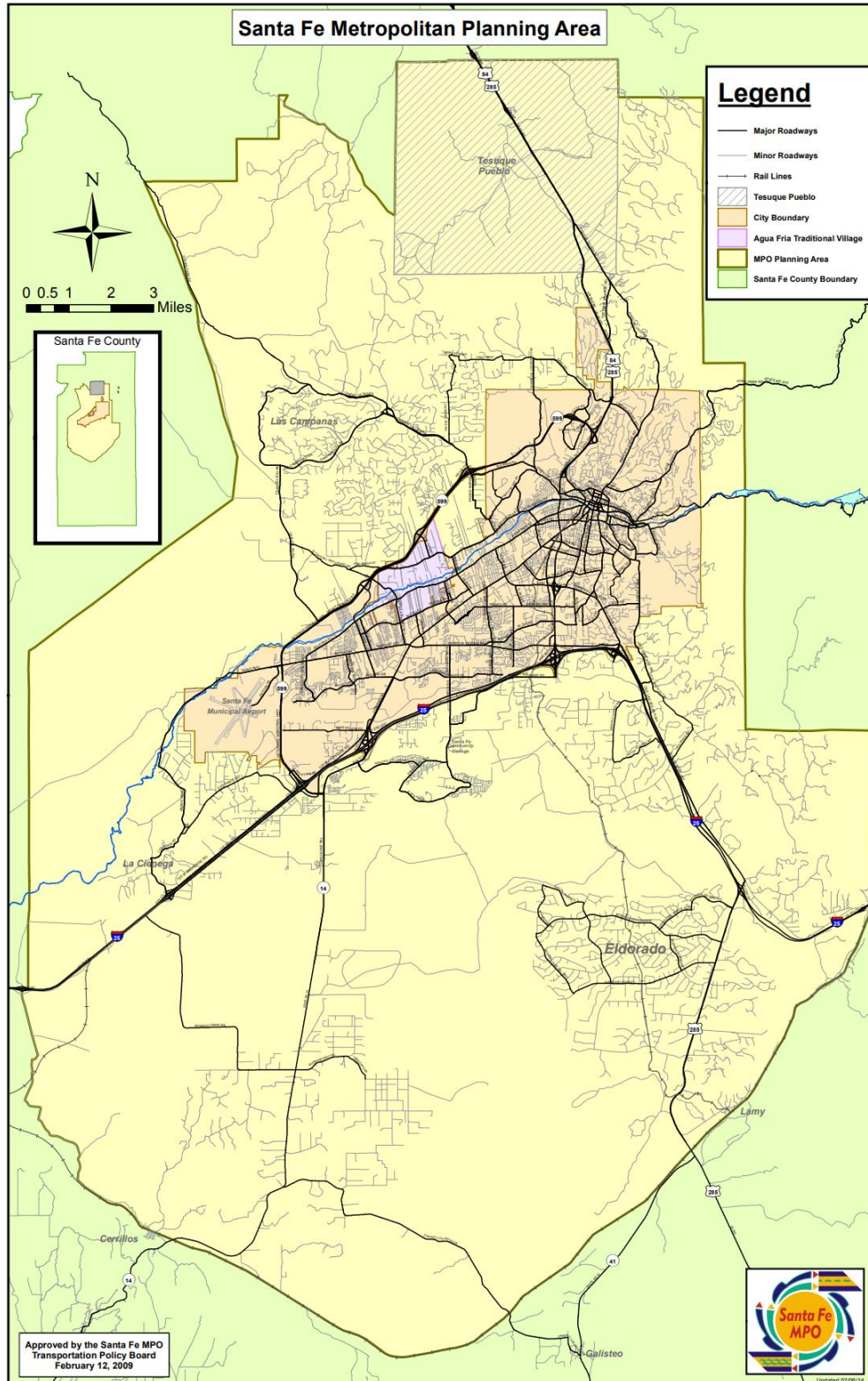
Santa Fe County plays an important role in the broader governance context for the City of Santa Fe. As the county seat, Santa Fe is home to the county's administrative offices, courts, and public service hubs. Santa Fe County is governed by a five-member Board of County Commissioners, each elected by voters from a geographic district to serve four-year terms with a two-term limit. The County government oversees a wide range of services that extend into and around the city, including regional planning, infrastructure, public safety, housing programs, and health and human services. Although the City and County operate as separate jurisdictions, they collaborate on issues that cross boundaries, such as land use planning in growth areas, emergency response coordination, transportation initiatives, and sustainability efforts. Specific collaboration efforts between the City and County include short-term rental policies and homelessness initiatives. The County's policies and investments have a direct influence on the development patterns, infrastructure needs, and service delivery in the city of Santa Fe. Continued collaboration and cooperation between the City and County could foster increased communication and efficiency, while limiting redundancy.

15.2.2 The Santa Fe Metropolitan Planning Organization

The Santa Fe Metropolitan Planning Organization (MPO) facilitates regional transportation planning, ensuring coordination among local governments, transportation agencies, and the public. It develops long-range transportation plans and short-term improvement programs, integrating land use and transportation planning to enhance mobility and accessibility in the Santa Fe metropolitan area. The MPO Planning Area (shown in Figure 15-2) covers approximately 25 percent of Santa Fe County's land area and 80 percent of its population. The Santa Fe MPO is responsible for:

- Facilitating cooperation, consistency, and connectivity between all transportation planning efforts within the Santa Fe metropolitan area;
- Promoting a multi-modal, regional transportation system that is safe and energy and fiscally efficient;
- Maximizing community connectivity;
- Serving the mobility needs of all citizens; and
- Existing in harmony with the environment.

Figure 15-2. MPO Planning Area



Source: Santa Fe MPO, 2009

15.3 State

15.3.1 State Requirements for Comprehensive Planning

New Mexico authorizes that municipalities develop comprehensive plans to guide growth and development, under New Mexico Statutes 3-19-9, which states:

“The planning commission shall prepare and adopt a master plan for the physical development of the municipality and the area within the planning and platting jurisdiction of the municipality which in the planning commission's judgment bears a relationship to the planning of the municipality.”

While the statute uses the term “shall,” it has been interpreted as enabling rather than mandating the creation of such plans. The New Mexico Department of Finance and Administration outlines steps for comprehensive planning, emphasizing the importance of citizen participation, data collection, goal setting, and implementation strategies. These plans serve as blueprints for sustainable development, addressing elements, such as land use, housing, environment, transportation, and economic development.

15.3.2 State Legislature

New Mexico's legislature operates on a part-time, citizen volunteer basis, meaning legislators often maintain separate full-time employment and are not professional, full-time politicians. New Mexico does not pay its legislators a base salary. Legislators do receive per diem of \$191 per day for work at the capital or committee hearings and mileage reimbursement at the federal rate. This structure poses several challenges:

- Limited session lengths: Legislative sessions are brief – 60 days in odd-numbered years and 30 days in even-numbered years – restricting the time available for thorough policy deliberation and budgetary decisions.
- Complexity of issues: Legislators must address intricate issues, such as managing a multi-billion dollar state budget, within these constrained timeframes, which can hinder comprehensive policy development.
- Resource limitations: The part-time nature may limit legislators' ability to conduct in-depth research and oversight, potentially impacting the effectiveness of governance.

As of April 2025, New Mexico remains the only U.S. state with a legislature that is both part-time and unsalaried. Efforts to modernize the legislature have been discussed, aiming to balance the traditional citizen-legislator model with the demands of contemporary governance.

15.4 Public Participation

Public participation is a cornerstone of governance in Santa Fe, ensuring that residents have a voice in decision-making processes. The City employs various mechanisms to facilitate community engagement:

- Public Meetings and Hearings: The City conducts regular meetings where residents can provide input on proposed policies, projects, and budgetary matters.
- Citizen Advisory Committees: These committees offer recommendations on specific issues, fostering collaboration between the public and city officials. The following is a list of all the active citizen advisory committees, 27 total, as of April 2025:

- Airport Advisory Board
- Arts Commission
- Audit Committee
- Bicycle and Pedestrian Advisory Committee
- Board of Adjustment
- Capital Improvements Advisory Committee
- Community Development Commission
- Economic Development Advisory Committee
- Ethics and Campaign Review Board
- Historic Districts Review Board
- Human Services Committee
- Immigration Committee
- Independent Citizen’s Redistricting Commission
- Long Range Planning Subcommittee
- Metropolitan Redevelopment Commission
- Municipal Tree Board
- Occupancy Tax Advisory Board
- Parks and Recreation Advisory Committee
- Planning Commission
- Public Safety Commission
- Santa Fe Film and Digital Media Council
- Santa Fe Public Library
- Santa Fe River Commission
- Sister Cities Committee
- Transit Advisory Board
- Veterans Advisory Board
- Water Conservation Committee
- Comprehensive Planning Process: The state emphasizes the establishment of a citizen participation process as the initial step in comprehensive planning. This involves detailing how citizens will be involved, how information will be used, and addressing any language or accessibility considerations.

These efforts reflect Santa Fe's commitment to transparent and inclusive governance, recognizing that active public engagement leads to more responsive and effective policies. While the City prioritizes public participation and community engagement, increased “interactional capacity” – the ability of a local community to work together and mobilize resources around shared interests in times of need – could increase Santa Fe’s responsiveness and resiliency to future needs (Flint and Luloff, 2005).

Sources:

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