Municipal Law

Following is a selective presentation of our library holdings and a brief introduction to how you would use our print and electronic resources to answer various questions related to municipal (local government) law. For additional help, you may ask any Reference Librarian for assistance.

1. Catalogs, Indexes and other Databases

Use the Diamond Law Library’s catalog, PEGASUS (http://pegasus.law.columbia.edu/). Also use the University Libraries’ catalog, CLIO (http://clio.columbia.edu/), to find resources at other Columbia libraries. You may also use WorldCat (go to PEGASUS (http://pegasus.law.columbia.edu/) and choose it from the drop down menu under CATALOGS) to find books beyond the Columbia system.

1. To find law journal articles that may contain articles on domestic municipal law, use directly CLIO (http://clio.columbia.edu/), because its search engine locates both full text content as well as catalog records.

2. Sometimes, to find full-text journals, patrons feel more comfortable using familiar databases, such as JSTOR, Project Muse, Elsevier, ProQuest Direct or ProQuest Historical. They can be accessed through CLIO (http://clio.columbia.edu/).
3. When you search a popular research term, you may want to use the Index to Legal Periodicals. You may access the latter from PEGASUS (http://pegasus.law.columbia.edu/) (click on Periodical and Treaty Indexes, the 3rd entry under the E-RESOURCES drop down menu, and once on the Periodical and Treaty Indexes’ screen, choose the 3rd entry again).

4. If you have the citation to a law journal, you may try our HeinOnline collection of electronic journals, which can be accessed from PEGASUS (http://pegasus.law.columbia.edu/) (the 1st and 2nd entries under the E-Resources drop down menu).

5. To find New York City local government documents, go to the New York City Documents web site at http://library.columbia.edu/subject-guides/usgd/state_local/nyc.html.

2. Browsing Our library shelves

Few of you will use the following way to access our municipal law collection. But, if you are familiar with how a print collection is usually organized, knowing that municipal law sources are usually classified using the Library of Congress classification system (LC) is helpful.

You can search our catalog, Pegasus, by call number. Go to PEGASUS and use the “LC Call#” or “HICKS/SCHILLER Call#” option.

Here are some of the LC call numbers you may want to use: JS348 for state and local government interplay or KF5300 for local government. Few municipal law sources will use the Hicks classification system. For example, New York City laws are classified under S NY8-NY85 and some New York City court reports are classified under R NY.

3. Primary Sources in the Law Library

As a general rule the law library carries current municipal law only for New York City and the District of Columbia. New York City municipal law can be found both on the third floor, in the reserve and reference area, and on the fourth floor. Older material is located in a closed-stacks area, and if you need it you will have to page it hours or even days in advance.

New York City Law:

(a finding-aid tool which contains both chronological and subject-matter indexes of local bills, laws, resolutions and messages), and The Official Compilation of the Rules of the City of New York (http://pegasus.law.columbia.edu/record=b756155~S9) (a subject matter compilation of municipal administrative rules, which is popularly known as The Rules of the City of New York).

On the fourth floor (http://diamond.law.columbia.edu/sw/images/1/1e/4th_2012_2013_02112013.jpg), primary sources on New York City do not have a specific location and often are part of more compilations that cover municipal law at the state level. For example, you can find the City local laws within the New York State law collection (each year the last volume of the Laws of the State of New York (http://pegasus.law.columbia.edu/record=b295065~S9) contains local laws by cities, counties and towns). In addition you you find, The Administrative Code and Charter of the City of New York (http://pegasus.law.columbia.edu/record=b201449~S9) (a subject-matter compilation which covers the municipal charter and the municipal legislative law – local laws, no longer updated); and The New York City Local Laws Advance Service (http://pegasus.law.columbia.edu/record=b325825~S9) (a chronological compilation of local laws).

You can find case law pertinent to the City's local laws in two publications: The New York City Housing Court Reporter (http://pegasus.law.columbia.edu/record=b552835~S9) is a subject-matter compilation of decisions handed down in the New York State and New York City Housing Court system.

Ordinance Law Annotations (http://pegasus.law.columbia.edu/record=b450153~S9), which is currently published by West. Because originally the publisher was different, this source is still popularly known as Shepard's Ordinance Law Annotations -KF5313 .S5. It is a comprehensive digest of case law which interprets or applies city and county ordinances.

D.C. municipal law:

The library carries both legislative and administrative DC law, LEXIS District of Columbia Code Annotated (http://pegasus.law.columbia.edu/record=b578071~S9) (S D6.5 2001) and The Code of D.C. Municipal Regulations (http://pegasus.law.columbia.edu/record=b555275~S9) (S D6.59 1999), but only the latter is on the library premises.

Local Research tips Every time you need to find a source, use the catalog, PEGASUS (http://pegasus.law.columbia.edu/) to see if we have it and if we do, whether you can retrieve it from the open shelf or whether you need to request it [click on request button].

Municipal law is freely available on the Internet, so if we do not carry it, and often we won't, unless it falls within the teaching and research interests of our faculty, go there.

4. Secondary Sources in the Law Library

If our municipal law collection of primary sources is limited to two jurisdictions (New York City because we are located here, and D.C. by default, as DC municipal law has the double status of municipal and “state” law), our municipal law treatise collection is quite substantial because of its constitutional ramifications and political implications. Here are some of those secondary sources that you may find useful in your research.
McQuillin, Eugene. The Law of Municipal Corporations (West, 1997-)
(http://pegasus.law.columbia.edu/record=b195243~S9) This 20-volume treatise (in 30 tomes!) is jurisdiction-based and provides extensive coverage of many aspects of municipal law. It is also available on WestlawNext, from Practice Areas, under Municipal Law.

(http://pegasus.law.columbia.edu/record=b688330~S9) This two-volume loose-leaf treatise focuses on civil rights litigation where the defendants are municipal entities. Earlier editions are also available in our collection.

Matthews, Thomas A. Municipal Ordinances; Text and Forms (West Group,1998-)
(http://pegasus.law.columbia.edu/record=b752400~S9) This five-volume source (which counts 12 books!) offers detailed coverage of municipal ordinances. The fifth volume contains useful information about “how to use” and “how to access” both the text of the ordinances and of the forms. It is also available on WestlawNext, from Practice Areas, under Municipal Law.

(http://pegasus.law.columbia.edu/record=b571082~S9) This single-volume monograph offers in-depth 50-state explanations of the complex relationship between the local and state governments.

(http://pegasus.law.columbia.edu/record=b792918~S9) This two-volume loose-leaf provides information concerning substantive and procedural issues related to landlord and tenant matters in New York State, and New York City such as nonpayment and holdover proceedings or changes to rent regulations, terminating tenancy and which includes analysis of court decisions, statutes, rules, as well as useful practitioner-created and official forms.

NYC: Rents, Markets & Trends
(http://pegasus.law.columbia.edu/record=b581824~S9Housing) This annual publication contains research reports by the New York City Rent Guidelines Board members on housing supply, mortgage survey, income and affordability etc.

5. Additional Helpful Web Sites (free of Charge)

Lexis – Municipal Codes Web Library
(http://municipalcodes.lexisnexis.com/)

New York City Housing Court Decisions
(http://www.tenant.net/Court/Hcourt/)

New York City Zoning Resolution (from NYC Department of City Planning)

The Center for New York City Law at New York Law School
(http://www.nyls.edu/center-for-new-york-city-law/)

MuniNet Guide provides data and analysis with an accent on municipal finance and economic health
(http://muninetguide.com/)

6. Helpful Research Guides
Though the principles of researching municipal law are the same as for researching either federal or state law (look for a secondary source on the topic, or find the relevant local law or ordinance, if there is one; make sure that you know how agencies have detailed it and courts have applied it, and then update your results), due to its specificity, research guides, whether in print or online tend to be limited to municipalities from a single state.

In the reference area, our library carries a good collection (arranged in alphabetical order) of research guides for 36 states of the union (including DC). For some of those states the library has multiple guides. To find them perform a subject search in Pegasus for “Legal Research -- [name of the state]”. You may start your research with those guides, because some may have a good section on that state’s municipal law.

For example, to find a guide on Illinois municipal law, go to Pegasus and perform a subject search by typing “Legal Research -- Illinois.” First on your result-list is Wojcik’s Illinois Legal Research; its fifth chapter focuses on Illinois municipal ordinances.

Print Research Guide to NYC municipal law:


Ellen Gibson wrote the clearest and most comprehensive legal research guide to New York state law. She continued on the same principles and accomplished the task for New York City municipal law as well. This is a must for students, researchers and practitioners interested in our city’s laws. William H. Manz revised this third edition.

7. Lexis Advance, WestlawNext and Bloomberglaw

On LexisAdvance (https://advance.lexis.com/), municipal codes are easily located if you go to

1. Click on "Home"
2. Search by content
3. Click on Statutory and legislative material

On WestlawNext (http://info.legalsolutions.thomsonreuters.com/westlawnext/default.aspx) municipal law is also available in a very organized, user-friendly manner.

Finally, Bloomberglaw (http://www.bloomberglaw.com) also covers some municipal codes, but no municipal courts cases. To search for municipal law you need to either go to each state codes and identify the municipal codification or to type the title of the municipal code in the main search box.

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