

**331.301 General powers and limitations.**

1. A county may, except as expressly limited by the Constitution of the State of Iowa, and if not inconsistent with the laws of the general assembly, exercise any power and perform any function it deems appropriate to protect and preserve the rights, privileges, and property of the county or of its residents, and to preserve and improve the peace, safety, health, welfare, comfort, and convenience of its residents. This grant of home rule powers does not include the power to enact private or civil law governing civil relationships, except as incident to an exercise of an independent county power, or to enact private or civil law which violates [section 675.4](#).

2. A power of a county is vested in the board, and a duty of a county shall be performed by or under the direction of the board except as otherwise provided by law.

3. The enumeration of a specific power of a county, the repeal of a grant of power, or the failure to state a specific power does not limit or restrict the general grant of home rule power conferred by the Constitution and [this section](#). A county may exercise its general powers subject only to limitations expressly imposed by a state law.

4. An exercise of a county power is not inconsistent with a state law unless it is irreconcilable with the state law.

5. A county shall substantially comply with a procedure established by a state law for exercising a county power unless a state law provides otherwise. If a procedure is not established by state law, a county may determine its own procedure for exercising the power.

6. *a.* A county shall not set standards and requirements which are lower or less stringent than those imposed by state law, but may set standards and requirements which are higher or more stringent than those imposed by state law, unless a state law provides otherwise.

*b.* A county shall not impose any fee or charge on any individual or business licensed by the plumbing and mechanical systems board for the right to perform plumbing, mechanical, HVAC, refrigeration, sheet metal, or hydronic systems work within the scope of the license. This paragraph does not prohibit a county from charging fees for the issuance of permits for, and inspections of, work performed in its jurisdiction.

*c.* (1) A county shall not adopt an ordinance, motion, resolution, or amendment that sets standards or requirements regarding the sale or marketing of consumer merchandise that are different from, or in addition to, any state law. For purposes of this paragraph:

(a) “*Consumer merchandise*” means merchandise offered for sale or lease, or provided with a sale or lease, primarily but not exclusively for personal, family, or household purposes, and includes any container used for consuming, carrying, or transporting such merchandise.

(b) “*Container*” means a bag, cup, package, container, bottle, or other packaging that is all of the following:

(i) Designed to be either reusable or single-use.

(ii) Made of cloth, paper, plastic, including foamed or expanded plastic, cardboard, corrugated material, aluminum, glass, or postconsumer recycled or similar material or substrates, including coated, laminated, or multilayer substrates.

(iii) Designed for consuming, transporting, or protecting merchandise, food, or beverages from or at a food service or retail facility.

(2) An ordinance, motion, resolution, or amendment adopted prior to March 30, 2017, that violates this paragraph is void and unenforceable on and after March 30, 2017.

(3) This paragraph “*c*” shall not apply to county solid waste or recycling collection or county solid waste or recycling programs.

*d.* A county shall not adopt an ordinance, motion, resolution, or amendment, or use any other means, that restricts an owner of real property from refinancing existing debt on, selling, or otherwise transferring title to the property by requiring the owner to take or show compliance with any action with respect to the property or pay any fee before, during, or after refinancing existing debt on, selling, or otherwise transferring title to the property.

7. A county shall not levy a tax unless specifically authorized by a state statute.

8. A county is a body corporate for civil and political purposes and shall have a seal as provided in [section 331.552, subsection 4](#).

9. Supervisors and other county officers may administer oaths and take affirmations as provided in [chapter 63A](#).

10. Pursuant to the general grant of home rule power conferred by the Constitution of the State of Iowa and if not inconsistent with the laws of the general assembly, a county that has designated more than one city to be a county seat may consolidate or reduce the number of county seats by ordinance.

11. A county may enter into leases or lease-purchase contracts for real or personal property in accordance with the following terms and procedures:

a. A county shall lease or lease-purchase property only for a term which does not exceed the economic life of the property, as determined by the board.

b. A lease or lease-purchase contract entered into by a county may contain provisions similar to those sometimes found in leases between private parties, including, but not limited to, the obligation of the lessee to pay any of the costs of operation or ownership of the leased property and the right to purchase the leased property.

c. A provision of a lease or lease-purchase contract which stipulates that a portion of the rent payments be applied as interest is subject to [chapter 74A](#). Other laws relating to interest rates do not apply. [Chapter 75](#) is not applicable. A county enterprise is a separate entity under [this subsection](#), whether it is governed by the board or another governing body.

d. The board must follow substantially the same authorization procedure required for the issuance of general obligation bonds issued for the same purpose to authorize a lease or a lease-purchase contract made payable from the debt service fund.

e. The board may authorize a lease or lease-purchase contract which is payable from the general fund if the contract would not cause the total of lease and lease-purchase payments due from the general fund of the county in any single future fiscal year for all lease or lease-purchase contracts in force on the date of the authorization, excluding payments to exercise purchase options or to pay the expenses of operation or ownership of the property, to exceed ten percent of the last certified general fund budget amount in accordance with the following procedures:

(1) (a) The board must follow substantially the authorization procedures of [section 331.443](#) to authorize a lease or lease-purchase contract for personal property which is payable from the general fund. The board must follow substantially the authorization procedures of [section 331.443](#) to authorize a lease or lease-purchase contract for real property which is payable from the general fund if the principal amount of the lease-purchase contract does not exceed the following limits:

(i) Five hundred twenty thousand dollars in a county having a population of twenty-five thousand or less.

(ii) Six hundred fifty thousand dollars in a county having a population of more than twenty-five thousand but not more than fifty thousand.

(iii) Seven hundred eighty thousand dollars in a county having a population of more than fifty thousand but not more than one hundred thousand.

(iv) One million forty thousand dollars in a county having a population of more than one hundred thousand but not more than two hundred thousand.

(v) One million three hundred thousand dollars in a county having a population of more than two hundred thousand.

(b) However, if the principal amount of a lease or lease-purchase contract pursuant to this subparagraph (1) is less than thirty-two thousand five hundred dollars, the board may authorize the lease or lease-purchase contract without following the authorization procedures of [section 331.443](#).

(2) The board must follow the following procedures to authorize a lease or lease-purchase contract for real property which is payable from the general fund if the principal amount of the lease or lease-purchase contract exceeds the limits set forth in subparagraph (1):

(a) The board must institute proceedings for entering into a lease or lease-purchase contract payable from the general fund by causing a notice of the meeting to discuss entering into the lease or lease-purchase contract, including a statement of the principal amount and purpose of the lease or lease-purchase and the right to petition for an election, to be published as provided in [section 331.305](#) at least ten days prior to the discussion meeting.

No sooner than thirty days following the discussion meeting shall the board hold a meeting at which it is proposed to take action to enter into the lease or lease-purchase contract.

(b) (i) If at any time before the end of the thirty-day period after which a meeting may be held to take action to enter into the lease or lease-purchase contract, a petition is filed with the auditor in the manner provided by [section 331.306](#), asking that the question of entering into the lease or lease-purchase contract be submitted to the registered voters of the county, the board shall either by resolution declare the proposal to enter into the lease or lease-purchase contract to have been abandoned or shall direct the county commissioner of elections to call a special election upon the question of entering into the lease or lease-purchase contract. However, for purposes of this subparagraph (2), the petition shall not require signatures in excess of one thousand persons.

(ii) The question to be placed on the ballot shall be stated affirmatively in substantially the following manner:

Shall the county of ..... enter into a lease or lease-purchase contract in an amount of \$ ..... for the purpose of .....?

(iii) Notice of the election and its conduct shall be in the manner provided in [section 331.442, subsections 2 through 4](#).

(c) If a petition is not filed or if a petition is filed and the proposition of entering into a lease or lease-purchase contract is approved at the election, the board may proceed and enter into the lease or lease-purchase contract.

f. The governing body may authorize a lease or lease-purchase contract payable from the net revenues of a county enterprise or combined county enterprise by following the authorization procedures of [section 331.464](#).

g. A lease or lease-purchase contract to which a county is a party or in which a county has a participatory interest is an obligation of a political subdivision of this state for the purposes of [chapters 502 and 636](#), and is a lawful investment for banks, trust companies, savings associations, investment companies, insurance companies, insurance associations, executors, guardians, trustees, and any other fiduciaries responsible for the investment of funds.

h. Property that is lease-purchased by a county is exempt under [section 427.1, subsection 2](#).

i. A contract for construction by a private party of property to be lease-purchased by a county is a contract for a public improvement and is subject to [section 331.341, subsection 1](#).

12. A county may enter into insurance agreements obligating the county to make payments beyond its current budget year to procure or provide for a policy of insurance, a self-insurance program, or a local government risk pool to protect the county against tort liability, loss of property, or any other risk associated with the operation of the county. Such a self-insurance program or local government risk pool is not insurance and is not subject to regulation under [chapters 505 through 523C](#). However, those self-insurance plans regulated pursuant to [section 509A.14](#) shall remain subject to the requirements of [section 509A.14](#) and rules adopted pursuant to that section.

13. The board of supervisors may credit funds to a reserve for the purposes authorized by [subsection 12 of this section; section 331.424, subsection 1](#), paragraph “a”, subparagraph (5); and [section 331.441, subsection 2](#), paragraph “b”. Moneys credited to the reserve, and interest earned on such moneys, shall remain in the reserve until expended for purposes authorized by [subsection 12 of this section; section 331.424, subsection 1](#), paragraph “a”, subparagraph (5); or [section 331.441, subsection 2](#), paragraph “b”.

14. The board of supervisors may waive a tax penalty, interest, or costs related to the collection of a tax if the board finds that a clerical error resulted in the penalty, interest, or cost. [This subsection](#) does not apply to bonded special assessments without the approval of the affected taxing jurisdiction.

15. The county may establish a department of public works. The department shall be administered by the county engineer or other person appointed by the board of supervisors. In addition to other duties assigned by the board, the department shall provide technical assistance to political subdivisions in the county including special districts relating to their

physical infrastructure and may provide managerial and administrative services for special districts and combined special districts.

16. a. A county may adopt and enforce an ordinance requiring the construction of a storm shelter at a manufactured home community or mobile home park which is constructed after July 1, 1999. In lieu of requiring construction of a storm shelter, a county may require a community or park owner to provide a plan for the evacuation of community or park residents to a safe place of shelter in times of severe weather including tornadoes and high winds if the county determines that a safe place of shelter is available within a reasonable distance of the manufactured home community or mobile home park for use by community or park residents. Each evacuation plan prepared pursuant to [this subsection](#) shall be filed with, and approved by, the local emergency management agency. If construction of a storm shelter is required, an ordinance adopted or enforced pursuant to [this subsection](#) shall not include any of the following requirements:

(1) That the size of the storm shelter be larger than the equivalent of seven square feet for each manufactured or mobile home space in the manufactured home community or mobile home park.

(2) That the storm shelter include a restroom if the shelter is used exclusively as a storm shelter.

(3) That the storm shelter exceed the construction specifications approved by a licensed professional engineer and presented by the owner of the manufactured home community or mobile home park.

(4) That the shelter be located any closer than one thousand three hundred twenty feet from any manufactured or mobile home in the manufactured home community or mobile home park.

b. For the purposes of [this subsection](#):

(1) “*Manufactured home community*” means the same as land-leased community defined in [sections 335.30A](#) and [414.28A](#).

(2) “*Manufactured home community or mobile home park*” means a manufactured home community or mobile home park as defined in [section 562B.7](#).

(3) “*Storm shelter*” means a single structure or multiple structures designed to provide persons with temporary protection from a storm.

17. The board of supervisors may by ordinance or resolution prohibit or limit the use of consumer fireworks or display fireworks, as described in [section 727.2](#), if the board determines that the use of such devices would constitute a threat to public safety or private property, or if the board determines that the use of such devices would constitute a nuisance to neighboring landowners.

18. a. For purposes of [this subsection](#), “*short-term rental property*” means any individually or collectively owned single-family house or dwelling unit; any unit or group of units in a condominium, cooperative, or timeshare; or an owner-occupied residential home that is offered for a fee for thirty days or less. “*Short-term rental property*” does not include a unit that is used for any retail, restaurant, banquet space, event center, or other similar use.

b. A county shall not adopt or enforce any regulation, restriction, or other ordinance, including a conditional use permit requirement, relating to short-term rental properties within the county. A short-term rental property shall be classified as a residential land use for zoning purposes.

c. Notwithstanding paragraph “b”, a county may enact or enforce an ordinance that regulates, prohibits, or otherwise limits short-term rental properties for the following primary purposes if enforcement is performed in the same manner as enforcement applicable to similar properties that are not short-term rental properties:

(1) Protection of public health and safety related to fire and building safety, sanitation, or traffic control.

(2) Residential use and zoning purposes related to noise, property maintenance, or nuisance issues.

(3) Limitation or prohibition of use of property to house sex offenders; to manufacture, exhibit, distribute, or sell illegal drugs, liquor, pornography, or obscenity; or to operate an

adult-oriented entertainment establishment as described in [section 239B.5, subsection 4, paragraph “a”](#).

(4) To provide the county with an emergency contact for a short-term rental property.

d. A county shall not require a license or permit fee for a short-term rental property in the county.

19. a. A county shall not adopt, enforce, or otherwise administer an ordinance, motion, resolution, or amendment, or use any other means, to restrict, impede, regulate, or prohibit, intentionally or effectively, any of the following:

(1) The provision of natural gas service by a public utility as defined in [section 476.1](#), a competitive natural gas provider as defined in [section 476.86](#), or a retail propane marketer or retail propane dispenser as those terms are defined in [section 101C.2](#) to a person, business, municipality, or other wholesale or retail customer within or outside the county.

(2) The purchase of natural gas or propane from a competitive natural gas provider as defined in [section 476.86](#) or a retail propane marketer or retail propane dispenser as those terms are defined in [section 101C.2](#), or the receipt of natural gas or propane service from a public utility as defined in [section 476.1](#), by any person, business, municipality, or other wholesale or retail customer within or outside the county.

b. Paragraph “a” does not apply to an ordinance, motion, resolution, or amendment that regulates a retail propane marketer or retail propane dispenser, as those terms are defined in [section 101C.2](#), adopted before July 1, 2021.

20. A county shall not adopt an ordinance, motion, resolution, or amendment, or use any other means, that requires the owner of real property to implement a policy relating to the use of facial coverings that is more stringent than a policy imposed by the state.

21. A county shall not adopt or enforce an ordinance, motion, resolution, or amendment imposing any requirement to obtain a permit or license, or to pay a fee, for an eligible business operated on an occasional basis for no more than eighty-nine calendar days in a calendar year by a person or persons under the age of eighteen. For purposes of [this subsection](#), “*eligible business*” means an on-site transactional business traditionally operated exclusively by a person under the age of eighteen, including a “*stand operated by a minor*” as defined in [section 137F.1](#), that a person under the age of eighteen is not otherwise prohibited by law from operating.

22. A county shall not require the payment of a penalty, fine, or fee due to a resident’s noncompliance with rules adopted by the county sanitarian regarding periodic septic tank pumping as part of routine maintenance.

23. For purposes of [this subsection](#), “*energy benchmarking*” means requiring a decrease in the average energy use of a property or requiring the average energy use of a property to be less than the average energy use of a similarly situated property. A county shall not adopt or enforce an ordinance, motion, resolution, or amendment to require energy benchmarking requirements for a private property.

24. a. Unless expressly authorized by state law, a county shall not adopt, enforce, or maintain an ordinance, order, or rule for the purpose of making payments to individuals under a guaranteed income program.

b. The attorney general shall send a cease and desist order to any county that adopts or enforces an ordinance, order, or rule in violation of [this subsection](#).

c. If the county fails to comply with the cease and desist order, the attorney general shall bring an action in the name of the state for injunctive relief against any county that has adopted an ordinance, order, or rule in violation of [this subsection](#).

d. For purposes of [this subsection](#), the term “*guaranteed income program*” means a program under which individuals are provided with regular periodic cash payments that are unearned and that may be used for any purpose, but does not include a program under which an individual is required to perform work or attend training.

e. A guaranteed income program operating prior to or on May 1, 2024, may remain in effect until January 1, 2025, or until expiration of the program, whichever is earlier. A county shall not start a guaranteed income program or extend an existing guaranteed income program after May 1, 2024.

25. a. For purposes of [this subsection](#):

(1) “Construction site” means the same as used in a storm water general permit adopted by rule pursuant to [section 455B.103A](#).

(2) “Topsoil” means the same as used in a storm water general permit adopted by rule pursuant to [section 455B.103A](#).

b. A county shall not adopt or enforce an ordinance, motion, resolution, or amendment relating to the preservation, compaction, placement, or depth of topsoil at a construction site that is more restrictive than those requirements provided in the national pollutant discharge elimination system general permit no. 2 as issued by the department of natural resources. A county may develop standards to evaluate topsoil quantities before and after construction and ensure compliance with general permit no. 2. A county may request that the department of natural resources review the soil of a construction site to verify that the national pollutant discharge elimination system general permit no. 2 as issued by the department of natural resources is proper for the construction site.

c. (1) A county may adopt or enforce an ordinance, motion, resolution, or amendment that regulates storm water runoff at a construction site only to the extent that such regulation for rainfall events having a return frequency ranging from five through one hundred years does not require a post-construction storm water flow rate that is more restrictive than the existing flow rate of a rainfall event having a return frequency of five years, with all such runoff rates based on the actual existing condition of the site at the time the construction commences.

(2) A county may adopt or enforce an ordinance, motion, resolution, or amendment that regulates storm water runoff from upstream properties adjacent to a construction site to the extent that storm water runoff shall be allowed to pass through downstream storm water basins at the same flow rates as off-site storm water runoff entering the construction site.

(3) A county may impose a storm water runoff requirement that is more restrictive than what is allowed or required by this paragraph at the construction site if the county meets all of the following conditions:

(a) The county pays for all study, design, and engineering costs for implementing the more restrictive storm water runoff requirement that includes an analysis by a licensed professional engineer of the difference in costs between the requirements of this paragraph and the more restrictive county storm water runoff requirement.

(b) The county pays for the difference of costs between the requirements of this paragraph and the more restrictive requirement imposed by the county for installation of equipment or practices required for a property owner to comply with the storm water runoff requirement.

(c) If the storm water runoff requirement results in the county using a person’s private property, whether by easement or otherwise taking an interest in the property, the county pays the property owner the fair market value of the property taken for any additional land required beyond the requirements of this paragraph.

(d) A county shall not impose a special assessment or otherwise recover the costs from the property owner for the portion of the costs attributable to the county.

(e) The costs attributable to the county shall only apply to the storm water management practices addressed in this paragraph.

26. a. A county shall not adopt, enforce, or otherwise administer an ordinance, motion, resolution, or building code that prohibits or limits, either directly or indirectly, the use of a specific style of exterior cladding or finish materials for residential buildings in a manner that is more restrictive than the state building code as adopted pursuant to [section 103A.7](#). [This section](#) does not prohibit a county from regulating the use of a specific style of exterior cladding or finish materials for a residential building that meets any of the following conditions:

(1) The building is located in an area designated and declared as a state or local historic district under applicable law.

(2) The building is designated as a local, state, or national historic landmark.

(3) The building is in a common interest community as defined in [chapter 499C](#).

(4) The building is located on a property that is governed by a policy of regulation of an overlay or special purpose zoning district that is adopted pursuant to applicable law.

b. For purposes of [this subsection](#), “residential building” means any single or multifamily

residential dwelling and includes single-family and two-family dwellings and townhouses, condominiums and apartments with a maximum of twelve units per building, and all secondary structures to such a single or multifamily residential dwelling.

[C51, §93; R60, §221; C73, §279; C97, §394; C24, 27, 31, 35, 39, §5128; C46, 50, 54, 58, 62, 66, 71, 73, 75, 77, 79, 81, §332.1; S81, §331.301; 81 Acts, ch 117, §300]

85 Acts, ch 156, §1; 86 Acts, ch 1211, §19; 87 Acts, ch 115, §51; 89 Acts, ch 101, §1; 92 Acts, ch 1138, §1; 92 Acts, ch 1204, §8; 95 Acts, ch 67, §53; 95 Acts, ch 206, §8, 12; 99 Acts, ch 186, §1; 2001 Acts, ch 143, §1; 2001 Acts, ch 153, §9, 16; 2004 Acts, ch 1119, §1; 2006 Acts, ch 1010, §93; 2009 Acts, ch 100, §8, 21; 2010 Acts, ch 1061, §131, 132, 177; 2011 Acts, ch 100, §13, 15; 2012 Acts, ch 1017, §72; 2013 Acts, ch 77, §33, 36; 2014 Acts, ch 1092, §86; 2017 Acts, ch 20, §1, 5; 2017 Acts, ch 115, §6, 12; 2018 Acts, ch 1013, §1; 2018 Acts, ch 1075, §10, 12, 13; 2018 Acts, ch 1172, §71, 72, 74; 2020 Acts, ch 1074, §1, 93; 2020 Acts, ch 1118, §147; 2021 Acts, ch 44, §1; 2021 Acts, ch 139, §29, 31; 2021 Acts, ch 179, §1, 3; 2022 Acts, ch 1024, §1; 2022 Acts, ch 1153, §19; 2023 Acts, ch 71, §138, 154; 2023 Acts, ch 147, §2; 2024 Acts, ch 1003, §1, 7, 8; 2024 Acts, ch 1011, §1; 2024 Acts, ch 1094, §37, 47; 2024 Acts, ch 1109, §2, 4; 2024 Acts, ch 1174, §1

Referred to in §13.2, 346.27

See also Iowa Constitution, Art. III, §39A

2024 amendment to subsection 11, paragraph e, subparagraph (1) effective July 1, 2024; 2023 Acts, ch 71, §154

See Code editor's note on simple harmonization at the beginning of this Code volume

Section amended and editorially internally renumbered