Summary: By learning about cities, counties, school districts, and special districts, OLLI members will understand the impact that different types of local government have on their daily lives and that individual voices, votes, and actions can truly make a difference on the local level. Topics covered include how and why cities, counties, school districts, and special districts were formed, the range of services they provide, and their history and organizational structure. A number of current issues facing local government leaders today will be discussed and we will review some of the measures on this November’s ballot and their potential impact on local government. Through the use of a Mock City Council meeting, students will also discover the complex array of planning, financial, environmental, legal, and societal issues citizens and local government officials must contend with. This course utilizes PowerPoint slides in all discussions, interactive activities, real-life examples, a discussion of current issues, and allows ample time for questions and answers.

Week One – Overview
We will start to answer the age-old question: What does local government really do? We will begin with an overview of cities, counties, school districts, and special districts including how and why cities and counties were formed along with their function and purpose. We will also run through a brief history of California cities and counties highlighting more recent actions including the Ralph M. Brown Act (decisions must be made in public and not in the back room), the Political Reform Act of 1974, and a number of statewide ballot measures aimed at limiting local government’s ability to directly tax its citizens.

Week Two – Cities and Counties
We will learn about how cities and counties are organized and review the different types of services each provides. We will explore the difference between a strong Mayor and a Council-Manager form of government and touch upon several issues facing cities and counties today including the potential impact state propositions on this November’s ballot may have on local government.

Week Three – School Districts and Special Districts
We will explore the different types of school districts and special districts throughout the state. We will also discuss several current issues facing school districts and special districts today such as the Charter schools movement, utility rate setting, and whether or not we have too many special districts for our own good.

Week Four – Local Government Financing
Where do my tax dollars go? In this lesson we will focus on city, county, and school district revenues and expenditures. We will also explore the different types of funds used by local government, operating versus capital improvement budgets, and delve into the impact state propositions (especially Proposition 13 and its progeny) and legislative action have had on local government’s ability to raise revenue.
**Week Five – Regional Government and the Players in Local Government**
We will explore regional government by taking a look at the Bay Conservation and Development Commission, the Bay Area Air Quality Management District, the Association of Bay Area Governments, and the Metropolitan Transportation Commission. We will also discuss who the players are in local government (both within and outside the official government bureaucracy) and reveal the “hidden” layers of local government right here in the Bay Area.

**Week Six – Mock City Council Meeting and How You Can Make a Difference**
By using a hypothetical proposed neighborhood housing development, we will learn about the complex array of planning, financial, environmental, legal and societal issues facing local government officials. Students will also learn how they can get involved and make a difference in each level of local government including volunteer opportunities.

There are no required readings for this course. However, students are encouraged to seek out stories about local governmental agencies in their own community from the newspaper, online news, website blog, or other source, and bring questions for the class to discuss.