

Township government plays an essential role in today's society. Most Townships, including mine, consist of elected officials; a Township Supervisor, a Township Clerk, a Highway Commissioner, a Township Assessor, and four Trustees. I recently had the opportunity to speak with Mr. Gene Younker, the Supervisor of the Township that I live in (Peotone Township). Within that conversation, I was able to learn that the Township has three main responsibilities; maintenance of roads and bridges, the assessment of real estate property for the basis of local taxation, and general assistance for qualifying residents.

Each Township is required to maintain roads and bridges outside of the village limits. Townships maintain more than half of Illinois' total road miles. This includes snow removal, trimming of grass and weeds, signage, repairing surfaces, junk removal, etc. They also assess gravel roads and seek to upgrade them to tar and chip or possibly pave them. The main goal is to maintain safe and clean roads for citizens to utilize, including bridges. They have a tracking system and also compile plans for these improvements over time. The Highway Commissioner is in charge of overseeing the roads and bridges and has their own budget.

Another objective of each Township is to assess all properties, even those within the village, and also commercial properties. They aim to provide fair and accurate property assessments. They compare similar properties in the area to ensure consistency and are completed by the Township Assessor. These property assessments are then used by the county to assign the tax amount owed for each property. This provides income for the local government. This is a joint effort between the Township and the County.

The last requirement of each Township is to provide general assistance for those residents who qualify. This provides immediate help to those in need, when all other resources have been exhausted. This includes food, shelter and emergency relief. This is provided according to local standards and with local dollars. Residents must utilize all other means of assistance before being able to reach out to the Township assistance.

I also learned some interesting facts. Township Government is actually the oldest form of government that continues to serve in North America. There are 1,433 townships in Illinois, helping more than 8 million people. Residents are given the opportunity to have their voices heard during required open town meetings. All Townships hold an annual meeting in April. My Township, Peotone Township, also hold monthly board meetings. The Supervisor and the Trustees form the voting board. Any bills that need to be paid must be approved by the voting board. They are also obligated to be aware of any legal requirements. The Clerk, the Township Assessor and the Highway Commissioner attend the meetings but are not a part of the voting board. The Supervisor is responsible for planning the budget yearly. He also looks to the future by providing a three-year plan to map out equipment replacement and road improvements.

One of the unique aspects of my Township, Peotone Township, is that they give back to the community in several different ways. For example, they provide local scholarship opportunities to local HS seniors. They donate to several local organizations such as Helping

Hands Food Pantry, the American Legion Christmas Program and some senior citizen organizations. They also offer transportation through Will Ride for senior citizens needing to get to/from doctor appointments.

I am very thankful to have had this opportunity to interview one of my town's local celebrities- the Township Supervisor of Peotone Township, Mr. Gene Younker. The information he shared with me not only educated me but also enlightened me. I hope to be able to be a part of something this vital to a community one day.