

****The Role of Township Government in Today's Society and in the Future****

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Township government feels like the most down-to-earth part of government in the state of Illinois—it's right here in our communities, dealing with the things that actually affect our daily lives. Over the last four summers, I got to see this up close while working as a camp counselor at youth camps put on by the South Fork Township in Christian County. I helped kids with hands-on activities like building projects in Woodshop 101, running games that got everyone laughing and working together in Youth Olympic Camp, and just being part of activities that made our small town feel even closer. Those experiences showed me how townships don't just fix roads—they build communities too. Plus, my family has a personal connection: my dad (who currently sits on the South Fork Township Board) was a close family friend with Mr. Jerry Young, who served as Supervisor of South Fork Township from 1980 to 1989. Hearing stories from Mr. Young and knowing how dedicated he was made me appreciate even more what township officials do.

To get more information on township government, I actually talked with Dennis Foli, our current South Fork Supervisor. He laid out the basics that Illinois law requires every township to handle: keeping up roads and bridges outside city limits, assessing property values for fair taxes, and running general assistance programs for people who hit hard times. South Fork Township is one of over 1,400 in the state, and together they maintain more than 71,000 miles of roads—mostly gravel roads that rural families like ours depend on. Mr. Foli explained how they handle snow plowing, fix bridges, put up signs, and ensure assessments stay local and accurate so taxes support schools and counties without extra red tape.

After hearing all the information, what really stands out is how townships go beyond the basics with services that feel personal. Mr. Foli calls it “vital services to the people next door,” and I saw that in action with the summer camps. We kept kids busy learning real skills, having fun, and feeling like they belong in our township of about 2,500 people. The township also helps seniors, maintains cemeteries, and steps in with emergency help when families need it most. Unlike bigger county or state offices, township leaders are your actual neighbors. When in need of assistance, you can stop by the hall on Central Avenue in Kincaid or just call. And every

year at the annual town meeting, anyone can show up and vote on local decisions. Mr. Foli told me, “We know our families, their roads, and their needs personally.” That kind of closeness matters a lot.

In today’s world, where people sometimes feel far removed from government, townships keep things real and responsive. During tough times—like economic squeezes or bad weather that tears up rural roads—our township jumps in fast because they’re right here. The camps I worked at aren’t just fun; they teach kids responsibility and community pride, the same kind of thing Mr. Young focused on years ago while juggling township work with county board duties.

Looking ahead, there’s talk of consolidating or even removing townships to save money. Some people think folding them into counties would be more efficient. I get the idea, but I don’t think it works for places like Christian County. Counties don’t have the local equipment, staff, or firsthand knowledge to handle every back road or quick family emergency the way townships do. Merging could actually cost more in the long run and make it slower and less accountable. Townships already team up smartly—sharing gear or planning road work years out, as Mr. Foli described.

In the future, I hope townships will keep evolving: using better tech for assessments, greener ways to maintain roads, more programs for seniors as populations age, and stronger youth enrichment to keep kids from leaving rural areas. With climate changes bringing heavier storms, local know-how on drainage and bridges will be huge. I also hope townships will continue to get young people involved so the next generation cares about local government. Maybe one day I’ll run for a township position myself, carrying on what Mr. Jerry Young started and what leaders like Dennis Foli do every day.

Township government isn’t an old-fashioned form of government—it’s essential. It gets things done with heart, keeps government close to home, and makes communities grow stronger. As Illinois changes, townships will stay the reliable, adaptable foundation we need. I’m thankful my camp work and my family’s history with Mr. Young let me see this firsthand. My goal is to keep supporting the township government for a long time.