

“It takes a village” is how the old saying goes. However, after my interview with Becky Wiley, Harter Township’s Supervisor, I would say that it takes a township, rather. Admittedly, as a high school student, I didn’t know much about townships or what they did prior to this interview. I will certainly move forward with a new appreciation for what townships provide and for the people involved.

Townships, one of the oldest forms of government, are made up of elected officials that each serve a distinct purpose. The elected officials in Harter Township include the Supervisor, Clerk, Road Commissioner, Assessor, and the four Trustees. These elected officials all work together and provide three basic functions including providing general assistance for the indigent, road and bridge maintenance, and the assessment of real property. How a township makes money, where the money goes, and the future of townships are a few of the topics Becky and I discussed.

The largest source of revenue for townships is property taxes. The Township Clerk annually certifies to the county Clerk the amount of taxes required to be raised for the township. I think it is important to note that while some may complain about paying property taxes, townships ensure that the money being paid to them is being invested back into the township. That is one thing about my interview with Becky that stood out the most as she spoke on all information being available to the public. The public is invited and encouraged to attend public meetings. This allows them to ask questions and to know how funds are being put to use. It is the Township Clerk that is tasked with keeping meeting minutes which can be read later if someone was unable to attend the meeting.

Through discussion with Becky, she noted that the largest budget line went to roads and bridges. The Road Commissioner is responsible for the maintenance of all roads and bridges within their township, making sure they're safe to drive on. From widening of roads to snow removal, this is a large job that requires not only manpower but equipment as well. As you can imagine, the equipment and supplies needed for this role would warrant a larger budget. Another source of expense that I was unaware of was the General Assistance Program. This fund provides financial aid to low-income residents who can't get other public benefits. The Supervisor oversees this program and has an application process for those seeking this assistance. This is just another example of the funds being invested within the township.

What does the future look like for townships? They, like citizens and other entities, have their fair share of challenges. Funding and budget constraints, population changes, and ever-changing needs of the public are just a few. Becky noted that there are fewer townships than there used to be. We both agree, however, that it is vital for townships to find a way to persevere, keep funds coming in, and continue existing. Without them, one could fear that tax money would be utilized elsewhere rather than back into our own communities where needed. I also think it is vital for younger generations to get involved in their local government. The future is in our hands, after all.