

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

Township government remains one of the most stable and community-centered forms of governance in the United States. Dating back to the 1600's, it continues to serve as the level of government closest to the people. In Illinois alone, more than 1400 townships provide essential services to more than eight million residents. The township in which I reside serves Wood River, East Alton, Roxana, Cottage Hills, Rosewood Heights, and portions of Bethalto and Hartford, directly influencing the daily lives of countless families.

Illinois townships are responsible for three primary functions: general assistance, property assessment, and road and bridge maintenance. The GA provides food, shelter, and emergency relief for the people who need it until they can support themselves. Many of the Illinois townships are in charge of the food banks that guarantee the necessities of life for children and young adults. Township assessors establish the value of all real property. In fact, this position is the only elected government official who is required to pass approved courses of instruction to be eligible for election. Lastly, the road and bridge maintenance covers more than 71,000 miles in Illinois, a full 53 percent of all road miles in the state. Through these essential services, Illinois townships remain a crucial layer of local government, directly impacting the daily lives and well-being of their communities.

In an Illinois township, each elected official plays an important role in keeping the community running smoothly. The Supervisor acts as the main leader, runs meetings, and manages the township's money. The Clerk keeps important records, posts public notices, and makes sure documents are properly signed. The four Trustees work together as the township board to set policies and approve spending. The Highway Commissioner takes care of building and maintaining local roads and bridges. The Assessor determines property values, which affects how property taxes are calculated, and must complete special training to do the job. In some counties, the Tax Collector collects the first installment of property taxes. Together, these officials make sure the township is organized, financially responsible, and able to serve its residents effectively.

Before speaking with my township clerk, Sherry Tite, and my township supervisor, Robert Pollard, I had not fully appreciated the depth of township governments impact. When I interviewed the supervisor, he shared that what he enjoys most about his job is working directly with people: serving residents, helping them with their needs, and making sure services are provided in a timely manner. His response showed me that township government is not just about policies, but about real relationships and daily support for the community. Although, legislation has been proposed in Springfield to eliminate townships in Illinois under the belief that the state has too many units of government, removing townships could lead to unintended consequences like reduces access to essential services. Township government is not just traditional, but it is necessary for meeting everyday needs of residents.

Township government stands out because it is easy to reach and quick to respond to the needs of the community. Unlike larger government bodies, township officials operate within the

communities they serve, encouraging direct communication and immediate assistance. This closeness allows residents to voice concerns, ask questions, and seek guidance without navigating complicated systems. At Wood River Township, residents regularly seek guidance in person, an interaction that would be much more difficult to do at the state level. This proximity strengthens civic trust and ensures that local concerns receive timely attention.

As communities continue to change, the need for leadership that is quick to respond and focused on local issues will only grow. Township government not only fills that role today but will remain important in the future. In a time when many government offices feel far away, the township government keeps a feeling of connection and shared responsibility. It makes sure decisions are made with a clear understanding of local needs and challenges. By continuing its commitment to service, accountability, and accessibility, the township will remain an important part of Illinois government for generations to come.