

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

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Township government may not be the first thing most people think about when they hear the word “government,” but where I live in Vermilion County, Illinois, townships actually affect a lot of what happens every day in my community. They aren't as well-known as city councils, state governments, or Congress, but townships are one of the most local and direct forms of government we have. In Illinois, township governments are an official part of how communities are organized and how services are delivered, and they will continue to matter a lot in the future as local needs change.

Township governments in Illinois have three main jobs required by state law. First, they take care of road and bridge maintenance for roads outside of cities and villages. This includes fixing potholes, clearing snow in the winter, and making sure rural roads are safe for drivers. In fact, township governments in Illinois maintain over half of the roads in the state, which shows how big this role really is. Second, they handle property assessments, which means they figure out the value of land and homes so taxes can be calculated fairly. The person who does this — the township assessor — must take special courses before running for office, which shows how important property value work is. Third, townships provide general assistance to residents in need, like emergency help or support for people who are struggling to get by.

In Vermilion County, Illinois, township government has a long history. The county adopted the township form of government back in the mid-1800s, and since then many townships have been established, including Carroll, Danville, Elwood, Georgetown, Catlin, Blount, Oakwood, Sidell, and others. Each of these townships has its own local officials who focus on serving people in that specific area. For example, Danville Township is one of the largest, serving tens of thousands of people and overseeing roads, assessments, and community needs. Matt Waclaw, CEO of the Georgetown township stated that he assists residents who are going through a difficult time with rent, lodging, transportation and even food items. They must fill out an application and be approved. He also stated that he does see some of those benefits being cut in the future due to funding.

Besides those three basic responsibilities, townships often offer additional services that matter a lot to real people. In some places, township offices run food pantries, programs for senior citizens, youth programs, and help for people with disabilities. They also may take care of local cemeteries, parks, and community events. Not every township does all of these things, but in many cases they step in where city or county governments don't have the capacity to help directly.

One reason township government remains relevant today is because it is so close to the people it serves. Unlike state or federal government, township board meetings are usually open and accessible. Residents can actually go talk to officials who live in the same community and understand local problems first-hand. This closeness makes township government one of the best

ways for regular citizens to be involved in decision-making and to see direct results from their own participation.

Another reason townships are important is because they help manage local resources responsibly. Townships create budgets and collect local tax dollars to pay for services. Because they are smaller and focus on specific areas, they can often identify priorities that matter most to their neighbors. For example, fixing a busy rural road in Oakwood Township might be a priority that could get lost if managed only at the county level.

Of course, some people question whether township government is still necessary in the 21st century. Some argue that county governments could handle all these services more efficiently, or that modern technologies could replace traditional township roles. But townships often know local problems better than anyone else, and eliminating them could mean residents lose direct access to services they rely on. For many families in Vermilion County, those little things like safe roads in winter or help with emergencies are essential.

Looking toward the future, township government will still serve an important role — especially if it continues to adapt. Technology is already changing how local government works. For example, the city of Danville launched a mobile app to help residents find information about all levels of local government services, including township offices. Tools like this could make township government easier to navigate, especially for younger people who use smartphones and expect quick online access to information.

Township officials might also increase their use of social media and online platforms to communicate with residents, hold virtual meetings, and share updates about maintenance or assistance programs. These changes could help bridge the gap between local government and citizens who are used to accessing everything online.

In conclusion, township government in Vermilion County and across Illinois plays an important role by maintaining roads, assessing property, and helping residents who need assistance. Because townships operate close to the people they serve, they encourage local involvement and offer direct support that larger governments can't always provide. As communities continue to grow and change, township governments — by using new technology and focusing on local needs — will stay relevant and continue to help shape the future of local governance