

I have never met the president of the United States or an Illinois representative. But I have met Sherry Tite and Sandy Shaw, my great aunts, who serve as the Town Clerk and Township Assessor for Wood River Township. When I look around at the well-maintained streets, clean parks, and pickleball courts I know the people responsible live in my community. This tells me township government is personal, you can bring up problems to real people who live and serve in your community. Township governments are efficient, reliable, and personal. During my interview with Sherry Tite I learned that the Township government was founded in 1636 making it the oldest form of government in the United States. Illinois has 1,425 townships today. They have three main functions and consist of a supervisor, Clerk, four trustees, a highway commissioner, and an assessor. Each job is important to ensure an efficient government.

The three functions of township government are general assistance, property assessment, and road and bridge maintenance. For general assistance townships provide food, shelter, and emergency relief for those who can't support themselves, and many townships in Illinois operate food banks that provide the necessities of life for children and adults. The second function, property assessment, establishes the value of all real property in the township. The third function is road and bridge maintenance, townships maintain more than 71,000 miles of roads in Illinois. I got the opportunity to hear from the highway department foreman who informed me they do more than regular road maintenance that goes unnoticed. For instance leaf removal, salting and plowing snow and ice, cutting trees down, and maintaining their own equipment. In addition, many townships provide other vital services including senior citizens programs, youth programs, assistance to the disabled, parks and recreational facilities, health services, and cemetery maintenance.

I learned the main jobs within a township government. The Supervisor is the Chief Executive Officer of the township and chairs the board of trustees. The Supervisor is responsible for presiding over township meetings, and administration of the general assistance program. They serve as the treasurer by statute of all town and road district funds. While interviewing Sandy Shaw, the township Assessor. She told me how she establishes property values of approximately 14,000 parcels of residential and commercial property in the township. She is the only elected position in Illinois that requires the candidate to take formal certification training. She also has to attend continuing education classes each year. Sherry Tite, the Township Clerk, keeps the township's official record, including keeping minutes of all meetings, posting and publishing notices of all meetings, administering oaths, and filing documents with the county and state. She is the local election official and registers all the voters. Lastly, the Highway Commissioner is responsible for the construction and maintenance of all the roads and bridges within the road district.

Sherry and Sandy showed me how superior small township government really is. This local government will continue to adjust and grow along with their community. It has been shown smaller governments are more efficient because they are under the direct influence of their local electorate. In addition smaller governments tend to maintain a lower taxation, spending, and debt levels per capita. Sherry shared there have been some attempts from the

Illinois government to abolish township government. However, township governments have played a vital role in our history's success and continue to do so. I will probably never meet a president but I have met township officials, a government by the people, for the people. Like my Aunt Sherry always says "Township government is the best form of government" and now I understand why.