

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

"Alone we can do so little; together, we can do so much." This quote, stated by author, Helen Keller, represents the role township government plays in today's society. Not only does each township government effectively accommodate the needs of individuals who reside within its area, it also serves as a key factor for the upkeep and improvement of each community. Many individuals, including myself, have been widely unaware of what functions are regulated by the leaders of each township. However, I had the opportunity to meet with Dave Weeks, the Supervisor of La Moille Township in Bureau County, Illinois. As the result of an informative interview, Mr. Weeks thoroughly described the role of township government in our community, its uniform role across the state of Illinois, and its importance in our future society.

To begin, a township government is set up in a system of "Checks and Balances," where each elected official holds different powers and, most importantly, must collaborate with one another. Monthly meetings are held to discuss and review topics that are stated on an agenda 48 hours in advance. Important considerations that exist within these meetings are the upkeep of roadways and bridges, and how to spend township revenue.

According to Mr. Weeks' statement in our interview, all townships have three mandated functions, each of which are uniform from one township to the next. The first is to assess all personal property. The second function of a township government is to maintain a General Assistance program, which is set to assist people within the township who are in need due to hardship or emergencies. The final and most important function of a township government is to sustain construction and maintenance of all roads and bridges in the township. This is an extremely important factor for each township to establish safe and updated methods of transportation in its area. While each township government has the same functions, the means by which they execute them differ. For example, La Moille Township stands in the Northeast corner of Bureau County, consisting of 36 square miles of land and 50 miles of roads. One great difference our township has is the fact that it contains 18 bridges, which is more than any other township in Bureau County. Mr. Weeks stressed the importance of individuals working together, and highlighted the importance of officers' knowledge of the community, so they can accurately carry out the duties specific to their individual township.

A township government is comprised of 7 positions, all of whom are elected by registered voters, unless appointed. These individuals are often reliable, involved members of the community who are willing to offer time and effort for its betterment. As stated in the oath of office, an elected official is entrusted to execute the duties of their position to the best of their ability.

The Township Supervisor holds many leadership roles, such as Chief Executive Officer, meaning they are responsible for leading and overseeing the township's operations. The supervisor is also named Treasurer of all township funds, and is the sole administrator of the General Assistance Program.

The Township Assessor is required to maintain precise records of all personal property within the township's area. They must fairly assess the market value of such properties, which will dictate the amount of tax revenue accounted for in the township levy. The levy assesses the amount of money the township aims to earn through property taxes in the fiscal year, which, in turn, is spent on various township funds.

The Highway Commissioner is responsible for many important duties, the most visible being the construction and maintenance of all roads and bridges within the township that are not already accounted for by other governments. The Highway Commissioner is required to give the township board frequent updates about ongoing and future projects.

The Township Clerk is in charge of keeping records of township affairs. They must keep accurate minutes of all township meetings and have the task of posting all necessary documents in a timely manner. The Clerk is also the sole person responsible for conducting the annual town meeting, held on the second Tuesday of April, where they discuss issues and concerns with residents, known as electors, in the community that hold powers over programs and policies.

The final position of a township government is the Township Trustees. Each board contains 4 Trustees who take part in numerous ways. Along with the Supervisor, they are the primary voters on a board who offer valuable input on a budget and how revenue is spent. They are able to approve bills and assist in preparing a fair levy.

Mr. Weeks, who has served various roles on the township board for 25 years, underlined the fact that each decision made in a township government will not only affect current society, but will have effects on future society as well. For instance, when making decisions, each board member must keep in mind population fluctuations, financial setbacks, and visualize future needs of the community to make decisions that will still be in the best interest of all as circumstances change. Thus being said, Mr. Weeks urges the importance of youth involvement in current township governments so we can have a greater outlook on the future. Different times create new issues that must be solved, and youth involvement can bring in new ideas that may better accommodate for emerging problems within each township. Township government is the closest form of government to the people. Therefore, an important attribute is to ensure that its officials are close members of the community who have an outlook on the future to ensure the township's future success.

With this knowledge I have gained from Mr. Weeks, I acknowledge the difference that a small, dedicated government body can make in each community. It is of utmost importance that each official works together and anticipates future circumstances for the enhancement and stability of each of the 102 Illinois townships and its peoples. In accordance with my sincere appreciation to Mr. Dave Weeks for his shared knowledge and assistance, I pleasantly anticipate your consideration for this scholarship opportunity.