

OUR TOWNSHIP ENVIRONMENT

TOWNSHIPS IN OHIO

History and Functions

Township Roads

Responsibility for constructing and maintaining public roadways in Ohio is assigned by law to the state, municipalities, counties, and townships. This responsibility is divided among these levels of government in terms of miles of roadway: the State of Ohio, 19,000 miles; municipalities, 21,000; counties, 30,000, and townships, 39,000.

The care and maintenance of the township road system is the largest function of most of Ohio's 1,311 townships today and includes such tasks as snow removal and weed control. To help cover the expense of this service, Ohio townships receive part of the state's motor vehicle fuel tax and the motor vehicle license fees. These revenues, however, are modest in relation to the total cost involved, so most of Ohio's townships find it necessary to obtain additional revenues through local taxation. (Road and Bridge Levy).

Police Protection

A board of township trustees has the authority to employ police constables and to create police districts. Today's Ohio township police or constables are required to receive basic training in the duties of a police officer. They have, in general, the same authority and power that the law grants to a sheriff. They are required to apprehend and bring to justice all felons and disturbers of the peace in the township and in the county. The constables or police officer also serves and executes all warrants, writs and other legal processes delivered to him throughout the county. (Poland Township has a police district).

Fire Protection

Fire protection in township areas was first recognized (in its present form) for rating insurance credit in 1938. In 1939, one hundred ten townships had adequate fire protection to receive a rating credit. This number today has increased to approximately 1,300.

Township fire departments are staffed with full-time or volunteer firefighters or a combination of both. Ohio law also permits townships and municipalities to get maximum benefit from their fire departments by contracting with each other for mutual protection. This service not only protects lives and property more effectively but also reduces insurance rates.

The Insurance Services Office recognizes that more than 90% of the townships in Ohio have a good standard of fire protection covering more than 96% of the population in the unincorporated areas of the state. (Poland Township and Poland Village have joined in a fire district. With all the new water lines and fire hydrants, Poland's classification has gone from a 9 to 5.

Cemeteries

Townships manage over 1,800 township cemeteries. Purchasing or appropriating land for a cemetery must be submitted to vote of the electors of the township at a regular annual election. Once a township cemetery is established, the township trustees have the authority and obligation to sell plots, set fees for services, maintain the cemetery and provide for expansion. Cemeteries owned by religious or cemetery associations may be transferred to the township as may happen if the association is going out of business. The township then assumes responsibility for the cemetery.

Parks & Recreation

A board of township trustees may purchase, appropriate, construct, enlarge, improve, repair or equip a township park. They may establish and operate a park on their own initiative either by themselves or by joint action with another political subdivision. The board may buy suitable land and materials or accept a gift. Moneys may be used from township funds to acquire or improve a park, or the board may levy a tax. If an additional tax is required, it must be submitted to the voters for approval.

A township park district may also be established in a township. The district must be approved by the electors of the township, and when established, it is run by an appointed board of park commissioners who must be township residents. The park is a separate political subdivision and has taxing authority.

Zoning

Zoning is the regulation of the use of land and buildings which permits a community to control the development of its own territory. It provides for orderly growth by protecting homes and property from harmful uses on neighboring properties. Any zoning restrictions must have a reasonable relationship to public health, safety, morals, comfort or general welfare.

Ohio authorized township zoning in 1947. Ohio law now adequately provides for submission of a zoning plan to the electors of the township and contains provisions for the administration, enforcement, and amendment of the zoning plan if it is adopted.

Waste Disposal

Solid waste are now being created in Ohio at the rate of about four and a half pounds per day. In the 1920's, this rate was about two and a half pounds per day. Considering the tremendous increase in population along with this rise in the per-person rate, it is no wonder that government units face a waste disposal problem of gigantic proportions. The difficulty of the challenge is compounded by the fact that improper disposal contributes to water and air pollution and can be the cause of other health hazards.

The township is authorized to provide waste disposal services to its residents. It may collect and dispose of garbage and refuse or it may enter into written contracts with other political subdivisions for such services. The cost of refuse collection and waste

disposal may be met from tax revenues or from reasonable charges to those who benefit from the service.

Other Township Functions

Besides those mentioned above, township trustees also have certain responsibilities for animals running at large in the township; ditches, drains, and other surface waters; line fences between adjacent properties; township hospitals or township hospital districts; and, under certain circumstances, controlling weeds and brush. They may also erect monuments to commemorate those who died in the service of their country.

Another significant responsibility of the township is lighting. A board of township trustees may provide artificial lighting for any public road, public place or building under its supervision or for any territory outside municipalities when it determines the public safety requires such lighting. The township may install its own lighting system or contract with an electric company.

History of the Township

The Pilgrim fathers brought the township form of government to America in 1620. This unit of local government, still referred to in New England as the "town," spread eventually as far west as the Rocky Mountains. It is found today in twenty-two states, known either as the town or the township.

In Ohio, the township predates our state government. The township's size and shape were determined by the Congressional Acts which established the various land grants. All lands defined by these acts were surveyed under the range and township system with the exception of the Virginia Military Lands. Some were subdivided into townships five miles square - those for example, in the Connecticut Western Reserve established in 1786. Others were surveyed into townships six miles square, as in the Congress Lands, 1789-1801. In certain of the Ohio land grants, Congress set aside lands for the use of schools and the support of religious institutions. In the Symmes Purchase, for example, Section 16 of each township was reserved for schools and Section 29 was set aside for religious institutions.

As the Ohio Territory became populated, it was only natural that the surveyed townships should become the basic unit of local government. In 1804, the elected officials of a township consisted of three trustees, a clerk, two overseers of the poor, and a sufficient number of supervisors of highways, in addition to justices of peace and constables. A township treasurer and assessor were later added. In the early years of statehood, Ohio township government cared for the poor, maintained the roads, preserved the peace, registered brands and fulfilled the needs of local government generally.

Today, just as in 1804, the township in Ohio is a political subdivision of the state. As such, it has only those powers granted to it by the state legislature and performs functions defined by the state. To keep pace with the demands of changing times, the functions, duties and obligations of the township have changed over the years. Demands for increased or different services have prompted the state legislature to grant Ohio's 1311 townships the authority to fulfill these changing demands.

Three trustees and a clerk, each elected for a four-year term, administer each of our townships today. Officially they fill their offices on a part-time basis, but they are always ready to meet their responsibilities and put in many hours of work to serve their constituents. And their intimate knowledge of their community, its needs and its citizens makes them able to offer more personal service than any other unit of government. (Poland Village incorporated Aug. 6, 1866 but still remains a part of the township and pays a tax to the township.)

You and Your Township

Today, township residents are demanding a new type of government that provides a broad range of services in line with the needs of the community. They want good roads for year round travel, adequate police and fire protection, zoning and other regulations which protect their township.

Township government is best suited to responding to the needs of a community because its officials understand local problems and can devote more attention to individual concerns than can the county, state or federal levels of governments. And it can do this at less cost and with a minimum of red tape. Still, like any organization or unit of government, a township is what its residents make it. That requires personal involvement, which starts with getting to know those who administer the township. Fortunately, getting to know your local officials is simple. They are your neighbors. They welcome your interest and encourage your questions and suggestions.