

TOWNSHIPS 101



Townships were the original form of local government in Minnesota, established in the late 1700s when Congress ordered a survey that divided the territory into 36 square mile tracts of land. Today, “township” generally refers to public corporations governed by a local board of supervisors and created to provide services to residents.

Townships exist in every area of the state, including the metropolitan area. Some, with populations of more than 1,000, function in much the same way as a small city. While many townships remain rural agricultural centers, others host a variety of residential, light commercial, and industrial development.

TOWNSHIP GOVERNMENT IS: EFFICIENT. EFFECTIVE. ACCOUNTABLE. ACCESSIBLE.

THERE ARE
1,780
TOWNSHIPS
ACROSS MINNESOTA

REPRESENTING
16%
OF THE
STATE POPULATION

WITH
918,256
TOTAL
RESIDENTS

TOWNSHIP ELECTIONS & ANNUAL MEETING

- A township board of supervisors, usually three members, are elected by their residents to staggered three-year terms and make up the township governing body. The annual elections for 2/3 of all townships are held on the second Tuesday in March each year in conjunction with the township's annual meeting. The rest of the townships hold their elections in November.
- The township's annual meeting, held the second Tuesday in March on "Township Day," is what really sets townships apart from other forms of local government. At this meeting, the residents of the township have a direct voice in how the township will be run. Residents vote directly on a variety of matters for which the town board must receive voter approval and, more importantly, the township's tax levy for the next year. [This is grassroots government!](#)

SERVICES, REVENUE & EXPENSES OF TOWNSHIPS

- The types of services offered by townships vary greatly from community to community.
- Local property taxes are the largest source of township revenue, about 73% of total income. Townships are frugal and efficient! Over the past ten years, revenues have grown only 9.8% in inflation-adjusted dollars (less than 1% per year). In 2017, total township revenues were \$325.3 million; total expenditures were \$306.4 million. Most forms of direct state aid to townships have been eliminated.
- Townships control approximately 41 percent of the roads in Minnesota – more road miles than any other level of government. This means all townships must provide directly or contract for road maintenance services. Many townships provide volunteer fire services and participate in joint powers agreements for a variety of purposes.
- Road and bridge expenditures are by far the largest expense for townships. Other categories of expense include general government expenses, fire protection services, debt payments, water and wastewater services, and public safety.