

# What Townships Do

## **Township Functions**

State laws authorize Michigan townships to perform a wide variety of functions in two important categories: mandated and permissive.

### **Mandated Functions**

Mandated functions are activities that townships are required to perform. The three broadest mandated responsibilities are assessment administration, elections administration and tax collection, which are legally assigned functions of the supervisor, clerk and treasurer, respectively. State laws also specify details for performing these functions.

In addition to these broad mandates, there are other, more narrow state requirements. Procedures for the township's financial administration, such as budgets, accounting, investments and deposits, are closely regulated by the state. Township meetings must comply with Michigan's Open Meetings Act (MCL 15.261, et seq.), and township records must be stored and made available in conformance with specific laws, such as the Freedom of Information Act (MCL 15.231, et seq.).

### **Permissive Functions**

Beyond the mandated functions, Michigan townships are authorized to provide a wide variety of services that are generally expected from general purpose governmental entities. Virtually all townships provide fire protection and many also offer law enforcement as well. Parks and recreation programs, public water and sewer services, trash collection and recycling programs, sidewalks and trails, and cemeteries are other common township functions. Townships, as well as other local governments, can provide these services by themselves, or jointly with another entity, and townships can buy from and sell to other governments any function it can produce by itself. In some but not all cases, townships can also contract with private entities to provide programs and services.

Townships have broad powers to enact and enforce ordinances. Zoning ordinances regulate land use, while many other "police power," non-zoning ordinances control activities that protect the health, safety and general welfare of the community.

A significant difference between townships and cities and villages in Michigan is the general lack of authority in townships to perform maintenance and construction on roads. In most states, townships take care of local roads in their jurisdictions, but Michigan law transferred responsibility for roads to county road commissions and, most recently, provides the option for county boards of commissioners to transfer road responsibility from road commissions to themselves. Under very specific circumstances, larger townships may contract with road commissions to assume road maintenance responsibilities, but only one township has opted to accept road responsibilities to this degree. Townships do not receive gas and weight tax distributions as cities, villages and counties do. It is the county's statutory responsibility to keep roads in a safe condition, but township boards recognize that counties do not have sufficient resources to take

care of all the road needs. As a result, townships collectively spent in excess of \$160 million on roads in 2010, even though they are not required by law to do so. The Michigan Constitution and state statutes limit the amount of property tax millage that townships can levy for general township operations. General law townships are allocated at least 1 mill from the constitutionally limited 15/18 mills allocated among townships, the county, public schools and the intermediate school district..

Townships also utilize other sources of revenue to support services. User fees, permits, fines and special assessments on real property are the most frequently used sources.

### **Townships Support Other Governmental Units**

Townships serve other governmental units by providing tax collection services. To avoid imposing an unnecessary burden on citizens to pay separate property taxes to the township, schools, special assessment districts and the county, Michigan townships provide uniform assessment of property values and collect all property taxes on behalf of the other units of government. Only a very small portion of the taxes collected are retained by the township for its own operating purposes.

Michigan townships, large and small, provide services tailored to meet the needs of their residents. Township officials represent the level of government closest and most responsive to the wishes of the people.

### **Township Laws**

There are many laws that govern townships, but the two main laws dealing with township administration and governance are:

General township laws, the Revised Statutes of 1846, R.S. of 1846 (Chapter 41 of the Michigan Compiled Laws)

Charter Township Act (Chapter 42 of the Michigan Compiled Laws)

All Michigan laws are available to the public on the free, searchable Michigan Legislative Website. The laws can be searched by keyword, or Michigan Compiled Laws (MCL) number, such as "41.721" or "42.8".

All current legislation, including House and Senate bills, can be accessed and tracked as well.

Township Video

<https://youtu.be/e0mMkyxu3QA>