

September 2023 Op-Ed

The Importance of Local Government

Local government is the most accessible level of government. It makes communities strong and resilient through shared involvement. To understand the impact of local government, the League of Women Voters of Centre County (LWVCC) is providing a four-part series about local offices. This third installment focuses on borough and township government offices.

The LWVCC thanks the PA Governor's Center for Local Government Services and the PA Department of Community and Economic Development for the following information produced and published by them as the *Citizen's Guide to Pennsylvania Local Government*.

It's easy to lose track of who does what when it comes to local government in Pennsylvania. Each of us lives in one of 67 counties, in one of 2,560 municipalities and in one of the state's 500 school districts. That means, in addition to having one state representative and one state senator, every Pennsylvanian has government officials representing them at the county level, the municipal level and the school board level.

The different layers of government are classified by state lawmakers and are based on population per the PA Constitution. Townships are the most common form of municipal government followed by boroughs; there are 1,546 townships and 959 boroughs in PA. Both are governed by state laws. These local levels of government implement most of the services we use on a daily basis: infrastructure, parks and recreation, police and fire protection, EMS services, garbage and sewer management, water safety, libraries, museums, swimming pools, senior centers and the administration of local and state laws, all of which directly contribute to our quality of life.

Borough Elected Officials

Boroughs cover a smaller but more densely populated area than townships. Borough councilpersons are salaried and function under the Borough Code. Their work is mainly legislative. They enact laws and ordinances that guide services not otherwise provided for which affect all residents. They also pass budgets and levy taxes to support those services.

Councilpersons must live within the borough for at least one year, maintain residency during the term, be a registered voter and are elected to four-year overlapping terms. Other elected officials of the borough are tax collector, auditor and constable. These positions are also salaried, officials must live within the borough for at least one year and maintain residency during their terms and be a registered voter. The tax collector, elected to a four-year term, may be required to take a class, pass an examination, and must qualify for bond and then collects taxes. The auditor, elected to a four-year term, performs an annual audit of all borough department accounts. The constable, elected to a six-year term, enforces the laws, has the power to arrest, protects polling places, transports prisoners, and assists the courts.

Township Elected Officials

Townships have a smaller population but cover a larger more rural area than boroughs. Township supervisors are salaried and function under the Township Code. Their duties are mainly legislative, enacting laws and ordinances to guide basic services not otherwise provided, such as those previously listed. They are responsible for passing budgets and levying taxes.

A township supervisor must be a resident of the township for at least one year, maintain residency during the term, be a registered voter and they are elected to six-year overlapping terms. Other elected officials of the township are tax collector, auditor and constable. These positions are also salaried, these officials must live within the borough for at least one year and maintain residency during their terms, and be a registered voter. The tax collector may have to take a class and pass an examination, must qualify for bond and when elected to a four-year term, collects taxes. Auditor, elected to a four-year term, performs an annual audit of all township department accounts. The constable, elected to a six-year term, enforces the laws, has the power to arrest, protects polling places, transports prisoners, and assists the courts.

The final installment, in October, will focus on: Boards of School Directors. The Municipal Election will be held on November 7, 2023. Make sure your voter registration is current at www.centrecountyvotes.gov.