



MICHIGAN TOWNSHIPS MATTER

General Information about Michigan Townships

Township governments efficiently, economically and effectively protect the public safety of families and enhance the quality of life for more than half of Michigan’s residents. Townships consistently provide more services with fewer resources to residents—and do it in an accountable manner.

Townships are governed by everyday residents serving each other. Because neighbors are serving neighbors, townships match the needs of the communities they serve.

- The premise that combining smaller units of government into larger entities will produce cost savings in providing government services is overly simplistic. There is little evidence that larger units of government have lower costs—in fact, the opposite is generally true. Typically, greater local democracy—with smaller local jurisdictions—does not result in higher government costs per capita.
 - According to the U.S. Census Bureau, cities in Michigan spent nearly \$12 billion on municipal operations in fiscal year 2001-02. During the same period, townships spent \$1.7 billion—one-eighth the amount of cities.
 - Cities received more than \$3.5 billion from state and federal sources while townships received only \$450 million.
- Michigan ranks relatively low in terms of the number of local governments per capita.
 - There are 1,242 townships in Michigan.
 - Michigan is one of 20 states that have the township form of government.
 - Michigan is 12th nationally in total number of local governments.*
 - Michigan is 32nd nationally in total number of governments per person.*
 - More than half of Michigan’s population (50.1 percent) lives in townships.
- Townships are characteristically low-cost entities, and sharing services is far more prevalent than local governments are generally given credit for. In relation to the magnitude of the state’s structural deficit the amount of state money transferred to townships is extraordinarily small.
 - Of the 1,166 townships that provide fire services, 57 percent have a joint fire operation with another government unit.
 - Of the 351 townships that provide police services, 74 percent have police patrols through contract or some other agreement with another local government unit.
 - Of the 622 townships that operate ambulance services, 80 percent have services through joint operations or by contract.

Services Commonly Provided by Townships:

- Fire, Police and EMS
- Planning and Zoning
- Tax Collection
- Election Administration
- Property Assessing
- Public Water and Sewer
- Library Services
- Parks and Recreation
- Senior Programs
- Waste Hauling and Recycling
- Cemetery Operation
- Road Funding

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With an understanding of the efficiencies, effectiveness and economic accountability under which townships operate, it becomes important to carefully analyze the impact that the elimination of townships might have on everyday life in our state.

- The State of Michigan should only facilitate local dialogs on the wisdom of community consolidation or reorganization, including offering financial incentives to underwrite the costs of professional, objective studies that will help local residents decide if consolidation, mergers or abolishment is appropriate.
- There does not appear to be a strong case that the urban consolidations of recent decades have induced unusually significant revitalization of core areas.
- Townships were created pursuant to the Michigan Constitution. The abolishment of townships as a form of government would require numerous constitutional amendments adopted by the voters in a statewide general election. Consolidating or eliminating specific townships will require the consent of the electors in the townships. Township residents have the right to at least the same expectations of governmental self-determination as their counterparts in cities and villages.
- The elimination of townships would likely result in a proliferation of special districts to govern services previously governed by townships. Special districts are generally unelected, unaccountable and do not provide the fiscal oversight currently performed by townships.

More than other local units of government, townships consistently do more with less. In 1946, revenue sharing was established to replace and relieve local taxation. Revenue sharing was designed to be flexible, non-restricted funding that communities could use to best fit their needs. Now, money that local communities rely on to pay for services that directly impact the lives of residents is continually being threatened.

- Townships receive both statutory revenue sharing and constitutional revenue sharing. However, statutory revenue sharing has consistently been reduced over the years.
- Statutory revenue sharing for townships has gone from \$90 million to \$20 million since 2001-02.
- Townships, despite having more than 50 percent of the state's population, receive considerably less funding **per capita** than cities and villages.
 - In the current fiscal year (2006-07), cities received a total revenue sharing amount of \$748,438,714.
 - In the current fiscal year (2006-07), villages received a total revenue sharing amount of \$7,648,821.
 - In the current fiscal year (2006-07), townships received a total revenue sharing amount of \$337,296,134.

**Figures from the U.S. Census Bureau that includes schools and charter schools in the definition of local government. The number of local governments in Michigan is actually inflated because Michigan ranks 4th nationally in the number of charter schools.*