

SECOND CLASS TOWNSHIPS IN PENNSYLVANIA

Townships governed by elected boards of supervisors are the most common form of municipal government in Pennsylvania. The 1,457 second class townships represent 56.7% of all general purpose municipal governments in Pennsylvania. The state's township supervisors govern a combined population of 4.6 million, representing 38.6% of the state total, more than any other municipal classification.

Although some second class townships are located in urban areas and have dense populations, most are rural in nature and have low population densities. Seen as a whole, second class townships are small local governments; only 16% of the total have populations exceeding 5,000 persons. In Pennsylvania there are 14 townships with 20,000+, 16 with 15,000-19,999, 42 with 10,000-14,999, 165 with 5,000-9,999, 312 with 2,500-4,999, 518 with 1,000-2,499, 390 under 1,000. The largest second class townships are Bensalem (Bucks County) 56,788, Millcreek (Erie) 46,820, Middletown (Bucks) 43,063. Fourteen townships have populations under 100. The smallest are East Fork (Potter) 15, East Keating (Clinton) 22, West Keating (Clinton) 34, Elk (Tioga) 42, and Pine (Clearfield) 43.

Townships were the original subdivisions of counties in Pennsylvania. Cities and boroughs were formed from land originally included within a township. There are an average of 22 second class townships per county. The number ranges from five in Cameron County to 56 in Chester County.

ROLE OF MUNICIPAL GOVERNMENT

The municipality is the focus of government legitimacy on the local level. Townships are given power and acknowledged the right to use that power to circumscribe individual rights for the good of society at large. People living in society need rules to govern their behavior.

The municipality provides important community services which are unsuited to private enterprise. Townships have traditionally been heavily involved in maintenance of roads, a function of growing importance in a society heavily dependent on the automobile. Municipal governments have the ultimate responsibility for public safety, including police, firefighting, and emergency management. Townships often provide water, sewer, and refuse collection services.

The municipality is the tool for the regulation of the quality of life within the community. It can promulgate health and safety regulations to protect citizens and often has a role in enforcing state regulations in this field. The municipality can influence aesthetic factors and amenities which contribute much to the quality of life. This can be done by removal of nuisances, control of noxious activities, building regulation, control of development through zoning and subdivision ordinances, animal control and other regulatory activities.