



TOWNSHIPS TODAY

A QUARTERLY NEWSLETTER
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New Census Numbers Prove that Many Prefer the Township Way of Life

Numbers don't lie.

And more than 5.5 million people — or 44 percent of the population — now live in townships, according to the recently released 2010 U.S. Census.

This statistic, which represents an 8.6 percent jump in the past decade, is very telling, and what it says is that nearly half of all Pennsylvanians prefer the township way of life.

While some townships are rural and others are urban, some are small and others are large, they tend to share some common characteristics that make them attractive places to live and raise a family.

Here are just a few reasons why people are choosing to call a township home:

Township supervisors live in the communities they represent: When the nation's Founding Fathers envisioned our United States, they saw it as a bundle of communities, each represented locally by the people who live there. And you know what? Government that is closest to the people makes as much sense today as it did then.

As Thomas Jefferson said: "A perfect republic can materialize only in a small jurisdiction such as a township. [They] have proved themselves the wisest invention ever devised by the wit of man for the perfect exercise of self-government..."

Every township is represented by a board of three or five supervisors, all of whom live in the community and were elected to oversee the health,



The 2010 U.S. Census revealed that more than 5.5 million Pennsylvanians — or 44 percent of the population — are choosing to live in townships, where local leaders are never more than a phone call away.

safety, and welfare of their neighbors. Yet contrary to what some may think, this isn't a glamorous or high-paying job. On average, township supervisors in Pennsylvania earn just \$1,875 a year.

For this, they put aside their personal lives in favor of their public lives to attend countless meetings, maintain and plow roads, build parks, and

balance budgets. So why do they do it?

The truth is, township supervisors care about their hometowns and the people who live there.

These local leaders are hands-on, service-minded individuals whose behind-the-scenes work doesn't get a lot of recognition but is creating communities that many Pennsylvanians value and appreciate. Just look at the recent census numbers.

"Any science that says bigger governments are better governments is at least disingenuous if not downright foolhardy," Albert Paschall, a senior fellow with Harrisburg's Lincoln Institute of Public Opinion Research, wrote. "When was the last time you ran into a member of Congress in the supermarket aisle? How often do you meet a senator at a little league game?"

"But in your supermarket aisles and on little league bleachers all over this state, citizens can challenge the people who govern their neighborhoods."

Townships do more with less: Out-of-control spending may be the norm for state and federal governments, but not in townships. There, frugality rules.

Because township supervisors would much rather cut spending than raise taxes to cover increased expenses, including a growing list of unfunded state mandates, they have become skilled at doing more with less — much like you.

Therefore, it's not unusual for township supervisors to purchase used or surplus equipment, do extra work for the community and not expect payment, and work with neighboring municipali-

ties to increase services at a lower cost. In fact, a recent survey by the Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors found that 82 percent of responding townships are involved in projects with other municipalities. These cooperative efforts are saving tax dollars and enhancing government efficiency.

It's also worth pointing out that some township supervisors have gotten so good at managing the public's money, they have reduced and even eliminated the property tax while adding programs to meet residents' needs.

Township programs and services reflect what residents want and need: No two people are alike, and the same can be said for Pennsylvania's townships. Each has its own values, philosophies, and way of life. What some communities have, others have determined they don't need.

For example, full-time local police protection is provided in some townships because residents demand it and are willing to pay for it. Meanwhile, other townships prefer to rely on the Pennsylvania State Police. You'll also find that land use measures, such as zoning, recreational programs and facilities, and even garbage collection, vary from township to township.

And that's the beauty of Pennsylvania's local government system: The people who live there — not some distant, out-of-touch, overly bureaucratic governing body — make the decisions with input from their neighbors.

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Reforms would provide mandate relief and ensure that more tax dollars stay in the community

There has been a lot of talk lately in Harrisburg about Gov. Tom Corbett's proposed 2011-2012 budget.

While the \$27.3 billion spending plan has shared pain for all, the proposal arrived with some good news for our community. We, along with the commonwealth's other municipalities and school districts, are in line to get some relief from costly state-imposed mandates that are wasting millions of tax dollars.

Each year, for instance, townships like ours spend an average of \$5,000 — and often much more — complying with the state's legal advertising requirements. On top of that, costly and outdated regulations for purchasing products and services eat up more local revenues.

However, as part of his budget, the governor is asking lawmakers to support common-sense purchasing and advertising reforms that would impose no additional costs on the

commonwealth but would save communities statewide hundreds of thousands of dollars a year. And it's money that could be put to better use in our township, including improving local roads, purchasing land and equipment for parks, and upgrading public services.

Currently, the General Assembly is considering legislation that would increase the advertising and bidding thresholds for municipalities. Other proposals would open the door for townships to place legal ads in mass-circulation, community newspapers and on websites, a move that would save municipalities \$23 million a year, one Penn State study estimated.

Still, when talk turns to the governor's budget, mandate relief isn't getting a lot of attention. However, if this legislation passes, more of your hard-earned tax dollars will stay where they belong: in our community where the money can do the most good for our families and neighbors.