

What is a township?

In the late 1700s, Congress ordered a survey that divided the territory that became Minnesota into 36 square-mile tracts of land called townships. When Minnesota became a state, its legislature created a process for those living within these "congressional townships" to organize themselves into a form of local government called town government. Today, towns and cities are the two forms of general-purpose local government that exist in Minnesota.

What is a town board?

A town board is an elected body chosen to conduct the affairs of the town. Three supervisors comprise the town board and are supported by a clerk and a treasurer. Supervisors serve three-year terms, while clerks and treasurers serve two-year terms. The powers and duties of towns and town officers are set out in state statute.

There are optional forms of town government provided for in statute that allow the town voters to change the basic town board structure by: appointing the clerk and/or treasurer; combining the clerk and treasurer positions; or adopting a five-member board of supervisors.

What are the duties of a town supervisor?

Town supervisors are charged with the duty to make decisions on behalf of the town. While the clerk and treasurer positions have a specific set of duties, supervisors "have charge of all town affairs not committed to other officers by law." Minn. Stat. § 366.01, subd. 1. Supervisors have the responsibility to see that the town fulfills its duties to the state and to town residents.

What are the duties of a town clerk?

Town clerks perform a variety of duties for their town including: keeping meeting minutes; providing notice of meetings; filing and preserving the town's records; serving as the chief election officer for the town; and many other tasks designed to assist the town's operations. The primary duties of the clerk are listed in Minn. Stat. § 367.11, but there are many other references to clerk's duties spread throughout the statutes.

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What are the duties of a town treasurer?

Town treasurers are mostly responsible for properly handling and accounting for the town's funds. Treasurers keep a register of all demands for payment made to the town and of all checks the town issues. The primary duties of the treasurer are listed in Minn. Stat. § 367.16.

What should be considered before deciding to run for town office?

- Do you have sufficient time throughout the year to attend meetings, listen to concerned residents, perform assigned tasks outside of meetings, and attend training sessions to learn and remain current on the constantly evolving duties of public office?
- Do you currently hold a public office that might be considered incompatible with serving on a town board, thus requiring you to resign the earlier position?
- If you are interested in running for town supervisor, do you currently contract with the town or have an interest in contracting with the town in the future that may constitute a prohibited conflict of interest?
- Realize that holding public office, even on the board of a very small town, is considered a public trust that can carry very significant criminal and civil penalties if that trust is violated.

When is the town election?

Most town elections are held annually on the second Tuesday in March. Some towns have exercised an option to move their election to November of even or odd numbered years. The town board establishes when the polls open and close, but all town polls must be open at least between 5 p.m. and 8 p.m. In the eleven-county metropolitan area, towns must keep their polls open at least from 10:00 a.m. to 8:00 p.m.

Am I eligible to run for town office?

To be eligible to run for town office you must be: (1) an eligible voter; (2) a filed candidate for only one position at the same election; (3) be at least 21 years old at the time of assuming the office; and (4) be a resident of the town for at least 30 days before the election.

How do I run for town office?

Between 70 and 56 days before the election, those interested in running for a town office can contact the town clerk to file for an office. Notice of the filing period, the offices up for election, and where to file is published in the local newspaper and is posted at the town's posting places. To file, a person completes an affidavit of candidacy and hands it to the town clerk along with a \$2 filing fee. Those who properly file for office will have their name printed on the town's election ballot.

Do I have to file to be elected to office?

No, the ballot form contains an open line for each office up for election that voters can use to write in the name of the person they would like to see elected. Sometimes people actively pursue a write-in campaign for a position they did not file for.

If I run for office, am I required to campaign?

No, whether you choose to campaign for the office is entirely up to you. However, you may not campaign in any way at the polling place or within 100 ft. of the polling place door on Election Day. Also, all candidates must complete a certificate of filing form and file it with the town clerk. If you spend over \$750 campaigning, a detailed disclosure report is required.

What occurs on Election Day?

The town polls open at the time indicated in the notice provided by the town. The appointed election judges assist voters to register, confirm each voter's address, explain and assist with the voting process, and tally the votes after

the polls close. Election judges and town clerks receive regular training to remain current with correct election procedures. Also, election judges may not be a spouse or an immediate family member of a candidate at the election for which they are a judge.

What happens after the election?

Within 24 hours after the polls close, the election judges deliver a summary statement of the results and other materials to the town clerk. Within two days of the election, the town board meets as the board of canvass to review and certify the results. After the results are canvassed, a seven-day contest period begins in which someone could challenge the election. After the election, all candidates must file a certificate of filing with the town clerk disclosing campaign spending, even if a candidate spent nothing to campaign. After the contest period, the clerk gives each of the successful candidates a certificate of election. Within ten days of receiving the certificate, all candidates elected in March must take the official oath of office before a notary, sign it, and then file it with the town clerk. Officers elected in November take their oath of office before assuming their position which commences on the first Monday in January. Because town clerks are, by virtue of their positions, ex officio notaries, town officers often take their oath before the clerk. Town clerks must find another clerk or notary that can administer the oath to them. A candidate elected in March assumes the office upon the proper filing of the oath with the town clerk. The previous office holder is then required to turn over to the new officer all town documents and property in his or her possession.

What resources and training are available for new town officers?

Nearly every town in the state is a member of the Minnesota Association of Townships and is eligible to attend the Association's many training sessions. Every year the Association conducts numerous training sessions including 15 spring short courses, six summer short courses, an urban town short course, a legal seminar, 13 district meetings, and an annual meeting/educational conference. At the spring short courses, which are held around the state in late March and early April, there is a day-long orientation and training session

for new officers. Throughout the year town officers are also eligible to contact the Association to ask questions of its staff regarding the authority and duties of towns and their officers.

Where can I go for more information?

There are many resources available to learn more about towns and running for town office.

- Contact the current town clerk for information. The county auditor can usually provide you the name and phone number of your local town clerk.
- The county auditor is the chief elections officer for the county and can provide you election related information.
- The Minnesota Association of Townships web page contains a wide range of information on town government, including a calendar showing the dates and deadlines for town elections (www.mntownships.org). Included on the web page is the *Manual on Town Government* that provides an overview of many town related issues officers and prospective officers may find of interest.
- The Elections Division of the Secretary of State's Office answers questions regarding town elections (651-215-1440). They also have a wealth of information on elections available on their web page, including a town election guide (www.sos.state.mn.us).

"These wards, called townships in New England, are the vital principle of their governments and have proved themselves the wisest invention ever devised by the wit of man for the perfect exercise of self-government and for its preservation."

--Thomas Jefferson to Samuel Kercheval, 1816. ME 15:38

HOW TO RUN FOR TOWN OFFICE



From the
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