How Do Local Governments Serve You?

2,497 Units of Local Government in Michigan

Michigan has more local governments than most other states. Each of these units is designated as local government because they have the ability to levy taxes. There are currently 1,858 units of general purpose units of government and 639 special purpose units. The Michigan Constitution, state law, and local ordinances and charters determine the structure of local government. Each of these units has its own governing body and it uses tax revenues for general operation.

General Purpose

Villages–263
Cities–270
Townships–1,242
Counties–83

Special Purpose

Public School Districts–551
Intermediate School Districts–57
Special Authorities–(number unknown)

Counties

The county is the largest subdivision of state government. There are 83 counties in Michigan, ranging in size from 316 square miles in Benzie County to Marquette County with 1,828 square miles. Most counties are approximately 500-900 square miles. Populations range from 2,200 in Keweenaw County to more than 2 million in Wayne County. An elected board of county commissioners makes the governing decisions. Counties provide services which include assisting the circuit and probate courts, providing law enforcement, providing road maintenance, recording property ownership and some vital statistics, and providing health and social services.

Townships

Townships have jurisdiction of nearly 95% of Michigan's total land (36 million acres). Over one-third of the population of Michigan lives in one of the state's 1,242 townships. Originally, townships were to be 36 miles square but they presently range in size from 600 square miles in McMillan Township to 2/3 square mile in Royal Oak Township. Township populations vary from about 100 to 80,000. A township is governed by an elected board, with a supervisor, trustees and a clerk. Townships are responsible for services such as fire protection, traffic safety, land use and zoning and they may also provide public water and sewer systems, libraries, senior citizen programs etc.

Villages

There are 263 villages in Michigan with populations ranging from 150 to more than 10,000. A village is formed by people living close together in some area of a township who do not want to break the ties with the township by becoming a city. However, they do want additional services. Villages remain as part of the township and residents must register to vote in the township and pay taxes for both units. Village concerns may include sidewalks, zoning, street lighting and paving, building regulations, and local water supply.

Cities

There are 270 cities with populations ranging from less than 500 to nearly one million. Most cities were formed around densely populated communities within townships to provide more municipal services. City

governments have a great deal of flexibility in governmental structure, taxing powers and writing ordinances (laws). They carry on the same type of municipal services as villages, except on a larger scale. City charters determine the type of governing body for the city (e.g. strong mayor-council, or council-manager etc.)

Authorities
The number of authorities is not recorded. These units are organized to provide special services within or between units of government (e.g., mass transit, airports, water).

Local Schools
Local school districts are governmental areas with definite boundaries for the purpose of taxation and school attendance. These boundaries do not necessarily coincide with those of a city or township. School districts are administered by locally elected school boards, varying in size with an average of 5-9 members. There are currently 556 local K-12 school districts. Public school academies (charter schools) are counted separately.

Intermediate School Districts
The intermediate school districts are separate governmental units whose purpose is to coordinate special programs and services for a group of school districts. The 57 districts in Michigan are governed by boards (5-7 members), with members selected by the local school district or elected by popular vote.

Community Colleges
Community colleges are governmental units that provide post-high school programs in technical, vocational and academic subjects. About 80 percent of the state's population lives within commuting distance of a two-year public college. Community colleges receive money from the state, local property taxes and tuition. An elected board of trustees makes the decisions for the community college.

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