

## 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 in which a town board governs, but residents have direct input through the annual township meeting.

## What is a town board?

A town board is an elected body chosen to conduct the affairs of the town. In a traditional township, 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 (in March elections). If the town has a November election; Supervisors have either a four or six year term while the Clerk & Treasurer hold 4 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, adopting a five-member board of supervisors, choosing November elections, or use of mail-in ballots (provided your county approves).

## What are the duties of a town supervisor?

By law, supervisors "have charge of all town affairs not committed to other officers by law." Minn. Stat. § 366.01, subd. 1. Town supervisors are charged with the duty to make decisions on behalf of the town and have the responsibility to see that the town fulfills its duties to the state and to town residents. Common duties include awarding contracts, authorizing township expenditures, and adopting ordinances.

## What are the duties of a town clerk?

A town clerk performs a variety of duties for the township, including: keeping meeting minutes; providing notice of meetings; filing and preserving the town's records; and serving as the chief election officer for the town. 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, and the clerk frequently performs other tasks needed for the town to function effectively and efficiently.

## 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?

- Will I be able to attend the regularly scheduled (approximately one per month) and special board meetings (as determined by the board of supervisors), listen to concerned citizens and perform the statutory duties along with other assigned tasks?
- Am I able to dedicate sufficient time throughout the year to attend regularly scheduled training sessions provided through the Minnesota Association of Townships and the local county unit?
- Do I currently hold a public office that might be considered incompatible with serving on the town board or own a business currently doing business with the township that could be a conflict of interest?

There is a commitment to being in government at any level. The amount of time you spend performing your role is determined by your fellow officers and neighbors – you are working in your community and not in an office miles away. The dedication of folks like you will insure our local form of government will continue into the future. Your community needs people like you to get involved.

## When is the town election?

Most town elections are held annually on the second Tuesday in March, however some townships have exercised an option to hold biennial elections in November, usually in the even numbered years.

For March Elections the town board establishes when the polls open and close, but all town polls must be open at least between 5-8pm. In the eleven-county metro area, towns must keep their polls open at least from 10am – 8 pm.

For November elections the hours are 7 am – 8 pm. Townships under 500 and located outside the eleven county metro area may (at the annual meeting) approve an opening time not later than 10 am.

For combined or shared polling places; best practices would suggest all polls be open at the earliest required hour of a participating township or city.

## Am I eligible to run for town office?

To be eligible to run for town office you must be: (1) an eligible voter; (2) filed as a 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?

Minn. Stat. § 205.13 governs the filing process. No more than 70 but not less than 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. A proper petition can replace the 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. If you are eligible to run for office you can initiate a write-in campaign. A person can be elected without their knowledge in a write-in campaign. If you are elected in that manner, you can choose not to accept the post by declining to take the oath of office and that position will become an appointed position until the next election cycle.

## 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 building in which the polling place or is located or on public property if the polling place is on public property, on Election Day. Also, all candidates, regardless of whether they win or lose, 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 March election and between the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 10<sup>th</sup> day following the November 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. A candidate elected in March assumes the office upon the proper filing of the oath with the town clerk. Officers elected in November may take and file their oath of office any time before their term 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. The previous office holder is required to turn over all town documents and property in his or her possession to the new officer.

## What resources and training are available for new town officers?

Nearly every township in the state is a member of the Minnesota Association of Townships. Every year the Association conducts numerous training sessions for town officers, including 15 spring short courses, eight summer short courses, an urban town short course, 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](http://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](http://www.sos.state.mn.us)).

# HOW TO RUN FOR TOWN OFFICE



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*"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