

Little Britain Township Newsletter

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Pennsylvania Municipalities: In a Class by Themselves

William Penn established Pennsylvania's units of local government when he owned all the land that is now the Commonwealth of Pennsylvania. Through a charter from King Charles II of England, Penn was given the power to divide his land into counties, townships, cities, and boroughs, all of which had existed in England for quite some time.

Today, these four types of municipalities still exist in Pennsylvania. And while they all share the same basic statutory powers and public service responsibilities, each retains some unique characteristics.

According to state law, the "class" of a municipality depends not on money, status, or prestige, but on population. Pennsylvania has nine classes of counties, four classes of cities, and two classes of townships. Boroughs are not classified. Generally, each class of municipality operates under its own code of laws, which determines its structure and powers.

Although the state legislature determines the powers and organization of most municipalities, other options exist. For example, governments that operate under a home rule charter or an optional plan have the power to determine their structure and the services they will

perform as long as it is not a function denied by the state constitution or the General Assembly. However, all laws that are uniform and applicable statewide, such as the Uniform Construction Code, still apply to home rule municipalities.

William Penn established Pennsylvania's three original counties – Philadelphia, Bucks, and Chester – in 1682. Until the 1800s, the major function of these counties was to provide a headquarters for the court. As people moved west and north from the original counties, more courthouses were needed in locations closer to the expanding population. The fourth county, Lancaster, was established in 1729. Many other counties were later created from parts of existing ones. Pennsylvania currently has 67 counties, the last of which was established in 1878.

Townships are the oldest form of organized government in the United States, dating back to the 17th century. When the Pilgrims came to America from England, they brought the concept of townships with them, and by order of the Mayflower Compact, townships became the first political subdivision in the new world.

William Penn began establishing townships in Pennsylvania as early as 1683, with about 10 families to each. The Industrial Revolution brought more and more development to the state, however, jeopardizing the existence of many townships. As growth intensified around cities and boroughs, those municipalities began to annex the developed portions of adjacent townships without the need for citizen approval. In 1899, the legislature tried to address the dispersed growth by creating townships of the first

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TOWNSHIP DIRECTORY

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ZONING OFFICER/BCO

Christine J. Jackson (529-2373 ext. 2)

class as a special category. At that time, all townships with a population density greater than 300 people per square mile were designated as townships of the first class.

This separate classification enabled townships to preserve their character and fiscal integrity and gave townships of the first class greater power when dealing with growth. In 1937, they gained additional protection from annexation when the legislature passed a law requiring voters to approve a referendum before a township of the first class could be annexed. Townships of the second class were granted similar powers in the 1940s, although annexation continued to be a divisive issue into more recent times.

The Constitutional Convention of 1968 finally leveled the playing field for townships when it came to annexation. Article IX, Section 8, which the voters approved in April 1968, required the General Assembly to enact uniform laws for municipal consolidation, mergers, and boundary changes.

The 1899 legislation also was later amended to allow for a transition from second to first class township status, and these transition requirements remain the same today. To become a township of the first class, townships of the second class must have a population density of at least 300 people per square mile, and voters must approve the classification change in a referendum. However, many townships of the second class meeting the density requirement have chosen to maintain their form of government since there are few differences between the two classes of townships.

Even though townships now consist of more than 10 families, they are still governed by a few elected local residents who provide the functions necessary to protect the health and safety of the residents. Today, the 1,456 townships of the second class represent more Pennsylvanians than any other form of government – 5.4 million residents.

For those of you who may be wondering, Little Britain Township is a Township of the Second Class and was established in 1738. More information pertaining to the history of our Township may be found on our website, under the History section noted on the home page.

Zoning Matters

I love snow! Like a child I am still holding out hope that we are blessed with a late season snow storm. A heavy blanket of white, quietly covering the World in tiny sparkling crystals. Much to my disappointment, it appears Spring is steadily approaching bringing with it a plethora of work.

When faced with daunting lists of projects and repairs that require our attention, sometimes during the flurry of activity the need for permits is overlooked. Unfortunately, when this happens it leaves my office with the unpleasant responsibility of issuing violations and requiring remediation. Once violations are issued, permit fees are doubled and you could be facing per day fines.

Below is a list of the most frequently violated sections.

- All structures require permitting prior to placement, regardless of size.
- Driveways - the installation, alterations, paving and repaving of all driveways requires permitting before work begins.
- Since the adoption of the State mandated Stormwater Management Ordinance of May 13, 2014 it is unlawful to commence earth disturbance activities or the placement of new/additional impervious surface upon the land (stone, pavement, concrete, structures, etc.) without first obtaining the necessary permits.
- It is illegal to convert a single-family dwelling into a two-family dwelling without first obtaining the proper approvals from the Township and State.
- It is illegal to convert all or part of any accessory structure into a dwelling unit without obtaining the proper approvals from the Township and State.
- Individuals who wish to convert an accessory structure into a livestock structure must obtain Township approvals. Accessory buildings are intended for storage of personal items and require a much lesser setback than structures housing livestock.
- Prior to the start of a timber harvest project landowner's must contact the Township Office.

- No well may be installed, without first obtaining a permit
- All septic system installations and repairs require permit issuance prior to the work commencing.
- When planting vegetation adjacent to fields used for agricultural purposes you must setback an adequate distance to prevent encroachment at maturity. Minimum setback is twenty (20) feet for shrubs and thirty (30) feet for trees. All existing shrubs and trees on lots used primarily for residential purposes must be trimmed to alleviate encroachment onto adjacent agricultural croplands.

Please remember we are just a telephone call away. We are available to answer questions, provide information and help you through the permitting process.

At this time I would like to take a moment to announce a few new individuals to the Little Britain Township Municipal Planning and Zoning team. We would like to thank these individuals for being willing to serve.

David Martin was appointed as the newest member of the Little Britain Township Planning Commission on January 2nd. The Planning Commission is a seven person board who is responsible for reviewing all subdivision, land development and add-on plans, as well as, waiver requests, sewage modules, zoning hearing applications and conditional use applications. They prepare zoning ordinance rewrites and amendments. The Planning Commission is an advisory Board to the Little Britain Township Board of Supervisors.

The Little Britain Township Zoning Hearing Board welcomes two new alternates. George Osborn and Jeff Wood were appointed by the Board of Supervisors on February 13th. The Zoning Hearing Board of Little Britain Township is a standalone three person judicial body, separate from the Board of Supervisors, that hears requests for special exceptions, variances and appeals of the zoning officer's determinations of the Municipal Zoning Ordinance. The Board then renders a decision determining if relief is warranted.

