

How Well Do You Know Your Local Government?

Created by and for the Sole Use of the
League of Women Voters of Wilmette

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Democracy is Not a Spectator Sport



Here are some key things to know:

1. What local government bodies serve Wilmette residents?
2. Which members of our government are elected?
3. What are their main responsibilities?
4. How big are their budgets and what are their reserves?
5. How big are their property tax levies and how much of your most recent tax bill went to each government body?
6. How do they conduct their meetings?
7. How do citizens get information and participate?



What Local Government Bodies Serve Wilmette residents?

- Village of Wilmette
- Wilmette Park District
- Wilmette Public Library District
- K-8 School Districts
 - Wilmette Public School D. 39
 - Avoca D. 37
 - New Trier High School District 203
- New Trier Township

NOTE: This does not include Cook County districts, the Metropolitan Water Reclamation District of Greater Chicago (MWRD), the North Shore Mosquito Abatement District and Oakton College District 535. These are all SEPARATE government bodies, but we are not focusing on them here.

Government Officials: Elected or Appointed?

1. Board Members?
2. Board President?
3. Top Administrative Official?
4. Local Government Staff Positions?
5. Commission Members?

Government Officials: Elected or Appointed?

1. Board Members? **Elected**

Depending on Board, called Board Members, Trustees or Commissioners. Some Boards have committees made up solely of board members. The board president typically determines composition.

2. Board President? **Only VB and NT Township Elected**

Voters directly elect Village President and Township Supervisor. The other local boards elect their President at a board meeting.

3. Top Administrative Official? **Only NT Township Supervisor Elected.**

Most local boards appoint their government's top administrative official.

4. Local Government Staff Positions? **Appointed**

Top Administrator (or other administrative officials) generally hires other staff positions, though may require board approval depending on the level, depending on the board.

Government Officials: Citizen Advisory Committees/Commissions

Some of our Local Government Boards have Citizen Advisory Committees or Commissions that make recommendations to the elected Board. Some examples:

1. **Village Commissions.** The Village has several commissions, each with its own responsibilities. Appointments are made by the Village President, with approval by Village Board, from applications submitted to the Village.
2. **Township Advisory Committees.** The Township has 3 committees that make recommendations to the Township Board on the Township's funding of agencies that serve Township residents. Applications made to Township. Voted on by Township Board.
3. **School Advisory Committees.** The school district boards of education and administrations have at times had advisory committees to advise on various topics, including COVID response and strategic plans.

Take a Quick Quiz: True or False?

With respect to our local government bodies:

1. All have a 7 person board?
2. All board members are elected to 4 year terms?
3. All board members are term limited to 2 consecutive terms?
4. Candidates for the board must be affiliated with a political party?
5. All elected officials are paid a small salary?
6. All have committees of board members?
7. All have separate citizen commissions?

Take a Quick Quiz: True or False?

With respect to our local government bodies:

1. All have a 7 person board? **False** (Township has a 5 person board, including the Supervisor)
2. All board members are elected to 4 year terms? **True** (unless there is a special election for a vacated seat)
3. All board members are term limited to 2 consecutive terms? **False**. Only the Village is term-limited.
4. Candidates for the board must be affiliated with a political party? **False**. Most of our local elections are non-partisan.
5. All elected officials are paid a small salary? **False**. All but the Township have volunteer elected officials.
6. All have committees of board members? **False**
7. All have separate citizen commissions? **False**

Speaking of Commissions, they along with boards, are an important part of where the work gets done in our Village government. Here is a list of the active boards & commissions?

Commissions and Committees:

1. Appearance Review
2. Electrical
3. Environmental and Energy
4. Historic Preservation
5. Housing
6. Human Relations
7. Plan
8. Transportation

Boards

1. Building Code Board of Appeals
2. Fire & Police Commissioners
3. Police and Firefighters' Pension
4. Zoning Board of Appeals

What Do Our Elected Boards Do?

Which of the following are each of our elected government boards responsible for?

1. Setting policy?
2. Getting updates on how policies are being carried out?
3. Adopting Strategic Plans?
4. Day to day administrative or operational concerns?
5. Adopting an annual budget?
6. Approving large capital improvements/expenditures?
7. Adopting the annual tax levy?
8. Hiring/firing staff?
9. Approving contracts and monthly checks?
10. Hearing Public Input?



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2. Getting updates on how policies are being carried out? **Yes**
3. Adopting Strategic Plans? **Yes**
4. Day to day administrative or operational concerns? **No**
(staff does that)
5. Adopting an annual budget? **Yes**
6. Approving large capital improvements/capital expenditures? **Yes**
7. Adopting the annual tax levy? **Yes (but not the final step)**
8. Hiring/firing staff? **For most boards, only the top administrator (issues sometimes heard in closed session)**
9. Approving contracts and monthly checks? **Yes**
10. Hearing Public Input? **Yes**





Here are some things to know about local government finances

Budget and/or Budget & Appropriations

- Adopted each fiscal year, usually by end of its first quarter of that FY; planning starts months earlier.
- Budget & appropriations ordinance or appropriations ordinance limits by law what that entity can spend.
- Some boards also pass a working budget, which is what the entity expects to spend.
- Process typically includes short and long-term capital planning.
- Village and Park District have calendar year FYs, School and Library Districts have July 1-June 30 FY and Township has March 1-February 28 FY.

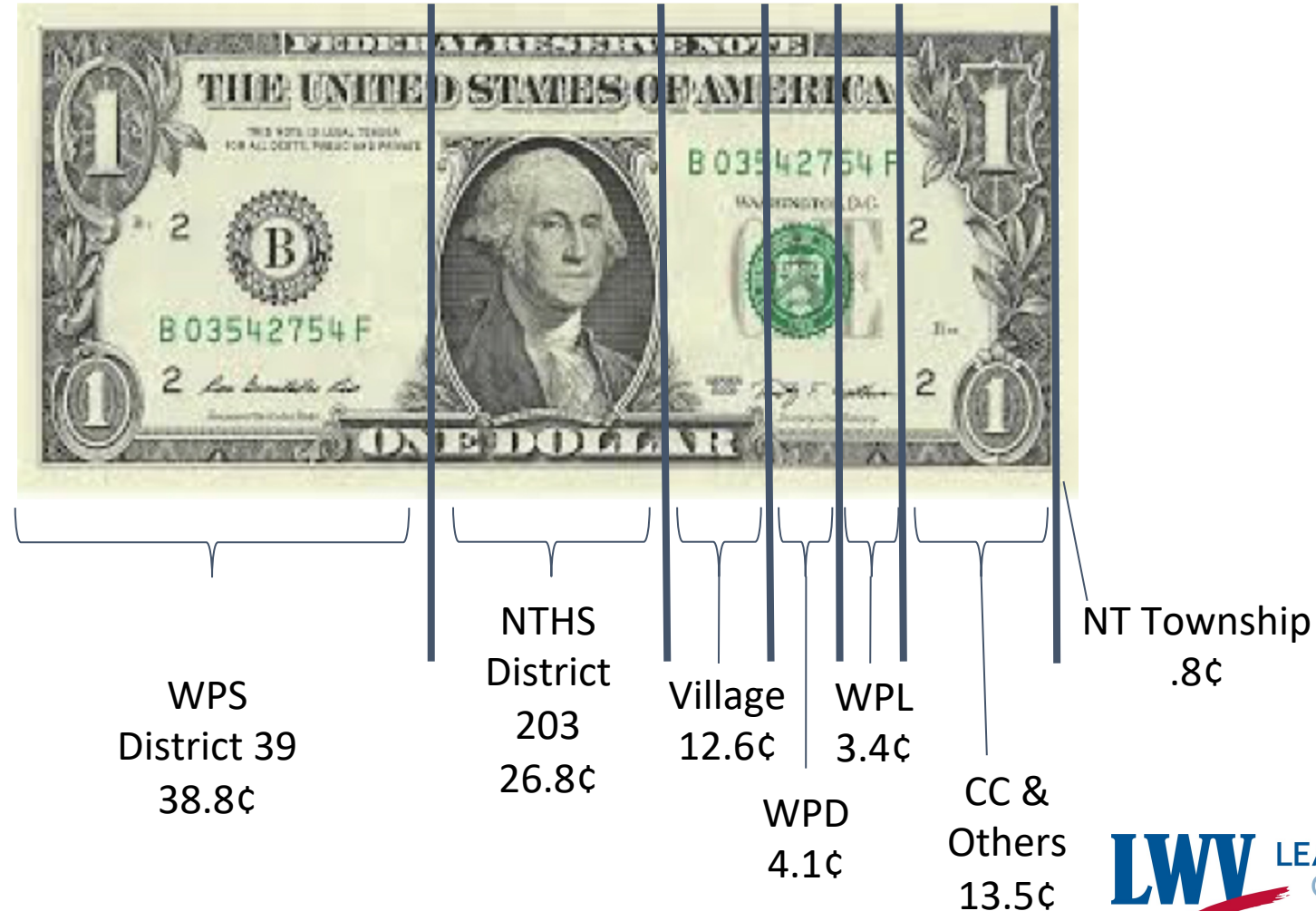
Tax Levy

- Approved by each board and submitted to County by last Tuesday in December of each year.
- Property tax years are calendar years, in arrears (e.g., 2022 tax levy pertains to 2022 taxes paid in 2023..
- County typically determines tax extension the following June (though 2021 tax extension was not determined until Nov. 2022).

Annual Financial Report

- Audited by independent accounting firm, presented after the end of a fiscal year.
- Includes an auditor's report containing an opinion by the accounting firm about whether the financial statements that are part of the report fairly represent the financial position of the governmental unit.
- Also includes a management discussion & analysis section containing highlights from the financial statements and the statements themselves, all generally prepared by the governmental unit staff.

What Percentage of Your Most Recent Tax Bill Went to Which Government Entities? *



*2021 tax bill paid in 2022 for property owners in WPS D39 and Wilmette

And, side note, what is the Tax Cap anyway?



Property Tax Extension Limitation Law (aka “PTELL” or the “Tax Cap”)

- A state tax law limiting the amount of the property tax extension growth on existing property from one year to the next
 - Limits that growth to lesser of 5% or previous year’s CPI.
 - Applies to the taxes extended by a district, NOT individual bills
 - The “look-back” sometimes is not to prior year, but to the highest of the previous 3 years
- Applies to all our local government bodies, EXCEPT the Village
- Does not apply to the property extension on new property
- Does not apply to all funds, especially funds to service taxpayer-approved and certain other bonds. Tax extension for those bonds is whatever is due.

What about Fund Balances?

- Fund Balances Are Built Up Reserves
- Appropriate levels have been a matter of debate in Wilmette
 - Low reserves can lead to higher debt costs, cash flow issues and financial uncertainty especially with economic downturns, building needs and unforeseen circumstances
 - High reserves can result in questioning of property tax rates, fees and/or whether important services are being provided
- Look for projected FY-end balances during the next year's budget process and final FY-end balances in the audited financials.
- Some local government bodies have reserve policies (min/max)

What is the Open Meetings Act (OMA)?

- An Illinois state law “to ensure that the actions of public bodies be taken openly and that their deliberations be conducted openly.”
- Requires meetings subject to OMA to be 1) public, 2) meet certain notice and minutes requirements, and 3) allow public comment.
- Meeting defined broadly, includes telephone calls, email, electronic chats, etc. Kicks in at 3 members for our local 5 or 7-member boards, and at 2 for 3-member committees. Otherwise, at a majority of a quorum.
- Exceptions to OMA apply, including to consider certain personnel matters, student discipline, litigation, purchase/sale/lease of real property, although final actions are generally not to be taken at a closed meeting.



How Does the OMA Impact the Public's Ability to Know What is Going to be Discussed at a Board Meeting?

- The agenda must be posted on the government body's website at least 48 hours in advance of the meeting (if full-time staff maintains the website; if not, must be available at principal office).
- The agenda must list the "general subject matter of any resolution or ordinance that will be the subject of **final action** at the meeting."
- Informational materials not required to be posted, but our local governments often do and LWVW encourages it.
- Recognize that some boards and committees are more transparent than others.
- OMA not a high hurdle to pass—LWVW hopes for more transparency locally. The LWV-W encourages our local government bodies to post to the public all information necessary to understand an issue, even if not required by the OMA.

So Under the OMA, When Do Our Elected Officials Do their Work?



1. At public board meetings meeting OMA requirements?
2. At public committee meetings meeting OMA requirements?
3. At closed board or committee meetings?
4. At cocktail parties or other informal gatherings?
5. In one-on-one discussions with each other, staff and residents?
6. On their own time?

So Under the OMA, When Do Our Elected Officials Do their Work?



1. At public board meetings meeting OMA requirements? **Yes**
2. At public committee meetings meeting OMA requirements? **Yes**
3. At closed board or committee meetings? **Yes if allowed under the OMA**
4. At cocktail parties or other informal gathering? **No if discussing in a number making a meeting under the OMA--but ok to be at a gathering together if not discussing or if just listening to constituents**
5. In one-on-one discussions with each other, staff and residents? **No with each other if both on a 3-person committee and discussing an issue pertaining to that committee, but otherwise yes**
6. On their own time? **Yes to study issues, get public input**

How are Government Board Meetings Conducted?

Who is at the Table?

1. Board President and other Board Members
2. Top Administrator
3. Sometimes other Administrative Staff

Who Speaks?

Anyone at the table can speak but board's meeting procedures govern when and how. The public also has an opportunity to speak, typically subject to limitations.

Who Votes on Action Items?

Only the Board President and other Board Members

How are Government Board Meetings Conducted?

Everything that happens at these meetings generally falls into one of three broad categories:

1. Board receives information and discusses it and sometimes gives informal direction as part of the discussion.

Information can be received from staff, outside consultants, other board members (especially with committee reports), community members.

2. Board receives public input

Different boards take input at different times in a meeting

3. Board takes actions

- No action has been taken unless a motion has been made, seconded (in some cases) and voted on
- Vote may or may not be by roll call (sometimes roll call required)
- There may or may not be discussion at the meeting prior to a vote
- Consent agenda—items voted on together, may not be discussed separately, unless pulled
- Distinguish from giving informal direction or taking pulse or consensus

It is important to know the differences among the 3 different categories!

How are Government Board Meetings Conducted?



It is important to be aware that beyond what we have already discussed, each board has its own policies for how its board meetings are to be run.

- The Village Board's rules of order are set forth in the Village Code online; D39 and D203 rules of order are also online. Some of the some of rules of order for boards are not online but are available in administrative offices.
- All of our government boards incorporate, at least to some extent, some version of Robert's Rules of Order in their procedural rules, though they vary in their formality.

NOTE: Beyond meetings, local government entities are also subject to myriad federal, state and local laws, in some cases only to some of the government bodies, in some cases to all. Just a few examples beyond what we have already mentioned:

- Freedom of Information Act--federal law, applicable to all
- Village Code applicable to all, but some provisions only to Village and VB
- IL Park District Code, IL Public Library District Act, IL School Code, IL Township Code, each applicable as its name indicates.

Another Quiz! Government Board Meetings

1. That meeting was just 10 minutes! Did nothing happen?
2. That meeting included a staff presentation on an issue, a 1 hour discussion of that issue among board members and all board members indicated agreement on how to proceed. Does that mean the board took action?
3. Lots of people spoke at that board meeting. Why didn't the board respond?

Another Quiz! Government Board Meetings

1. **That meeting was just 10 minutes! Did nothing happen?**

Not necessarily—be sure to look at the consent agenda!

2. **That meeting included a staff presentation on an issue, a 1 hour discussion of that issue among board members and all board members indicated agreement on how to proceed. Does that mean the board took action?**

Not necessarily! Was a motion made, seconded (if required) and voted on? If not, the board did not take an action or make a final decision. Government boards act by voting.

3. **Lots of people spoke at that board meeting. Why didn't the board respond?**

Boards are required to take input from the public but are not required to respond. They do not engage in debate or respond except in unusual circumstances. Committee meetings can be more informal.

Let's Look at a Quick Case Study of How An Issue Was Addressed by Different Village Boards: Stormwater

In significant rainstorms, there was stormwater from Village streets that floods onto residential property and into homes in a section of Wilmette. What government body worked on identifying reasons and potential solutions?

- A. The Village?
- B. The Park District?
- C. The State of Illinois?
- D. Cook County?
- E. None--that is up to individual homeowners to deal with?



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What processes did the Village take to decide on a solution, and what was the solution?

After hearing complaints from residents, the Village started studying the problem of overland flooding west of Ridge Rd. in 2013, with significant work done by Village engineering staff and outside consultants, and review by the Municipal Services Committee and the Village Board in many public meetings. Their work showed that the problem was a Village infrastructure problem.

In April 2018, the Village Board came to a decision on a solution: The Neighborhood Storage Project. The solution was to involve the construction of huge stormwater retention tanks in 3 Wilmette Park District Parks (Community Playfields, Hibbard and Thornwood) and storm sewers in the parks and neighboring streets.



Once the Village Board made a decision in 2018 on the Neighborhood Storage Project to solve the flooding, was that it? No!

- The solution involved Park District land so the Park Board needed to approve using their land.
- The solution also involved D39 land (mostly for construction access), so the D39 Board needed to approve using their land.
- Intergovernmental agreements and easements were signed between the Village and both the Park District and D39, after approval by their Boards in early 2020, before the Village began construction in spring 2020.
- The Village and Village Board also had ongoing work overseeing the design and implementation of the plan and how to cover the cost: Many VB voting actions were taken to implement this multi-year, multi-phase plan: e.g., approvals of construction contracts for each phase, debt issuances, stormwater fees, stormwater credits.
- The Park Board also had to sign-off on the final design for each phase.



Status of the Neighborhood Storage Project as of December 2022

- Phases I and IA took place in and around CPF in 2019-20 and is complete.
 - The Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA) with the Park District called for the Village to fund some improvements to CPF. After much discussion at Park Board and Park Board committee meetings, and much community input, the Park Board voted on a fitness path and restroom to be installed at CPF under the IGA. The fitness path was installed in fall 2021, and construction took place in 2022 on the restroom, with it due to open spring 2023.
- Phase II took place in and around Hibbard Park in 2021 and is complete.
- Phase II, taking place in and around Thornwood Park, started spring 2022 and is 98% complete as of December 2022.



Neighborhood Storage Project: Expected Results

- The Village has called the project the largest infrastructure project in Village history.
- Estimated final cost: \$55 M (construction), \$64.1M (with engineering and Park District amenities).
- In a 10-year storm, the project is expected to:
 - Reduce depth of street flooding by 2 ft. in hardest hit areas.
 - Provide protection for 98% of homes identified as at-risk.
 - Decrease pressure in storm sewer system, which reduces inflow into the sanitary sewer system.

