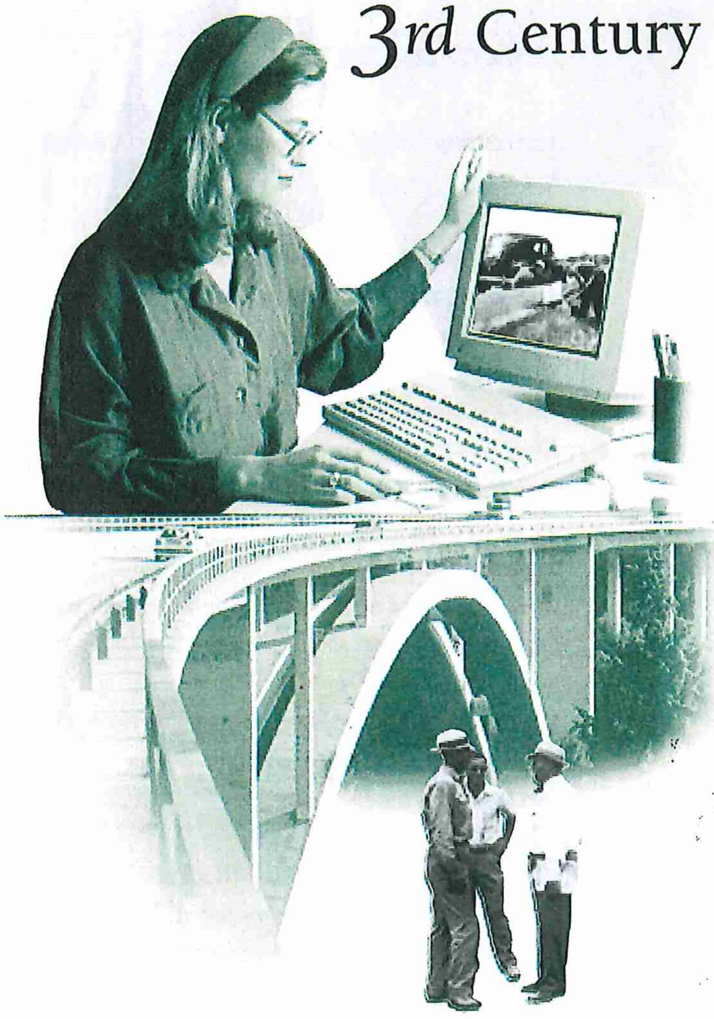
A County Courthouse Exploration

OHIO COUNTY GOVERNMENT

REINVENTING Public Service for Ohio's 3rd Century



COUNTY COMMISSIONERS ASSOCIATION OF OHIO

About the County Commissioners Association of Ohio

The County Commissioners Association of Ohio (CCAO) is the oldest organization of its kind in the United States. Organized in 1880, CCAO today works to anticipate the rapidly-changing and complex challenges facing Ohio's 88 units of county government. Association staff provides Commissioners with timely technical support and services, monitors legislation in the General Assembly, and works with state agencies in helping shape public policy.

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REINVENTING Public Service for Ohio's 3rd Century

Ohioans are turning to their County Commissioners and other elected county officials to make government work better.

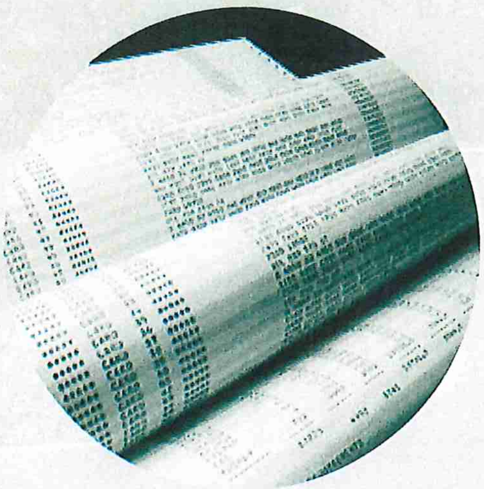
When it comes to protecting children, making welfare reform work, or growing jobs — matters once the jurisdictions of state and federal government — county government now shoulders those tasks. When the issues are domestic violence, collecting child support, or making public assistance work — considerations that didn't really pertain to county officials in years past — county government has become the ***can do*** mechanism for getting those jobs done.

The reasons for this shift from Washington, D.C., and Columbus to Ohio's 88 county courthouses are many, and generally political. Yet, regardless of party affiliation or partisan viewpoint, Ohio, and for that matter much of America, is turning to county government to do a better job. As a result, ***Ohio county government is reinventing what public service means to communities today, and what Ohioans can expect from it in the future.***

On The Front Lines of Change

As Ohio enters its third century as a state, its County Commissioners are at the center of many public policy matters that are making headlines and impacting the lives of millions of people. This is the work of County Commissioners in addition to their "routine" responsibilities of managing multi-million-dollar public budgets and responding to the daily health, safety and economic needs of local residents.

Policy matters in which County Commissioners are involved include:



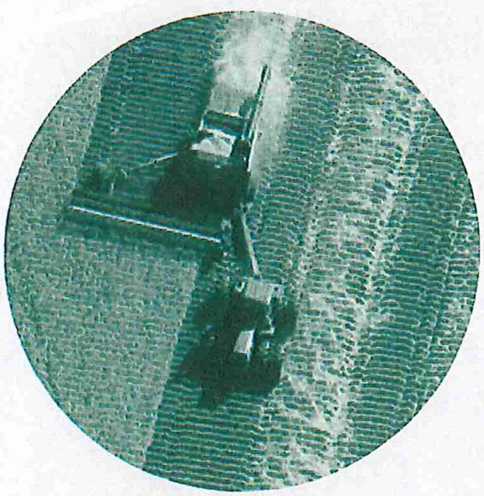
Protecting More Children Than Ever Before

Ever-increasing numbers of abused and neglected children are coming to the attention of most county children's services agencies, and there is little sign of that rise leveling off in the future.

As families come apart, counties are left to pick up the pieces, while making sure that children are protected. All of this is having a monumental impact on county budgets, which are straining to provide for foster homes, substance abuse counseling, daycare and a variety of other efforts to stabilize the lives of families.

Making Welfare Reform Work

Since welfare's inception, state and federal governments had lead jurisdiction for cash assistance and other benefits to low-income families. With welfare reform, that job now is county government's. Mandated performance targets, as well as sanctions, hinge on counties' ability to find jobs for unemployed residents, and provide them with training and skill building. County Commissioners are very much on the spot when it comes to making welfare reform work.



Farmland Preservation and Urban Sprawl

County Commissioners are working to balance residential and commercial development while also protecting Ohio's important agricultural resources. That means supporting the judicious preservation of farmland, and discouraging urban sprawl. Because agriculture is such a large part of state and county economies, striking this balance in land use is critical.

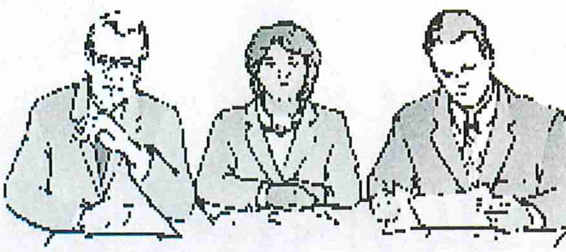
TODAY'S COUNTY COMMISSIONERS... NOT WHAT YOUR PARENTS REMEMBER

Ohioans accustomed to the work of county government a generation or two ago might not recognize their County Commissioners today.

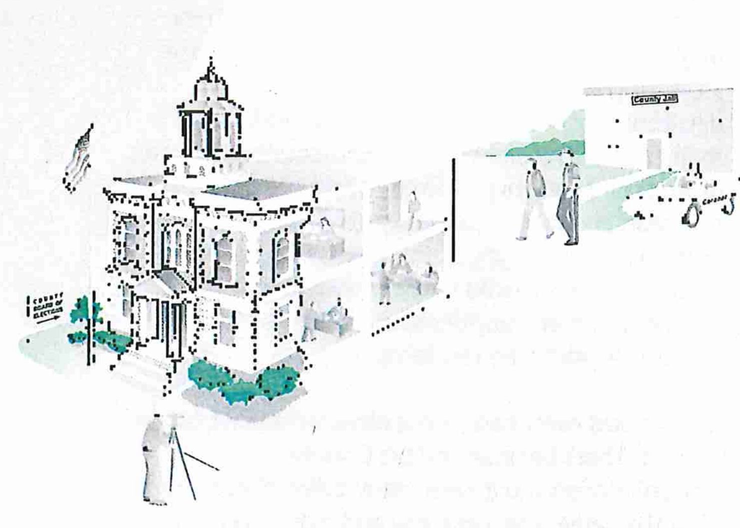
At times, they might mistake County Commissioners for corporate CEOs, because of their responsibilities for managing multi-million dollar budgets, local economic development and tax abatement. They might see them as education planners, given their increasing involvement in local workforce development and job-readiness programs. Some might confuse them with environmental technicians, given their legal obligations nowadays to control pollution and manage solid waste. Or County Commissioners might, at times, resemble human services leaders, thanks to the mandate that welfare reform places on counties to educate, train and find jobs for unemployed residents.

In each and every case, these observations would be correct. That's because today's County Commissioners must wear many different hats, often all at the same time, each day and many evenings, 52 weeks a year.

Overseeing the maintenance of county highways is one of the original responsibilities of Ohio's County Commissioners.



WHO ARE THESE PEOPLE, AND WHAT DO THEY DO?



County Commissioners

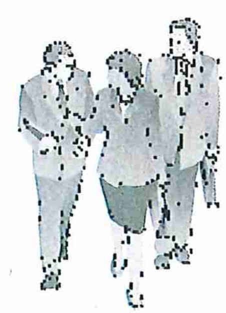
A board of three County Commissioners serves as the general administrative body for 87 of 88 Ohio counties; the exception is Summit County with its charter form of government. County Commissioners are elected to office like other county officials, such as the Sheriff, Engineer and Auditor. However, they are seen as the leaders of county government, and their authority goes a long way toward supporting that viewpoint.

Given specific and limited authority by the state legislature, County Commissioners hold title to all county property, serve as the sole taxing authority for the county, and control county purchasing. Most importantly, Ohio's 87 Boards of County Commissioners are the budget and appropriating authority for county government, meaning everyone — every agency, every court, every other elected office holder — depends on County Commissioners for their budgets.

This means that County Commissioners must take a broad view when making public policy and budget decisions. Given their impact on the work of many other elected officials and different departments, they must be astute in matters of law enforcement, correction facilities, human services, business development, and other areas. Given their budget-making authority, they must have a good business sense —matching available revenue to service needs.

County Commissioners also have statutory authority for providing water and sewer services as well as solid waste (trash) disposal. They hold hearings and rule on annexations. And, as noted earlier, County Commissioners today are being given responsibilities, such as making public assistance work, that were once held by the state and federal government.

In addition to three Commissioners, residents of 87 out of Ohio's 88 counties elect eight other officials to four-year terms to fulfill specific duties within county government: Auditor, Treasurer, Recorder, Engineer, Prosecuting Attorney, Sheriff, Coroner and Clerk of Courts. Voters also elect judges to county Common Pleas and Municipal Courts. More heavily populated counties have more judges than smaller population centers. What follows is a brief description of the duties of those elected officials, as well as an overview of the court system in Ohio's counties.

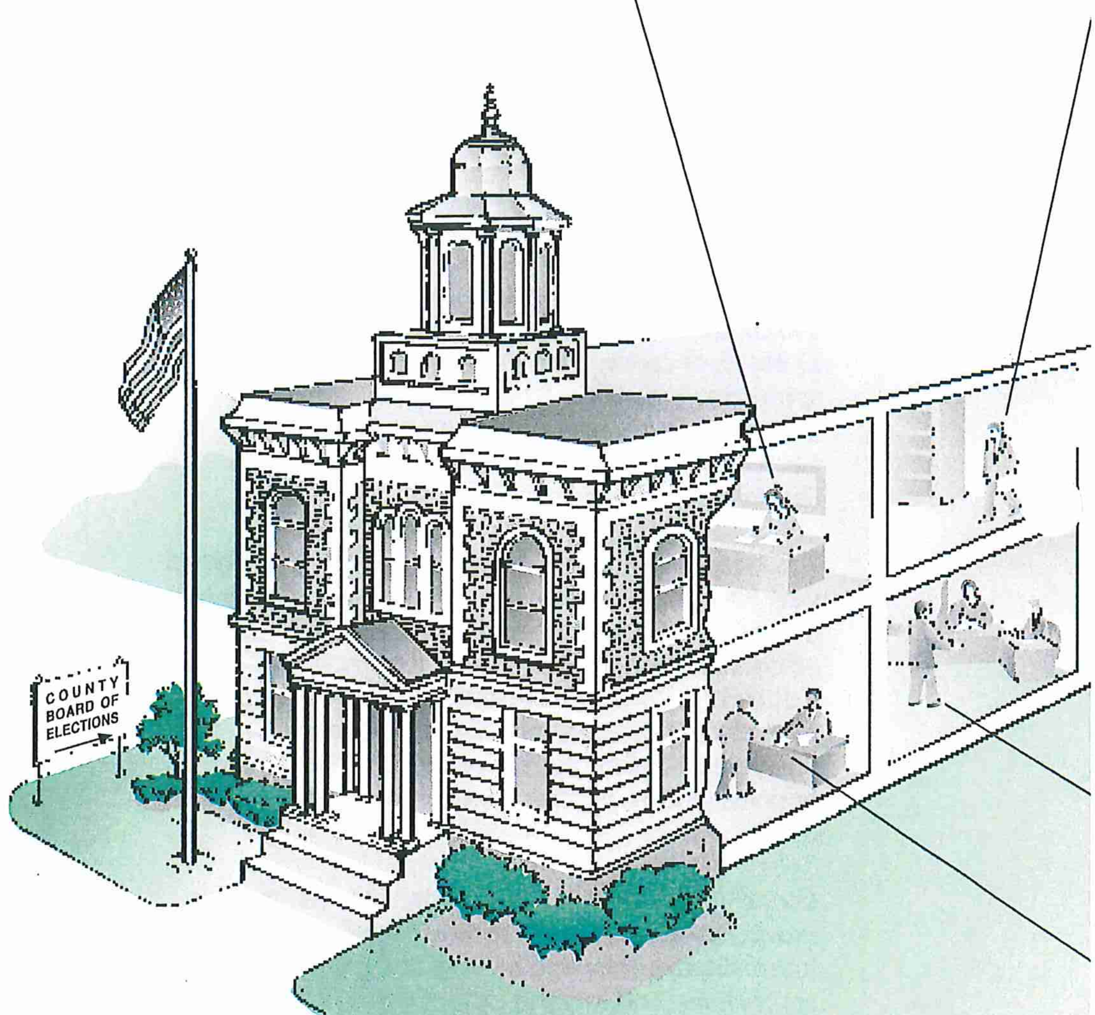


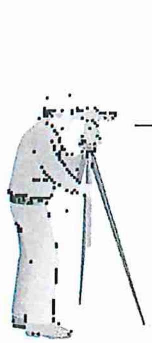
COUNTY GOVERNMENT

Treasurer

The Treasurer pays the county's bills and has custody of all of the county's revenue and assets. The Treasurer's banking function includes serving as the county's chief investment officer. Under strict legal guidelines, the Treasurer invests unspent revenue in interest-bearing commercial funds that generate added revenue for the county.

Real and personal property taxes are collected by the Treasurer, in addition to estate taxes and taxes on manufactured homes. The Treasurer collects delinquent taxes.





Engineer

Drive nearly anywhere and the work of the Engineer is there to see. As the county's surveyor and civil engineer, the Engineer designs, constructs and maintains the county road system, including county bridges, guardrails, traffic signals, and signs. The Engineer also works with township trustees in maintaining township roads.

Funded primarily through state motor vehicle license fees and gasoline taxes, the Engineer's office maintains the Auditor's tax maps used for reviewing deeds, land transfers, and lot splits. The Engineer spends a lot of time on drainage improvement projects, or ditches, and in some counties serves as sanitary engineer.

Auditor

Most people know the Auditor as the county official who calculates their property tax bills and reappraises the value of real property (land and improvements) every six years. As the county's chief fiscal officer, the Auditor also makes sure that expenditures made anywhere in county government follow the law.

County Commissioners depend on the Auditor each year to certify an estimate of total taxes and other revenues that is then made available to the county budget for appropriations to other county officials, agencies and departments.

As the county's chief fiscal officer, the Auditor also functions as:

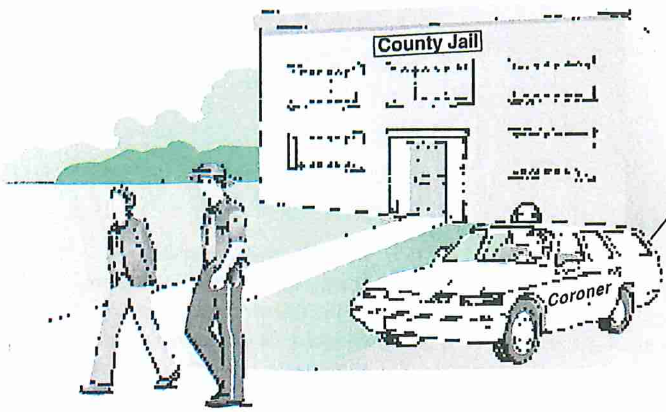
Distributor of Tax Revenues. Counties, municipalities, townships and school districts receive their shares of real and personal property taxes, motor vehicle license taxes, and inheritance taxes from the Auditor.

Recorder of Transactions. The Auditor maintains records of deed transfers, homestead exemptions, oil and gas wells, and special assessments.

Inspector and License Issuer. The Auditor inspects commercial weights and measures, such as gasoline pumps, and certifies them as accurate to protect consumers. The Auditor also issues dog licenses, vendors licenses, and cigarette sales licenses.

County Budget Commission. Composed of the Auditor, Treasurer and Prosecuting Attorney, the County Budget Commission oversees tax rates established by other political subdivisions within the county.

Board of Revision. This board, composed of the Auditor, Treasurer and one County Commissioner, hears appeals from property owners challenging their real property taxes.



Coroner

A licensed physician, the Coroner has broad authority to investigate causes of death resulting from crimes or violent acts, suicide, or any death of a suspicious nature. In fatal automobile crashes, the Coroner determines the blood alcohol content of those who die.

The Coroner works closely with law enforcement agencies and the Prosecuting Attorney in preparing cases for trial. The Coroner performs autopsies and toxicology tests, and testifies as an expert witness in court on causes of death. In large counties, Coroners operate morgues.

Sheriff

The Sheriff is the county's chief law enforcement officer, and is responsible for investigating crimes, as well as enforcing traffic and drunk driving laws. The Sheriff enforces all court orders, delivers subpoenas, and attends court sessions. The Sheriff also is administrator of county jail facilities — an expensive and rapidly-growing area of responsibility. The Sheriff has concurrent authority with municipal and township police in those political subdivisions, as well as authority on state highways. Small cities, villages and some townships contract with the county Sheriff's office for police protection.

Court of Common Pleas

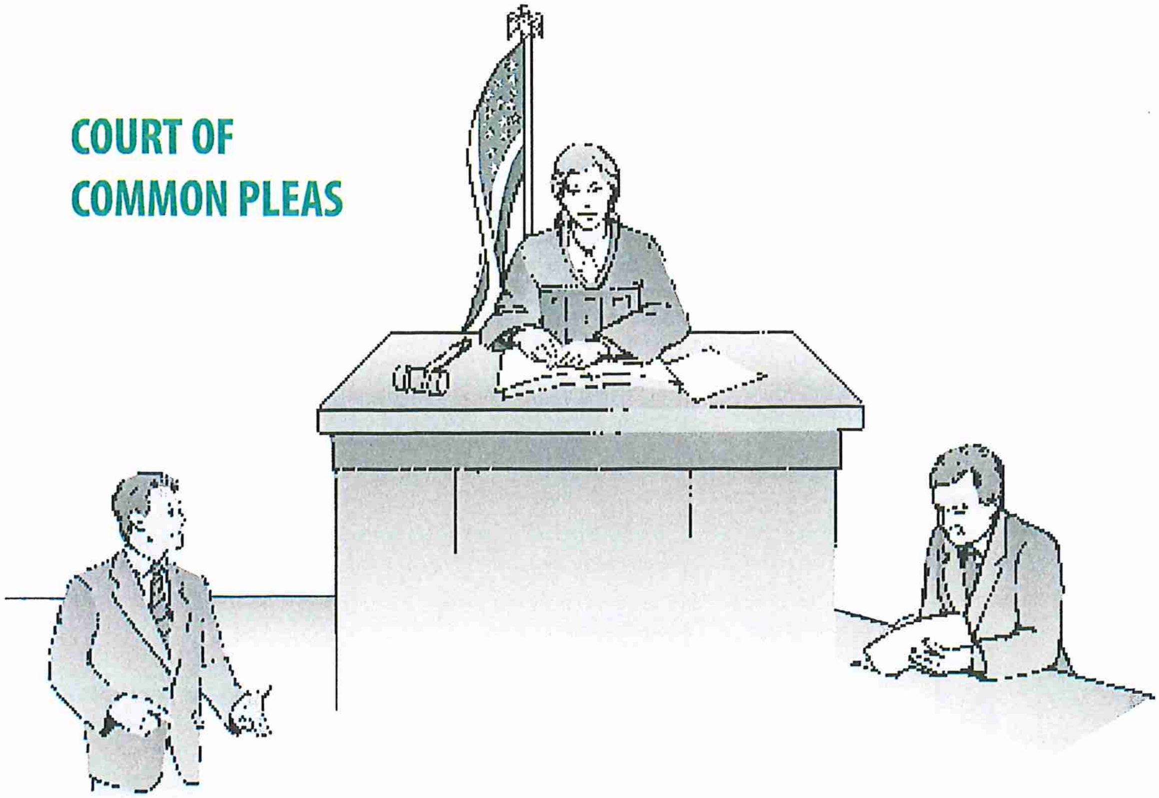
See following page for detailed description of the Court of Common Pleas, Prosecuting Attorney and Clerk of Courts.

Recorder

The Recorder is the county's official record keeper and is responsible for protecting a variety of legal documents, most of which relate to real estate transactions, including deeds, mortgages and liens. All subdivision plats are filed with the Recorder's office.

County Commissioners serve jurisdictions in Ohio that range in population from 11,000 to 1.4 million residents.

COURT OF COMMON PLEAS



Prosecuting Attorney

The Prosecuting Attorney is the county's chief criminal and civil representative in court, and prosecutes criminals in the name of the state. The Prosecuting Attorney is legal advisor to all county officials and county boards. The Prosecuting Attorney is responsible for all cases relating to juveniles, including child neglect and abuse, juvenile crime, and traffic violations.

The Prosecuting Attorney is increasingly involved in child support cases, and enforcing child support orders under contracts with county child support enforcement agencies.

The Courts

The judges who serve in the Courts of Common Pleas are elected county office holders, just like County Commissioners, Auditors, and Engineers. Courts are so large a part of county government that their budgets, when combined with the funding of Sheriffs' departments, account for more than half of all county government expenditures.

All Common Pleas Court judges are elected to six-year terms. However, not all judges serve their individual counties in the same capacity. Most counties have established divisions within the court that specialize in specific kinds of cases. Counties with higher populations tend to have more divisions, while smaller counties often combine divisions and dockets. Major Common Pleas Court divisions include:

General Division. The most common division, this court has original jurisdiction over adult criminal felony cases and civil actions. It rules on appeals from most county agencies.

Probate Division. Probate Courts supervise the probate of wills and the administration of estates and guardianships. They also have jurisdiction over marriage licenses, adoption proceedings, determination of sanity or mental competency, and certain eminent domain proceedings.

Domestic Relations Division.
The Domestic Relations Court has jurisdiction over cases involving divorce or dissolution of marriages, annulments, legal separations, spousal support, and allocation of parental rights and responsibilities.

Juvenile Division. Often a branch of Probate Courts, Juvenile Courts have jurisdiction over all cases involving juveniles, including juveniles found to be delinquent, unruly, abused or neglected. Jurisdiction includes child abuse and cases of non-support, paternity, and contributing to the delinquency of a minor.

County Courts and Municipal Courts
There are nearly 50 County Courts and more than 100 county- and city-operated Municipal Courts in Ohio. Their jurisdictions usually involve small claims, evictions, and violations of state law and municipal ordinances, such as traffic violations. Municipal Courts generally exist in counties with larger cities. County Courts exist in areas not served by Municipal Courts. Judges in both courts are elected to six-year terms.

BOARD OF ELECTIONS

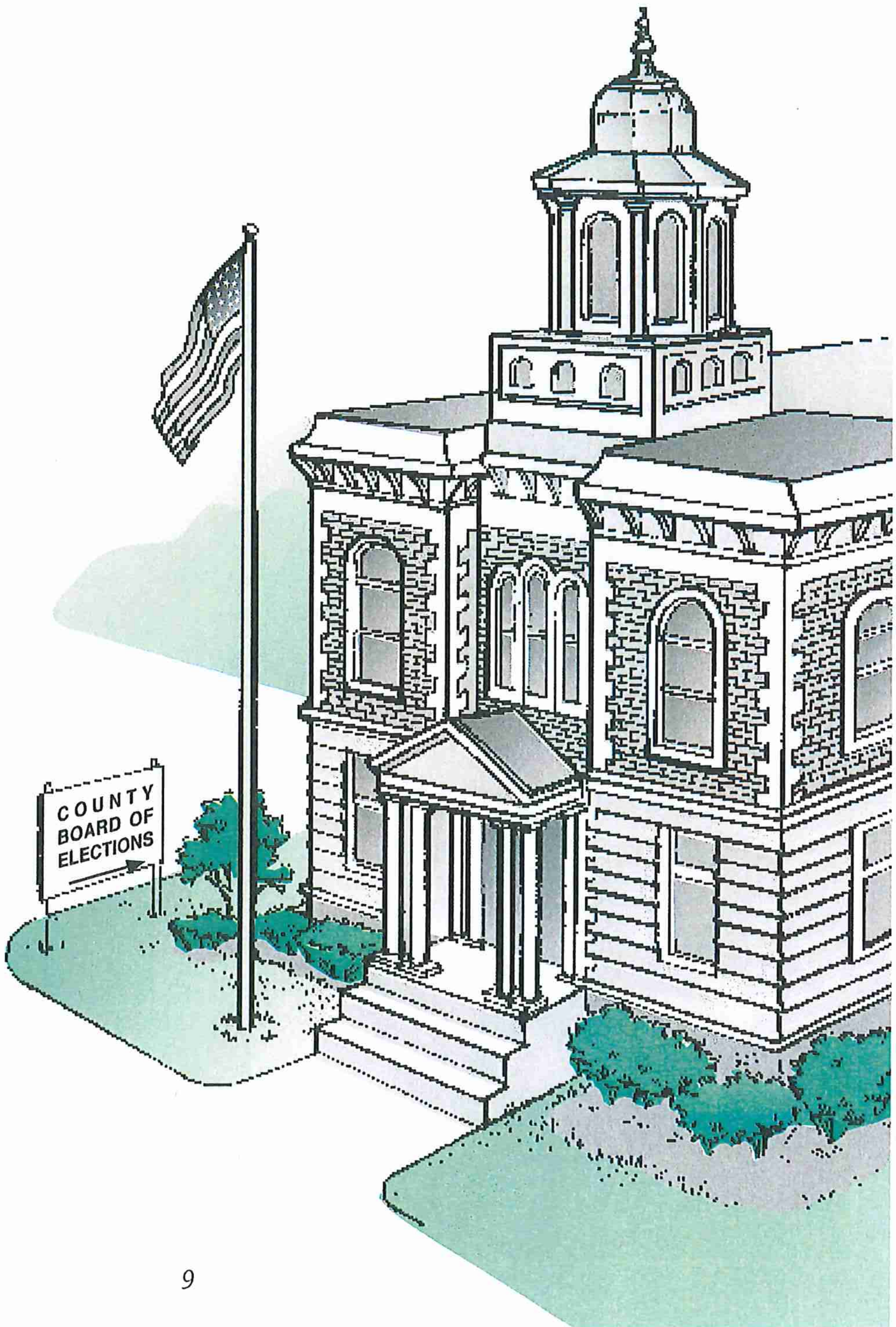
The county Board of Elections runs local and state primaries and general elections. As part of that job, the Board also is responsible for registering voters, printing ballots, approving the validity of petitions and nomination forms, determining the residency of voters, investigating fraud, and maintaining a voter registration list.

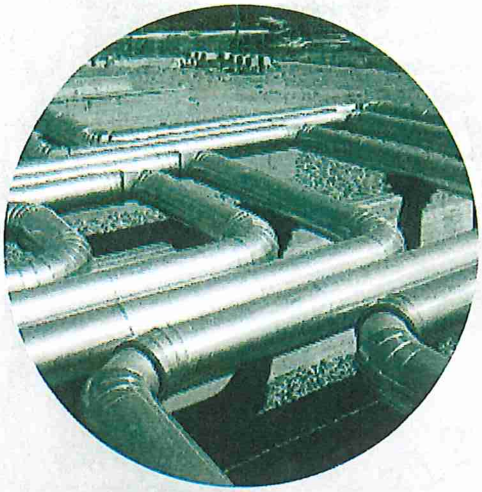
Each county Board of Elections is composed of two Republicans and two Democrats who are appointed by Ohio's chief elections official, the Secretary of State. The Secretary of State settles deadlocks by county boards.

Clerk of Courts

Anyone who has been summoned for jury duty or has received a subpoena is familiar with the functions of the Clerk of Courts. So are owners of automobiles and watercraft when they apply for ownership titles. These are two of the more visible functions of a county elected official whose primary job is to keep accurate records of all proceedings in the county Common Pleas Court. The Clerk of Courts performs similar duties for the Court of Appeals.

In addition to court duties, which include collecting fines and court costs, the Clerk of Courts collects sales tax on automobiles. In some counties, the Clerk of Courts also issues passports and serves as the clerk for county and municipal courts.





Like individuals managing their personal finances, county government also must be extremely responsible with the public's money. Yet, unlike the private sector, County Commissioners always must operate within balanced budgets, where expenditures never go higher than revenues. While county residents can use credit cards when finances get tight, counties are required by law to pay as they go. *This is also what separates county finances from federal budget making.*

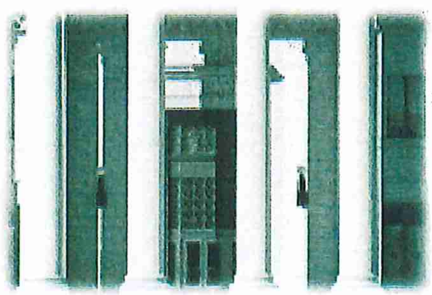
Making this entire job tougher, counties have limited discretion with the revenue they have to spend. Many funding categories are dedicated to specific purposes. In addition, County Commissioners are responsible for the tax revenues that fund the offices of other county officials and programs, many of which are not under the Commissioners' direct management.

REVENUES & BUDGETS: HOW TAXES ARE COLLECTED AND SPENT ON YOUR BEHALF

A very small percentage of all revenue that is collected by county government is available to County Commissioners to spend as they please for public purposes. Federal and state mandates dictate how County Commissioners budget the overwhelming portion of county revenues. This makes for some very hard decision making by County Commissioners when it comes to discretionary spending, because public needs almost always outdistance available revenue.

Special Purpose Funds vs. General Purpose Funds

As the county's taxing authority, County Commissioners are responsible for placing county-based property taxes on the ballot for voter approval, and they must apportion collected taxes to several county boards and agencies outside of their control. These are called Special Purpose Funds, and they exist for children services boards, mental health and mental retardation boards, hospitals, libraries, and senior citizens' agencies. So, when people discuss "the library levy" or "the mental health levy," they really are referring to a request by the County Commissioners that voters approve special purpose property taxes dedicated to specific programs. A special purpose fund even exists for a county's share of state gasoline taxes — it's money that must be used for local roads and bridges.



General purpose funds available to Ohio's county budgets range from less than $3 million to more than $260 million.

General Purpose Funds are used for the general governmental activities of county government. These funds pay for salaries, supplies, contract services, and equipment repair. They also pay for the county court system, county law enforcement and jails. The county sales tax, user fees and interest earnings are important sources of general purpose funds.

SALES TAX

Ohioans pay this tax everyday on nearly all retail products and on many services. All 88 counties add their own sales tax to the 5% sales tax the state of Ohio keeps for itself. Counties can add sales tax in 1/4% intervals — up to 1-1/2%. Sales taxes are very important to most counties, because the revenue they generate usually constitutes the largest discretionary source of revenue to fund county government.

Most items sold in department stores and other retail outlets — everything from radios and shoes to garden tools to clothes — include sales tax. The most important exemption to sales taxes is food that is consumed anyplace other than where it is purchased. That means groceries taken home are not taxed, but food eaten at restaurants is taxed.

Real Property Transfer Tax

Counties levy a tax on the transfer of property after its sale. By state law, the minimum tax is $1 for every $1,000 in value of the property being transferred in ownership. Counties are permitted to add up to $3 of additional fees on the value of real property when it is sold.

REAL PROPERTY TAX

School districts receive about 65% of all real property (land and buildings) taxes collected by the county. The majority of real property taxes must be approved by voters, usually for specific purposes such as public schools, children services, mental health, mental retardation, senior services, and nursing homes.

So what is millage? It is how property taxes are measured in size. One mill equals \$1 in taxes for every \$1,000 in taxable value of property. Taxes increase as a community's voted millage goes up. For instance, a 40-mill tax rate for a house with a taxable value of \$35,000 yields \$1,400 in taxes annually (40 x 35 = 1,400). If the voted millage goes up, so do the property taxes. But that same house sold on the open market for \$100,000, not \$35,000, you say? This is not a mistake. For tax calculations, taxable value of real property is defined by state law as 35% of market value. To figure out your real property tax bill, take the market value of your home, multiply it by 35% (.35), and then multiply that figure by the millage in your community.

Under Ohio law, property taxes can rise only when voters approve levies that raise millage. Property taxes cannot increase simply because the market value of the property increases over time. State law dictates that as property values increase, millage rates are *rolled-back* so that the same amount of taxes is collected for a given millage.

Tax relief from state government also is built into Ohio's real property tax laws. For instance, the state pays 10% of all real property taxes that are levied. That means if your real property tax is \$10, the state of Ohio pays the first \$1 for you. If you occupy that property, the state pays the first \$1.25 of that \$10 real property tax bill. If you occupy that property, are age 65 or older and have a low-income, the state will pay an even larger share of that \$10 real property tax bill. Finally, landowners who use their property exclusively for agricultural purposes qualify for a special real property tax reduction.

Motor Vehicle License Tax

All motor vehicle owners pay an annual registration fee (for license plates or tags). The state sends most of these license fees to counties and municipalities based on where motorists live. Townships receive some of these fees based on township road mileage. Counties are permitted to add to this tax with a surcharge of their own, most of which they may keep. Just less than half of Ohio counties levy this surtax. By law, all motor vehicle license tax revenues must be used for road purposes.

Motor Vehicle Fuel Tax

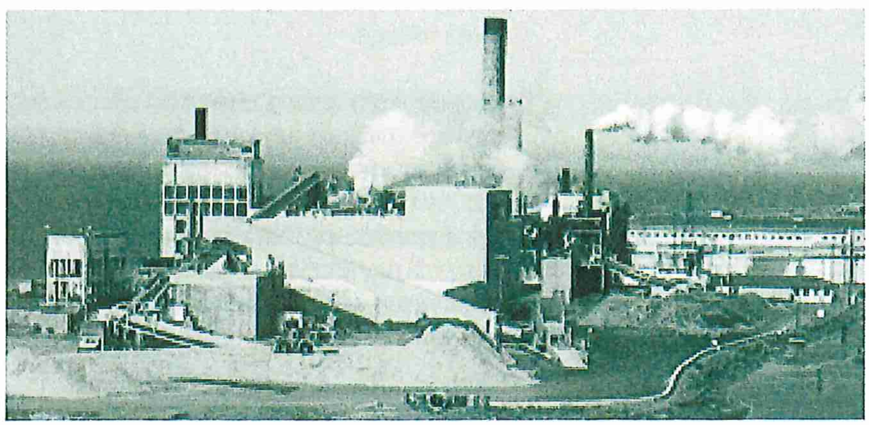
State government taxes every gallon of gasoline and diesel fuel pumped in Ohio, and all of these funds must be used for roads. The state keeps 75% of motor vehicle fuel taxes, and divides the remaining 25% among counties, municipalities and townships. Each county receives an equal share of the fuel tax. For that reason, fuel taxes make up a bigger share of needed funds for rural counties than for urban and suburban counties.

TANGIBLE PERSONAL PROPERTY TAX

While real property taxes are taxes on land and buildings, tangible personal property taxes are taxes levied on machinery, equipment, and inventories owned by businesses. Business and industry directly pay tangible personal property taxes. Individual Ohioans do not. There is a lot of business equipment and inventory in Ohio, so the tangible personal property tax is a significant source of revenue. School districts receive about 70% of all tangible personal property taxes collected; counties receive 19%; and municipalities and townships receive the remainder. Tangible personal property taxes are levied at a rate of 25% of market value.

Tangible personal property taxes are also the subject of frequent debate between business, which believes these taxes are an impediment to economic growth, and local government, which counts on this revenue for vital public services.

Exemptions to this tax are made for church and school property, licensed motor vehicles, aircraft, property used in agriculture, insurance companies, and financial institutions.



Lodging Tax

This tax is levied by counties, as well as by townships and municipalities, on fees overnight guests pay at most motels and lodges. More than 50 counties levy lodging taxes, most at a rate of 3%. Rates can go as high as 6%. In a majority of cases, County Commissioners earmark more than 90% of lodging tax revenues for local convention and visitors' bureaus, which use that money to attract business conventions and promote tourism.

Manufactured Home Tax

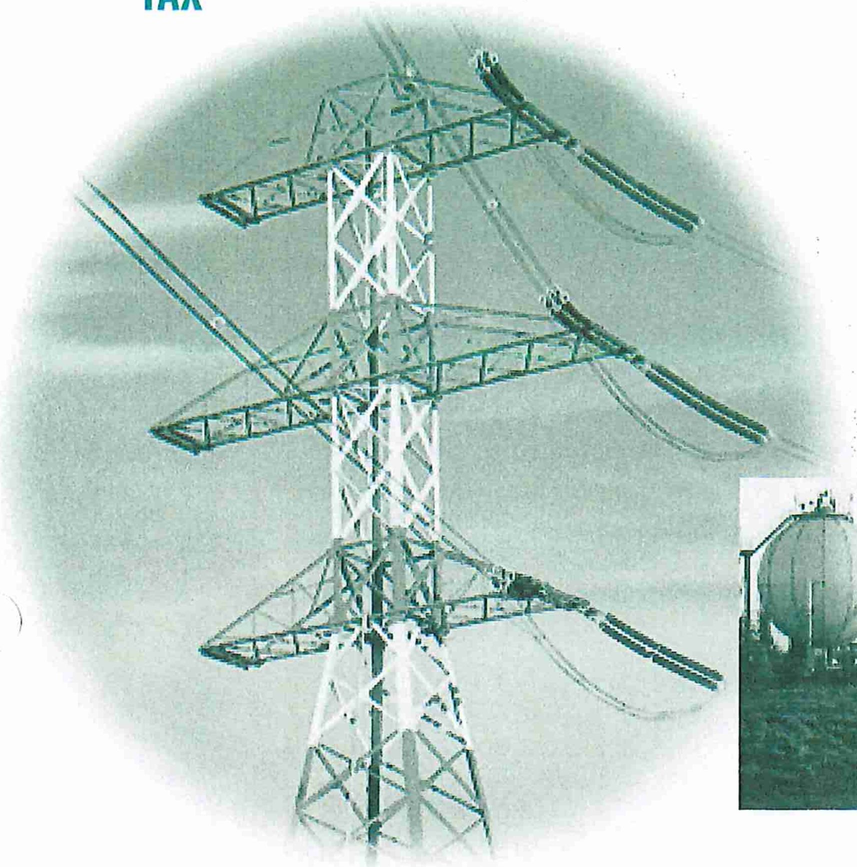
While not a major source of revenue for counties, the manufactured home tax is levied on the owners of mobile homes and similar structures. It is levied in lieu of real property taxes that residents of manufactured housing normally do not pay.

Local Government Funds

Ohio law requires small percentages of existing state taxes to be set aside and deposited into central accounts that are divided among local governments. These are called Local Government Funds, and they are important sources of revenue for counties. State law requires that slightly less than 5% of the state sales tax, personal income tax and corporate franchise tax be deposited into Local Government Funds. These funds are distributed primarily to counties, municipalities and townships. Law also requires that 5.7% of state personal income tax collections be deposited into the Library and Local Government Support funds — money which is then distributed primarily to libraries.

PUBLIC UTILITY PROPERTY TAX

The public utility property tax is levied on electric, telephone, natural gas, railroad, pipeline, rural electric, and waterworks companies. It is levied on both the land and buildings a utility company owns (real property) and its equipment (tangible property). Counties, townships, municipalities, and school districts share public utility property taxes. Municipally-owned utilities, as well as construction and pollution equipment, are exempt.



Investment Income, Fees and Grants

Just like many individuals, county government invests revenue that is not being used to pay bills in interest-bearing funds. The County Investment Advisory Committee, composed of two County Commissioners and the Treasurer, establishes investment policy. Investments are managed by the Treasurer.

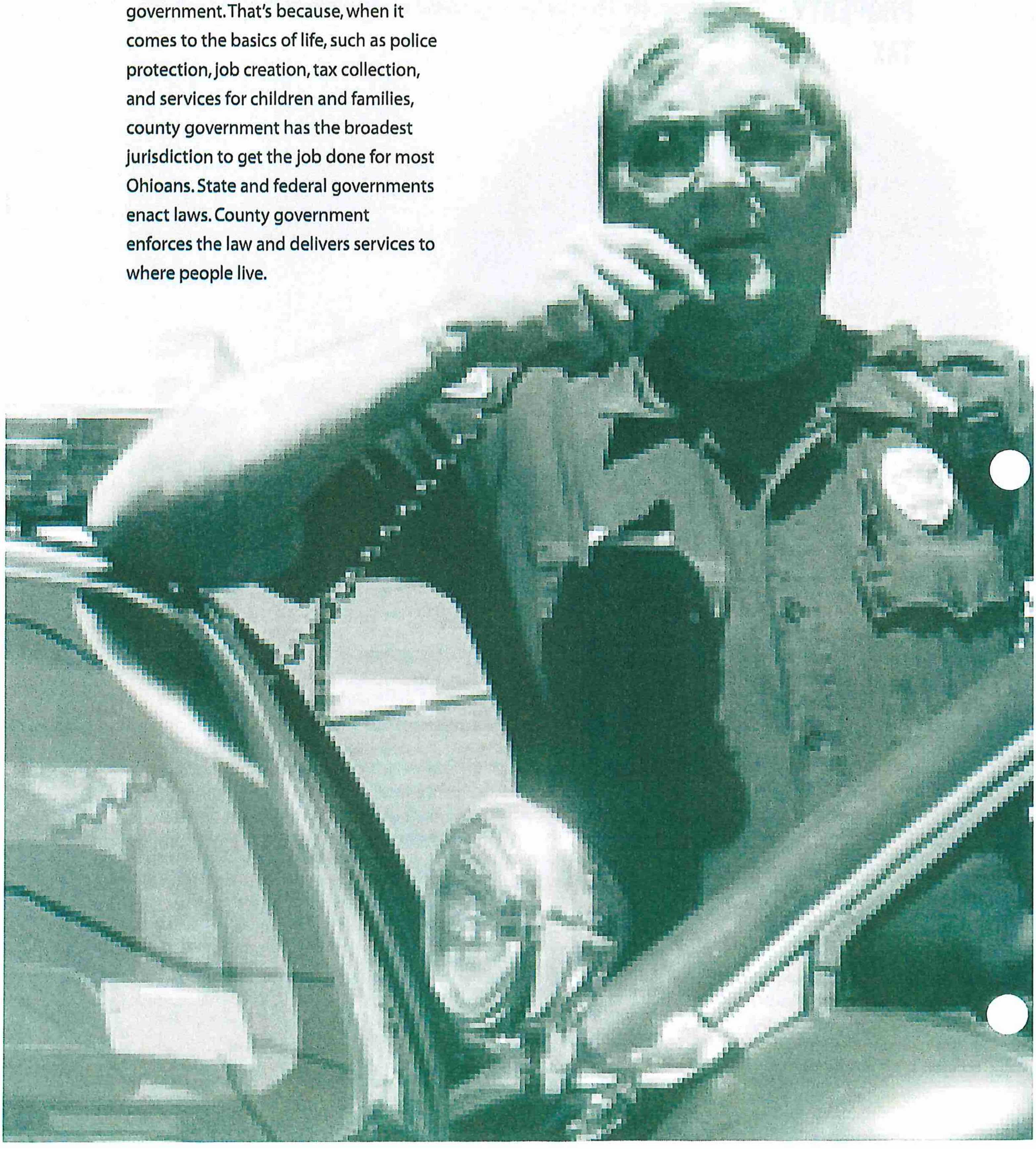
Investment income supplements tax revenues, which in turn helps provide additional services. To reduce risk, state law places strict controls on how counties can invest funds.

Fees and licenses. Revenue from fees and licenses are comparatively small, but important, sources of revenue for counties. Fees are charged for services such as issuing zoning and building permits, issuing automobile titles, and recording documents. Many different licenses are sold as well; they include dog, vendor, cigarette, and exhibitor licenses.

Fines and court costs. Fines and court costs are frequently collected from criminal and traffic offenders, yet provide a minimal amount of revenue to county government. These funds help subsidize county criminal justice services, county law libraries, and road and bridge maintenance.

State and federal grants. The grant picture is both broad and constantly changing, yet often important to counties. Grants usually are dedicated to certain areas of need, such as housing, development, human services, law enforcement, roads and bridges, water and sewer systems. One of the most significant federal grants to counties is the Community Development Block Grant.

County government touches the lives of more Ohioans than any other unit of government. That's because, when it comes to the basics of life, such as police protection, job creation, tax collection, and services for children and families, county government has the broadest jurisdiction to get the job done for most Ohioans. State and federal governments enact laws. County government enforces the law and delivers services to where people live.



NEW REALITIES ABOUT HOW COUNTY GOVERNMENT SERVES YOU

Law Enforcement & the Courts

Police protection and the court system are two of county government's oldest and most basic responsibilities — and its most expensive. Sheriffs' departments and county Common Pleas Courts are the biggest single budget area for every county, on average topping 55 percent of all general revenue fund expenditures.

The Sheriff. Today's Sheriffs are responsible for much more than simply catching crooks. Sheriffs must now help enforce child support orders, intervene more aggressively in domestic violence situations, help protect children, and stop drunk drivers. Sheriffs' departments also are dealing with levels of drug trafficking and juvenile crime that did not exist in the past. All of these efforts are expensive, especially when it comes to Sheriffs' other critical responsibility — running county jail facilities. Driven largely by federal and state mandates, as well as "get tough on crime" public policy in recent years, the cost of jails is skyrocketing and counties are picking up the tab.

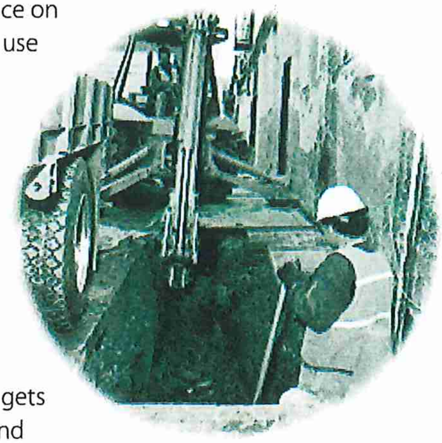
Emergency Services. County government that our grandparents remember didn't have to prepare for many of the emergencies confronting counties today. Emergency management response services must be established and ready to respond to everything from toxic waste spills, floods, and tornados to bomb threats, and even terrorism. Thanks to the efforts of County Commissioners and Sheriffs, 911 emergency telephone service is up and running in nearly all 88 counties.

The Courts. Just like Sheriffs, county Courts of Common Pleas are grappling with a greater scope and greater volume of responsibilities. For instance, as cases of child abuse and neglect have risen sharply in recent years, judges have been asked to make more determinations about whether children should be placed with foster families. Rising juvenile crime rates are helping swell court dockets and are leaving judges few alternatives to youth incarceration. Courts are facing an increasing number misdemeanor cases, as well as more divorces and dissolutions than ever before.

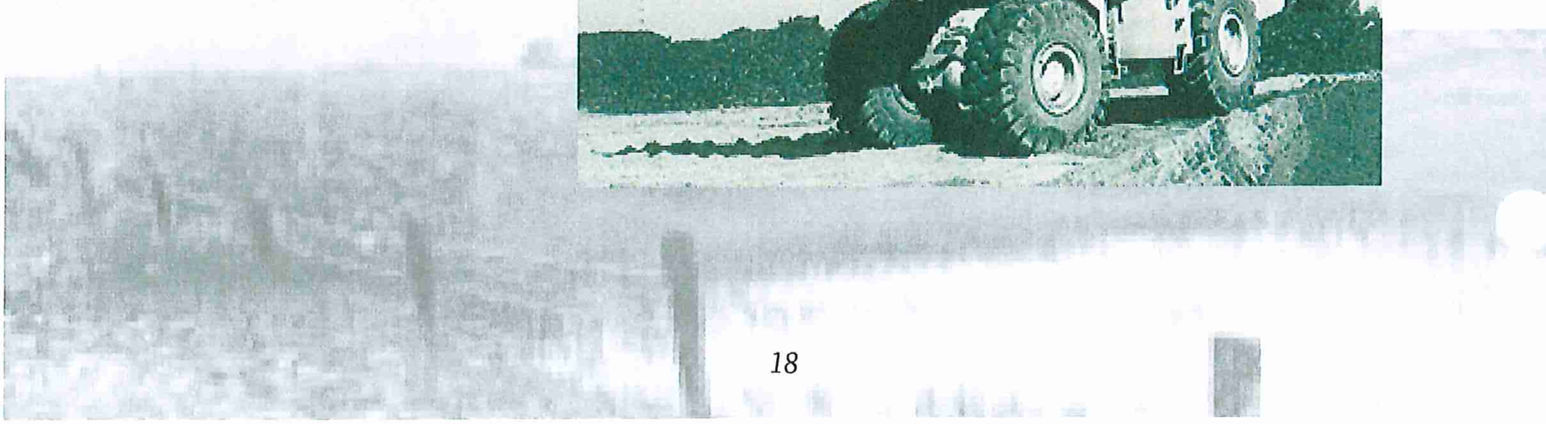
MAINTAINING ROADS, PROTECTING THE ENVIRONMENT & KEEPING WATER CLEAN

In years past, county maintenance of roads and bridges meant maintaining fewer miles of highway than exist today. Environmental management usually boiled down to running the county trash dump, and keeping water clean certainly did not involve the complex and expensive processes required today by environmental protection agencies. On all three fronts, the picture has changed dramatically.

Maintaining Roads. Ohio's 30,000 miles of county roads and highways and 27,000 county bridges are wearing out faster than county government can afford to fix them. Beyond the obvious safety threat to motorists, the implications of poor road conditions on job creation is serious. Commercial reliance on new ways of doing business, such as the use of just-in-time manufacturing, has meant an even greater dependence on county highways by the private sector.



Protecting the Environment and Managing Solid Waste. This is a responsibility that really did not exist for county government 30 years ago. Since a lot of pollution is locally-generated, counties are left with the responsibility for making sure much of it gets cleaned up. Planning for the collection and disposal of solid waste (trash) heads the list of these duties. Water quality also is a major county responsibility. Even the smallest of counties today face EPA orders to extend sewer lines and build expensive sewage treatment facilities. Counties also must respond to hazardous chemical spills, poor air quality, and the need for storm water management.



RESPONDING TO HUMAN NEED

For the most part, providing society with a safety net has become the responsibility of county government. This safety net includes public services that address mental health disorders, drug addiction, poverty, domestic violence, child abuse and neglect, child support, and mental retardation. County government is responsible for making sure local residents don't fall through holes in that net, regardless of how much help state and local government is, or isn't, providing. Among counties' other human services tasks are:

Welfare Reform. Washington, D.C., and Columbus generated the headlines about welfare reform, but County Commissioners are the ones responsible for making it work. Federal and state performance targets and sanctions hinge on the ability of counties to find jobs for unemployed residents, and provide transportation, job training, child care, and health care. Today, public assistance is no longer an entitlement. Recipients must work to receive assistance.

Child Support Enforcement. County Commissioners have bottom-line responsibility for getting the job done in this critical, yet often difficult task when parents don't live up to their responsibilities. Performance requirements connected to welfare reform have prompted county government to become even more vigorous in collecting court-ordered support, finding "dead-beat" parents and establishing paternity. County government also is overcoming years of inadequate technical capability necessary to enforce child support orders.

Senior Citizens Services. In a growing number of counties, voters have approved special purpose tax levies dedicated to providing for the well being of older residents. Many county-based senior citizens programs include assisted-living services to help older residents remain in their homes when appropriate. Nutrition programs (meals on wheels), adult daycare, visiting nurses, and transportation assistance also are among the services that county government provides to local residents.

Children and Family Services. Protecting children and stabilizing families have become the responsibility of county government, and that job is getting a lot harder. More children than ever are coming under the protection of county children services agencies. The number of new cases is staggering; most require caseworkers to sort out problems for both children and parents, prescribe treatment, and, many times, place children in foster homes. Treatment often includes alcohol and drug abuse intervention. All of this, of course, must be done with limited budgets and resources.

GROWING JOBS & ENSURING A CAPABLE WORKFORCE

It used to be enough for County Commissioners to be interested bystanders when it came to helping create jobs and supporting economic development.

No more.

Today, they must lead local efforts to attract new employers, keep existing businesses from moving away, and encourage commercial and industrial growth. They have some important tools at their disposal, such as the ability to extend water and sewer systems to undeveloped areas and provide county tax abatements as business incentives.

Together with land use planning, those measures can be time-consuming and complex. And while job creation and business growth are critical, so too is the responsibility County Commissioners have to balance economic development incentives against their impact on county and school district budgets. When is a tax abatement justified? When isn't it? County Commissioners must answer those questions.

Unlike a generation ago, counties are finding themselves carrying the ball in efforts to help employers find capable and skilled employees. It's called ***workforce development*** and it is seen today as being as much of an incentive to businesses as competitve tax rates and good transportation infrastructure. Of course, many other players are involved in local workforce development. However, county government provides a great deal of job training and skill building through its efforts to move local residents from welfare to work.

Creating an environment that leads to the creation of jobs is one of the greatest responsibilities that County Commissioners face today. That means employing traditional economic development tools, like infrastructure improvements, and moving forward on new opportunities, such as workforce development. With their partners in state and local government, and in private industry, county government is helping ensure that new jobs will be available for qualified local workers.

COUNTY GOVERNMENT DOES ALL THAT TOO?

The leaders of county government — its County Commissioners and other elected officials — as well as the services everyone depends on — police protection and road maintenance, for instance — are what touch all of our lives almost everyday. We all know there is a county sheriff, and we all know that county government maintains county roads.

But veterans services? Soil and water conservation? The county fair?

That's right. County government supports an infrastructure of services and programs that work for a wide variety of special populations and constituencies that include many of us, our neighbors, and fellow taxpayers. The following is an overview of many of those services, provided in most every Ohio county.

HEALTH AND HUMAN SERVICES

When others talk about providing a safety net to help those in need, it is county government that is holding that net for most of those who stumble. While Washington, D.C., and Columbus are the major players when it comes to debate, county government is where the ***rubber meets the road*** *for delivering those services to Ohioans.*

Department of Human Services

Central to any county's human services program is the county Department of Human Services. Some human services departments also include the county Child Support Enforcement Agency and Children's Services. In other counties, they are separate. Either way, the county Department of Human Services is chiefly responsible for assistance to low-income families with children — at one time called welfare — as well as Medicaid services, food stamps, and daycare for residents who are poor.

With enactment of welfare reform in recent years, the mission of county human services departments has shifted from simply determining eligibility and issuing checks to that of moving unemployed residents from welfare to work. Welfare reform in Ohio, called Ohio Works First, sets time limits for people receiving cash benefits, and performance targets for counties which must help recipients find jobs or receive training.

Child Support Enforcement Agency

Every county must establish a Child Support Enforcement Agency, and it is the responsibility of that agency to (1) locate parents delinquent in their child support payments, (2) establish the paternity of children when in question, (3) establish the level of financial support owed to children, and, (4) enforce collections and disburse funds to parents and children owed that money. The enforcement of child support orders has become a high priority for counties, the state, and federal government. This agency is often located in the county Department of Human Services, yet is sometimes run by another county agency.

Public Children Services Agency

The protection of abused, neglected and dependent children ultimately falls to County Commissioners, who in every county have established a Public Children Services Agency. Children services agencies are required to respond to reports of child abuse and neglect within 24 hours and take appropriate action. Agencies make recommendations to the court about whether children should be removed from their homes and placed in foster care, returned to their families, or be put up for adoption.

County children services agencies also work with families, and arrange for services, in an attempt to solve problems that contribute to abuse and neglect. Often, children services agencies are divisions of county departments of human services. In some counties, agencies are governed by separate children services boards. County tax dollars pay for the majority of local children service programs.

Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities Board

Services to residents with mental retardation and developmental disabilities are the responsibility of the county Board of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities (MR/DD). Five members of the board are appointed by County Commissioners. The remaining two members are appointed by the county's probate judge.

It is the responsibility of the MR/DD board to assess the needs of the mentally retarded and developmentally disabled, plan for services based on available resources, and evaluate those services on a regular basis. Early childhood programs and services are among the board's scope of responsibility. Once the county's MR/DD board is appointed, it essentially falls under the supervision of the Ohio Department of Mental Retardation and Developmental Disabilities.

Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services Board

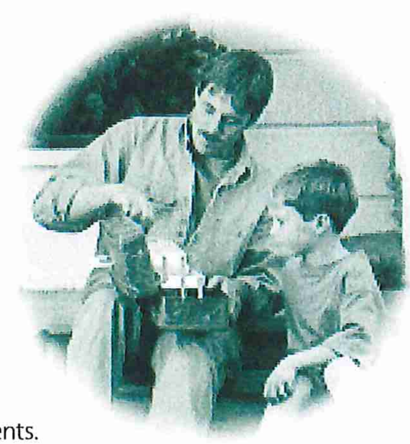
Alcohol, drug addiction, and mental health services are the responsibility of a combined Alcohol, Drug Addiction and Mental Health Services Board (ADAMH) in 81 of Ohio's 88 counties. Seven of Ohio's largest counties operate separate Community Mental Health boards and Alcohol and Drug Addiction Services boards.

Regardless of the arrangement, these boards must assess the alcohol, drug addiction, and mental health needs of communities and make plans to respond. That means contracting with public and private agencies to provide services for clients, and submit comprehensive plans to the state detailing local needs, local service responses, and funding. Major state reform of mental health and drug addiction services in 1988-1989 shifted roles in these areas between the state and counties so that county boards became managers of their own care systems. Prior to 1988, Ohio operated a system of state hospitals totally separate from local community service programs.

Family and Children First Councils

Each county has established a Family and Children First Council, which brings together a diverse group of public officials, agencies and organizations to plan how to achieve better results for local children and families. Members of the council include parents, judges, County Commissioners, nonprofit providers and Head Start grantees.

Many state-sponsored programs aimed at stabilizing families and helping young people get a good start in life are administered in collaboration with local Family and Children First Councils. Each county council receives a portion of Ohio's Wellness Block Grant for its own programming.



County Homes

Once the residence of many categories of individuals, the County Home today is residence to low-income elderly and frail residents. The County Home can operate primarily as a nursing home that is certified by Medicaid, or serve as a traditional facility, which provides rest home-type care. County Commissioners appoint a chief administrator or superintendent to run the County Home, and pay for the facility's operation with general fund or voted tax levy dollars.

Veterans Service Commission

Veterans, their families, and their survivors are provided with special assistance locally through the county-funded Veterans Service Commission. This often means helping veterans and their families obtain local, state, and federal assistance and benefits.

County government also serves veterans by appropriating funds for Memorial Day activities, the burial of veterans, and maintenance of veterans memorials.

Board of Health

Immunizations for children, prevention programs, and treatment of sexually-transmitted diseases, inspection of food service facilities, and inspection of septic systems are among the responsibilities of the Board of Health. Boards of Health receive funding through a variety of sources, including local health levies, state subsidies, and deductions from local property taxes distributed to townships and municipalities. Boards provide direct services to residents, and contract with other agencies for those services.

ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

In generations past, county government was much more of an interested bystander to local economic development. As Ohio enters its 3rd century, county government has become a catalyst for creating jobs and establishing a healthy business environment.

Planning Commission

County and Regional Planning Commissions establish land use plans and economic development goals for local communities. They help plan for future residential, commercial and industrial growth, and work to protect farmland from urban sprawl. They coordinate this work with similar plans also made by municipalities and townships.

Office of Economic Development

This office coordinates economic development activities at the discretion of County Commissioners. It works with state and local government to promote business growth and job creation.

Regional Airport Authority

County Commissioners of one or more counties may establish a regional airport authority to govern operations of local airports and airport facilities. Today's economic realities place a premium on airborne access to local communities.

Community Improvement Corporations

Counties and municipalities can create separate nonprofit corporations with special authority and tools to stimulate growth by local business and industry, and to create jobs. Community Improvement Corporations can acquire land, make loans, and acquire their own debt in the process of luring new employers and retaining existing businesses. In addition, they assist townships with zoning, and administer subdivision regulations.

Port Authorities

Port authorities govern the operation, expansion, land use, and development of all "ports" of entry to counties — water ports, airports, rail facilities and bus stations. They are separate organizations governed by a board of directors appointed by county government and other political subdivisions. They have extensive authority to own, lease, sell, and operate this property in the county's best interests.

County Fair Board

Counties operate their fairgrounds and annual county fair program through their fair boards. County fairs traditionally promote agriculture, consumer science, and youth programs.

Zoning & Subdivisions

County Commissioners may establish zoning in unincorporated areas of the county, upon voter approval. Zoning places restrictions on how land is used and developed, and governs considerations such as size of buildings and how those facilities will be used. Subdivision regulations control the design of subdivisions and make sure that adequate roads and improvements are in place for local residents.

Annexation

County Commissioners have authority to grant the requests of property owners who petition the county for the purpose of being annexed with adjoining cities or villages. Public hearings are held on such petitions.

Drainage Projects

County Commissioners have authority to hold hearings on petitions to clear and maintain drainage ditches. When these projects are approved, residents who own property in the ditch's watershed can be assessed (billed) for those costs.

Building Code and Enforcement

Requirements on how buildings are constructed and maintained in unincorporated areas come under the jurisdiction of the county's building code and enforcement powers. Building departments are established, with inspectors responsible for going into the field to inspect construction sites and other projects.

Park and Recreation Districts

Many counties fund and support the operation of county parks, both as a business incentive tool and a public benefit. Often, special park districts are established to oversee park operations.

CRIMINAL JUSTICE AND PUBLIC SAFETY

Catching criminals and operating courts remain the most important job of county criminal justice and public safety services. Today, however, a county's public safety commitment also means providing 911 emergency telephone service, disaster relief response programs, and animal control.

Dog Warden and Animal Control

Enforcing Ohio's dog laws and operating the county dog pound are the responsibilities of the Dog Warden, whose salary is paid for by dog license fees and kennel registrations.

Emergency Management Agency

Floods, tornadoes, chemical spills — and even terrorism — are among the disasters for which counties prepare to respond through their Emergency Management Agencies. Counties provide most local funds for this purpose, which includes training and mock drills for police, firefighters, and medical personnel.

911 Planning and Advisory Committees

Most counties provide 911 emergency telephone services to residents. Committees of county officials, sheriffs, other police, cities, townships, and telephone companies meet regularly to keep that service operating smoothly.

County Public Defender Commission

The right of an individual to an attorney regardless of the ability to pay is guaranteed by the U.S. Constitution. The County Public Defender Commission is funded by county government to provide attorneys for indigent clients.

Local Community Corrections Planning Boards

Composed of County Commissioners, judges, and law enforcement officials, these boards plan for the local use of alternatives to jail and prison for nonviolent offenders.

AGRICULTURAL AND NATURAL RESOURCES

Ohio's agricultural industry has long benefited from county government's role in maintaining soil and water conservation districts and participating in agricultural extension service programming. Hand-in-hand with that is county government's expanding responsibilities in protecting the environment.

Solid Waste (trash) Management

Counties today must *manage* trash, not just collect it and put it in the dump. County Commissioners now must implement state-approved solid waste plans aimed at reducing reliance on landfills, promoting recycling, and waste reduction. This planning is done through Solid Waste Management Districts, which encompass single counties or multiple counties.

Water and Sewer Districts

County Commissioners can get into the business of providing sewage disposal services and water supply systems where they are priorities. That means building and operating main and branch sewage disposal systems, water works and water service, or contracting with cities or private corporations to provide drinking water to local communities.

Soil and Water Conservation Districts

Assisting community efforts to conserve local natural resources is the main responsibility of Ohio's county-based Soil and Water Conservation Districts. Legal entities that are administered by boards of supervisors, these Districts provide technical support, surveys, and research that help local government and landowners prevent soil erosion, guard against flooding, and abate agricultural and urban pollution.

Ohio State University Extension Services

OSU Extension provides continuing education programs in agriculture and natural resources, home economics, community economic development and 4-H. These programs are county-centered and paid for with federal, state, and county funds.

INFORMATION SERVICES

The immense job of recording and processing information connected to county-based services has become an even bigger responsibility over the last generation.

Public Records Commission

A five-member group oversees the retention, maintenance, and disposal of county records, and employs an archivist, if necessary.

County Automatic Data-Processing Board

Created by County Commissioners, this board coordinates the purchase of all data-processing equipment by county agencies.

County Law Library

Funded primarily by local court fines, County Law Libraries provide legal information to judges, lawyers, and the public.

County Microfilming Board

This body oversees the purchase and use of all microfilming equipment by county agencies.

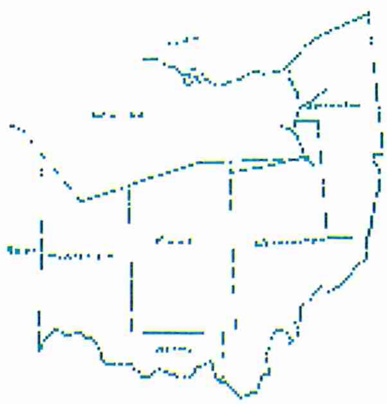
County District Public Libraries

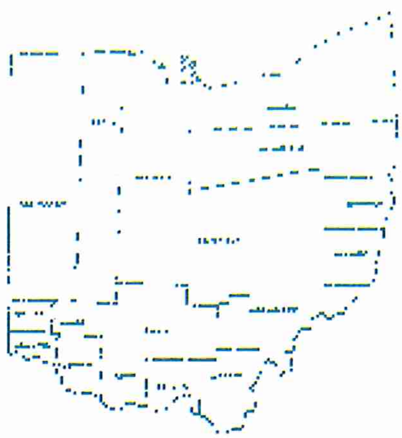
Overseen by a board of trustees, County District Public Libraries provide the resources of these facilities to the public.

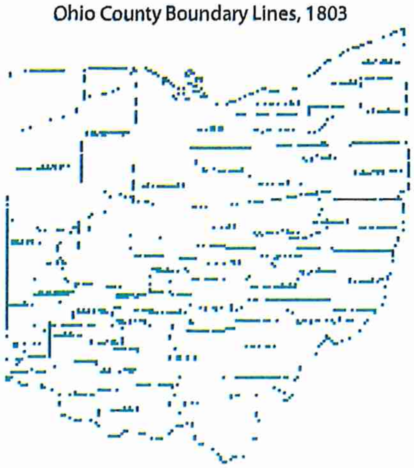
County Historical Societies

County Historical Societies preserve and disseminate archival materials concerning county history. Many operate county museums so that residents can learn about their local heritage.

The Development of Ohio Counties and County Government


Ohio County Boundary Lines, 1799


Ohio County Boundary Lines, 1803


Ohio County Boundary Lines, 1810

The origins of Ohio county government can be traced back more than 1000 years ago to England. Counties acted as agents of the King and the national government. In Colonial times and after the American Revolution, counties continued to act mostly on the behalf of state government in the areas of tax collection, road maintenance, and criminal and civil justice.

In Ohio, counties predated statehood. They emerged from the unsettled frontier as part of the Northwest Ordinance of 1787, which provided an early framework for local government. What was once known as the "Ohio country" saw its first county — Washington County — established in 1788. By 1802, nine counties existed. In 1851, Ohio's last county — Noble County — was established, and as a result, brought the number of counties to its current total of eighty-eight. Today, more than 3,000 counties are found in the 48 of 50 states where county governments exist.

When Ohio joined the nation in 1803 as its 17th state, counties became the primary subdivisions of state government. Counties still serve as administrative arms of the state, yet, the role of county government has evolved well beyond its limited, frontier responsibilities. For example, all counties are now responsible for recording deeds, transferring auto titles, and assessing the value of real property. They have discretionary authority to provide optional services to local residents, such as for water and sewer service, building inspections and landfill operations. In every governmental matter, either discretionary or mandatory, counties must always follow state law.

Today, county government is still making history. Important state and federal responsibilities, such as for environmental management, welfare reform and economic development, have been shifted to county government. It is a shift in roles and responsibilities that is likely to continue.

As Ohio has progressed over the last 200 years, it has come to rely more and more on its 88 county governments. This kind of local control over public matters has been at the center of Ohio's two centuries of success, and it remains the key for its continued growth and prosperity well into the future.

Ohio County Boundary Lines as they have existed since 1888

Ohio Counties and County Seats

County	County Seat
Adams	West Union
Allen	Lima
Ashland	Ashland
Ashtabula	Jefferson
Athens	Athens
Auglaize	Wapakoneta
Belmont	St. Clairsville
Brown	Georgetown
Butler	Hamilton
Carroll	Carrollton
Champaign	Urbana
Clark	Springfield
Clermont	Batavia
Clinton	Wilmington
Columbiana	Lisbon
Coshocton	Coshocton
Crawford	Bucyrus
Cuyahoga	Cleveland
Darke	Greenville
Defiance	Defiance
Delaware	Delaware
Erie	Sandusky
Fairfield	Lancaster
Fayette	Washington Court House
Franklin	Columbus
Fulton	Wauseon
Gallia	Gallipolis
Geauga	Chardon
Greene	Xenia
Guernsey	Cambridge
Hamilton	Cincinnati
Hancock	Findlay
Hardin	Kenton
Harrison	Cadiz
Henry	Napoleon
Highland	Hillsboro
Hocking	Logan
Holmes	Millersburg
Huron	Norwalk
Jackson	Jackson
Jefferson	Steubenville
Knox	Mount Vernon
Lake	Painesville
Lawrence	Ironton
Licking	Newark
Logan	Bellefontaine
Lorain	Elyria
Lucas	Toledo
Madison	London
Mahoning	Youngstown
Marion	Marion
Medina	Medina
Meigs	Pomeroy
Mercer	Celina
Miami	Troy
Monroe	Woodsfield
Montgomery	Dayton
Morgan	McConnelsville
Morrow	Mount Gilead
Muskingum	Zanesville
Noble	Caldwell
Ottawa	Port Clinton
Paulding	Paulding
Perry	New Lexington
Pickaway	Circleville
Pike	Waverly
Portage	Ravenna
Preble	Eaton
Putnam	Ottawa
Richland	Mansfield
Ross	Chillicothe
Sandusky	Fremont
Scioto	Portsmouth
Seneca	Tiffin
Shelby	Sidney
Stark	Canton
Summit	Akron
Trumbull	Warren
Tuscarawas	New Philadelphia
Union	Marysville
Van Wert	Van Wert
Vinton	McArthur
Warren	Lebanon
Washington	Marietta
Wayne	Wooster
Williams	Bryan
Wood	Bowling Green
Wyandot	Upper Sandusky

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