

Services Needed and Provided by Boroughs

Pennsylvania boroughs play a vital role in sustaining the quality of life for their residents. The Commonwealth's 966 boroughs are the second most common type of local government in Pennsylvania, accounting for almost 38 percent of all Pennsylvania municipalities. Municipal governments typically provide residents with important public services such as roads, sewerage and water, and public safety services such as police.

The large number of boroughs in Pennsylvania makes it important to understand the diversity of services boroughs provide and which services are most common—what boroughs do affects a large number of people. Such information will help borough officials understand what officials in other boroughs are doing, and what they might want to consider for their own borough. It will also help them anticipate how the demand for services may change in their own borough, especially with regard to population size, so that as their borough's population grows or declines they will be ready to respond.

It is also important to consider how the provision of services may have changed over the years. This information will chronicle the challenges boroughs face and how successfully they have been able to respond.

To find out which services are available in municipalities, how they are being provided, and how the situation compares with that of 15 years ago, Penn State Cooperative Extension, in cooperation with the Pennsylvania State Association of Boroughs, Pennsylvania State Association of Township Supervisors, and Pennsylvania State Association of Township Commissioners, sent two survey questionnaires to each borough and township during the spring of 1994. One questionnaire went to the municipality's secretary and the other to the chair of the board of supervisors, board of commissioners, or borough council, depending on the type of municipality. Questionnaires were mailed to 5,025 officials in a total of 2,516 municipalities.

The response rate was very good; nearly half of all borough officials (43 percent) answered the questionnaire, and responses were received from 69 percent of all Pennsylvania boroughs.

Boards, Commissions, Codes, and Officers Across All Boroughs

Boards, commissions, codes, and officers vary across boroughs (see Table 1). The most common boards and commissions are municipal planning commissions (65 percent), parks and recreation boards (61 percent), and water boards (41 percent). Very few boroughs have an environment advisory board (5 percent) or a municipal industrial development commission (13 percent).

A majority of boroughs have codes and ordinances related to land-use development. These include municipal comprehensive plans, zoning ordinances, subdivision ordinances, and building codes. A significant number of municipalities currently without these codes or ordinances reported that they need them. This number includes 25 percent of boroughs needing a building maintenance code, 17 percent needing a building code, and 11 percent needing a municipal comprehensive plan. While these percentages are not large, they represent many boroughs.

About one-third of boroughs have a full-time manager; 9 percent have a part-time manager. This means that more than half of Pennsylvania's boroughs have no manager, and the day-to-day management of borough functions likely falls directly on council members and secretary. In some cases, council members may be too busy handling day-to-day tasks to spend time making long-term decisions for the borough.

The most common personnel in boroughs are part-time engineers (66 percent), zoning officers (67 percent), sewage enforcement officers (60 percent), and building inspectors (55 percent). Almost one in five boroughs said they need building inspectors.

By Population Size

Population size is related to which boards, commissions, codes, and officers a borough has (Table 2). The percentage of boroughs having a given board or commission generally increases with population size. The percentage of boroughs with municipal planning commissions, for example, varies from 39 percent of all boroughs with populations of less than 1,000 people, up to 100 percent of boroughs with popula-

Table 1. Borough commissions, codes, and officers.

Commission, code, officer	Have	Don't have, don't need	Don't have, need	Don't know
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Boards and commissions				
Municipal planning commission	65	27	7	1
Health board	25	58	15	2
Shade tree commission	27	59	11	2.
Parks and recreation board	61	30	7	2
Municipal industrial development commission	13	75	9	4
Environment advisory board	5	77	12	6
Water board	41	52	5	2
Codes and ordinances				
Municipal comprehensive plan	64	19	12	5
Zoning ordinance	73	16	9	2
Subdivision ordinance	62	24	10	3
Building code	63	17	17	3
Building maintenance code	47	23	25	5
Personnel				
Manager (full-time)	34	58	7	2
Manager (part-time)	9	80	9	2
Engineer (full-time)	13	83	1	2
Engineer (part-time)	66	30	3	1
Building inspector	55	26	18	1
Zoning officer	67	24	6	2
Health officer	25	59	14	2
Sewage enforcement officer	60	32	6	2

tions of 10,000 or more. This suggests that many commissions and boards become more important as boroughs get larger.

The same relationship is observed regarding codes and ordinances. Larger boroughs were much more likely than smaller boroughs to report having the different codes and ordinances. About 39 percent of the smallest boroughs have municipal comprehensive plans, for example, while most boroughs with 5,000 or more people have them. The smaller boroughs generally were more likely to report not having but needing the various codes and ordinances than were their larger counterparts.

The percentage of boroughs employing different personnel also generally increases with population size. Only about 8 percent of the smallest boroughs have a full-time manager, for example, compared to 100 percent of the largest. The only

exceptions to this trend are part-time managers, part-time engineers, and sewage enforcement officers. Larger boroughs are more likely to have full-time managers and engineers, reducing their need for such part-time personnel. In addition, larger boroughs are more likely to have sewerage systems, making sewage enforcement officers less important.

SERVICES AND FACILITIES

Across All Boroughs

Available services and facilities vary across boroughs (Table 3). Most services are available in a majority of boroughs. Ambulance/rescue services (97 percent), emergency medical technicians (96 percent), trash pickup (94 percent), and athletic fields and playgrounds (89 percent) are the most commonly available.

Table 2. Borough commissions, codes, and officers, by municipal population.

Commission, code, officer	Municipal population in 1990						
	<1000	1000-2499	2500-4999	5000-9999	10,000-14,999	15,000-19,999	>20,000
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Boards and commissions							
Municipal planning commission	39*	69	87	99	100	100	100
	9	11	4	0	0	0	0
Health board	9	20	40	55	63	67	40
	14	21	8	16	0	0	0
Shade tree commission	9	31	40	49	63	33	60
	10	10	19	11	0	33	0
Parks and recreation board	45	70	75	72	75	100	67
	8	7	5	9	13	0	0
Municipal industrial development commission	6	14	19	20	25	0	40
	5	11	7	15	25	33	0
Environment advisory board	2	5	13	6	0	0	0
	8	13	9	18	43	33	20
Water board	39	42	46	43	0	33	50
	7	5	1	3	0	0	0
Codes and ordinances							
Municipal comprehensive plan	39	71	84	92	88	100	83
	16	13	6	5	13	0	17
Zoning ordinance	46	82	94	99	100	100	100
	16	9	4	0	0	0	0
Subdivision ordinance	41	66	78	90	88	100	100
	14	12	5	5	0	0	0
Building code	47	61	78	93	86	100	100
	18	24	14	4	14	0	0
Building maintenance code	23	47	68	82	75	100	100
	26	34	18	15	25	0	0

*Top row of percentages are municipalities that have the commission, code, or officer; bottom row are percentages that don't have it but need it.

(continued)

Table 2. Continued.

Commission, code, officer	Municipal population in 1990						
	<1000	1000-2499	2500-4999	5000-9999	10,000-14,999	15,000-19,999	>20,000
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Personnel							
Manager (full-time)	8*	21	59	88	88	100	100
	6	10	8	4	13	0	0
Manager (part-time)	10	10	9	4	0	0	0
	8	13	4	7	0	0	0
Engineer (full-time)	5	16	20	18	50	50	75
	0	3	1	0	0	0	0
Engineer (part-time)	52	73	80	81	75	67	50
	3	5	0	0	0	0	25
Building inspector	31	56	77	84	100	100	100
	21	22	10	11	0	0	0
Zoning officer	40	77	89	93	100	100	100
	10	6	4	1	0	0	0
Health officer	8	22	43	58	50	67	25
	13	19	9	13	0	0	0
Sewage enforcement officer	64	58	59	54	38	100	60
	6	8	5	4	0	0	20

*Top row of percentages are municipalities that have the commission, code, or officer; bottom row are percentages that don't have it but need it.

Table 3. Borough services and facilities.

	Not available			Is available, provided by:		
	Not needed	Is needed	Municipality only	Others only	Both	Don't know
Service or facility	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Community water system(s)						
Serving whole municipality	11	5	34	31	19	1
Serving part of municipality	50	6	9	23	9	3
Community sewerage system(s)						
Collector lines, mains, pumping stations	7	13	43	12	22	2
Treatment plant(s)	11	14	32	23	19	2
Community solid waste disposal						
Trash pickup	6	0	36	48	10	—
Sanitary landfill	44	3	1	46	4	3
Recycling	14	14	28	29	13	1
Incineration	68	7	1	17	1	6
Public safety						
24-hour-a-day police patrol	29	11	40	11	8	1
Less than 24-hour-a-day police patrol	31	11	39	12	7	1
Continuously staffed citizen-police communication	33	9	15	24	14	5
24-hour radio communication	16	6	20	35	20	3
Ambulance/rescue service	2	1	21	50	26	0
Emergency medical technicians	2	2	16	51	28	1
Recreation						
Community swimming pool	49	16	16	12	7	0
Athletic fields, playgrounds	5	6	52	9	28	0
Community picnic area	12	11	54	6	15	0
Parks	11	8	60	4	16	0
Youth/teen center	25	45	6	16	6	3
Senior citizen center	20	23	12	32	12	1
Library	25	10	18	28	17	1
Bookmobile	38	14	4	31	8	6

Some currently unavailable services were reported as being needed. Community sewerage systems (13 percent need collector lines, mains, and pumping stations, and another 14 percent need a treatment plant), recycling (14 percent), and a variety of recreation services were most commonly cited. Almost half of the boroughs said they need a youth/teen center but do not have one.

Many services currently available in the boroughs are being provided by nonmunicipal sources. Community water systems and solid waste disposal frequently are provided by others. Certain services, such as athletic fields, community picnic areas, and parks, are much more likely to be provided by the municipality alone than by others. The responses also indicate that partnerships between the boroughs and others are important for making many services available in many boroughs. Establishing such partnerships in other areas may be necessary for bringing needed services to boroughs.

By Population Size

Whether services or facilities are available depends in part on a borough's population size (Table 4). Larger boroughs, in general, are more likely to offer specific services than smaller boroughs. A larger population creates a greater and more diversified demand for services, requiring borough governments to respond. On the other hand, a larger population in a community makes it easier to support other groups (such as charities and other nonprofits, businesses, and intermunicipal authorities) that may help to provide those services.

Small boroughs were more likely to report needing community water and sewerage systems. About 28 percent of boroughs with populations of less than 1,000 people, for example, reported needing sewerage collection lines, mains, and pumping stations. The cost of installing a municipality-wide water system can be prohibitive, making it more difficult for boroughs to implement such a system despite the recognized need.

Smaller boroughs were also more likely than larger boroughs to report needing recycling programs. This difference is not surprising because larger municipalities are required by Pennsylvania's Municipal Waste Planning, Recycling, and Waste Reduction Act of 1988 to have a recycling plan for their community. Smaller municipalities have no such legal requirement from the state.

Notably, very few boroughs reported an unmet need for ambulance or emergency medical technicians. Only about 3 percent of boroughs with populations less than 1,000, for example, lack emergency medical technicians. This means emergency medical services are available in almost every borough in Pennsylvania.

Community picnic areas and parks are more likely to be unavailable but needed in smaller boroughs. About 17 percent of boroughs with less than 1,000 people reported needing community picnic areas, for example, and 15 percent need parks. Other services, such as community swimming pools and youth/teen centers, are more likely to be needed in the smallest or largest boroughs than in medium-sized boroughs.

Current Codes Compared with the Past

The percentage of boroughs having the different codes has changed over the years. A survey of borough officials conducted during 1981 also asked officials which codes their borough had (Norton et al., 1981). Comparing results from the two surveys shows there have been some changes over the past 14 years (see Table 5), although the changes are so small they likely are not statistically significant.

Current Services and Facilities Compared with the Past

The availability of services in boroughs has changed since 1981 (see Table 6). The percentage of boroughs with a sewerage collection system (collector lines, mains, and pumping stations) increased 7 percent during the period (from 70 to 77 percent), and the percentage with sewerage treatment plants increased by 9 percent (from 65 to 74 percent). Water system availability did not change significantly.

The percentage of boroughs with trash pickup increased, at least a partial result of the Municipal Waste Planning, Recycling, and Waste Reduction Act. Boroughs having trash pickup went from 86 percent of all boroughs in 1981 to 94 percent in 1994. Availability of community picnic areas saw a similar increase.

Not all the services became more available during this time period. The percentage of boroughs with 24-hour- and part-time police patrols actually decreased. About 69 percent of boroughs had 24-hour police patrols in 1981, but this figure had fallen to 59 percent by 1994. Boroughs with part-time patrols dropped from 66 percent in 1981 to 57 percent in 1994. Community swimming pools, youth/teen centers, and libraries saw similar declines in availability.

There is a noticeable pattern regarding services that increased in availability and those which decreased. Most services increasing between 1981 and 1994 were affected by growing attention to environmental issues during this period. New state and federal regulations and changing public attitudes towards sewerage systems and solid waste disposal likely were instrumental in getting boroughs to provide these services, irrespective of borough citizens' perceptions of their own community needs. Services that experienced a decline in availability, in contrast, generally had no comparable external forces requiring them to provide the service.

The survey did not allow for determining why these services declined in availability, but the question is important. It is interesting to note that the percentage of boroughs currently not having these services but saying they need them also declined rather dramatically for some of the services. The percentage of boroughs without 24-hour- and part-time police services and who said they need such services dropped from 50 percent to 28 percent (24-hour patrols) and 48 percent to 26 percent (part-time patrols). This finding suggests that the decline in police service availability is at least the partial result of boroughs' deciding the service was unnecessary, instead of having eliminated the service because of difficulties in financing such patrols.

Table 4. Borough services and facilities, by population.

	Municipal population in 1990						
	<1000	1000-2499	2500-4999	5000-9999	10,000-14,999	15,000-19,999	>20,000
Service or facility	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Community water system(s)							
Serving whole municipality	68*	93	95	94	88	100	100
	10	3	0	1	0	0	0
Serving part of municipality	24	58	48	59	0	—	100
	13	3	0	0	0	—	0
Community sewerage system(s)							
Collector lines, mains, pumping stations	52	89	96	98	88	100	100
	28	9	1	0	0	0	0
Treatment plant(s)	51	82	94	96	75	100	100
	26	10	2	0	0	0	0
Community solid waste disposal							
Trash pickup	92	95	96	97	88	100	100
	1	0	0	0	0	0	0
Sanitary landfill	41	49	59	66	57	100	83
	4	2	2	0	0	0	0
Recycling	59	69	74	95	88	100	100
	19	16	15	1	0	0	0
Incineration	16	19	21	25	29	0	20
	7	6	7	10	0	0	0
Public safety							
24-hour-a-day police patrol	30	54	91	98	100	100	100
	17	14	4	1	0	0	0
Less than 24-hour-a-day police patrol	54	74	46	28	0	0	0
	17	6	2	0	0	0	0
Continuously staffed citizen-police communication	34	52	76	82	100	100	60
	12	10	7	3	0	0	0
24-hour radio communication	56	78	94	98	100	100	100
	9	6	2	1	0	0	0
Ambulance/rescue service	95	99	97	98	100	100	100
	2	1	0	0	0	0	0
Emergency medical technicians	92	98	98	96	100	100	100
	3	1	0	0	0	0	0

*Top row of percentages are municipalities in which the service or facility is provided by the municipality or others; bottom row are municipalities that don't have the service or facility but need it.

(continued)

Table 4. Continued.

	Municipal population in 1990						
	<1000	1000-2499	2500-4999	5000-9999	10,000-14,999	15,000-19,999	>20,000
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Recreation							
Community swimming pool	15* 17	32 20	53 11	64 9	100 0	67 33	67 33
Athletic fields, playgrounds	78 12	92 4	98 0	98 1	100 0	100 0	100 0
Community picnic area	62 17	80 10	86 8	94 2	100 0	100 0	83 17
Parks	63 15	85 7	94 3	96 1	100 0	100 0	100 0
Youth/teen center	19 44	18 54	41 43	43 40	71 14	67 33	67 33
Senior citizen center	40 26	54 28	68 18	80 11	88 13	100 0	83 17
Library	45 13	67 10	74 10	91 3	100 0	67 33	83 0
Bookmobile	40 15	34 15	53 16	55 7	50 13	67 0	60 0

*Top row of percentages are municipalities in which the service or facility is provided by the municipality or others; bottom row are municipalities that don't have the service or facility but need it.

Table 5. Borough codes and ordinances (1981 compared to 1994).

Code or ordinance	Have	Don't have, don't need	Don't have, need	Don't know
	(%)	(%)	(%)	(%)
Municipal comprehensive plan	<i>71*</i> 64	8 19	15 12	— 5
Zoning ordinance	<i>69</i> 73	13 16	15 9	— 2
Subdivision ordinance	<i>58</i> 62	21 24	12 10	— 3
Building code	<i>68</i> 63	12 17	17 17	— 3
Building maintenance code	<i>44</i> 47	21 23	29 25	— 5

*Numbers in italics are percentages for 1981.

Table 6. Borough services and facilities (1981 compared to 1994).

Service or facility	Don't have, Is	
	but need (%)	available (%)
Community water system(s)		
Water system (1981)	39*	80
Serving whole municipality (1994)	31	83
Serving part of municipality (1994)	11	41
Community sewerage system(s)		
Collector lines, mains, pumping stations	68 65	70 77
Treatment plant(s)	67 56	65 74
Community solid waste disposal		
Trash pickup	44 0	86 94
Public safety		
24-hour-a-day police patrol	50 28	69 59
Less than 24-hour-a-day police patrol	48 26	66 57
Ambulance/rescue service	54 33	94 97
Recreation		
Community swimming pool	41 25	48 35
Playground (1981)	73	81
Athletic fields (1981)	61	77
Athletic fields, playgrounds (1994)	55	89
Community picnic area	57 48	67 76
Youth/teen center	73 64	33 27
Library	36 29	71 64

*Numbers in italics are percentages for 1981.

IMPLICATIONS

The survey suggests that certain types of boroughs may have special needs. Smaller boroughs were more likely to report needing (but not having) various codes and ordinances than were larger boroughs, but at the same time they are less likely to have full- or part-time managers. Writing good ordinances is a time-consuming process, and it may be more difficult without a manager to help handle day-to-day borough functions. Some method of helping smaller boroughs develop needed codes and ordinances should be explored.

A significant number of smaller boroughs also said they need sewerage systems but do not have them. Such systems can be costly, beyond the easy fiscal reach of smaller municipalities. Federal and state grant assistance is available to help operate such systems, but the relatively large percentage of smaller boroughs in this category suggests that many may be unaware of these programs or lack the resources needed to take advantage of them.

Developing partnerships can be an important way of getting needed services into a borough. Informal or formal collaborations with neighboring municipalities and joint authorities and partnerships with nonprofit agencies are all effective methods of making services available to citizens in an economical manner. The survey responses did not detail who "other" providers of services were, or the formal relationship between the borough and others if both provided a service, but the relatively high percentage of services provided solely or jointly by others shows that finding such collaborative relationships can be very important.

The differences in available services between 1981 and 1994 demonstrate that borough officials are responding to changes in their communities and to the state and federal policy environment. The greater number of boroughs providing sewerage, water, and trash pickup suggests that boroughs are responsive to changing state and federal regulations. Other changes in services demonstrate that borough officials must continually reevaluate their borough's community role and the challenge of being a borough council member. Borough officials need to be continually aware of how their borough is changing. That these changes have occurred demonstrates that by and large Pennsylvania borough governments are responding in ways to improve the lives of their citizens.

REFERENCE

Norton, Peter H., Theodore R. Alter, Neil B. Gingrich, Dan E. Moore, and Theodore E. Fuller. *Pennsylvania Borough Government: Officials' Views of Important Issues*. Department of Agricultural Economics and Rural Sociology, The Pennsylvania State University. 1981.

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