



from your Executive Director

By Bryan E. Smith

TOI Executive Director

EXACTLY 32 YEARS AGO THIS MONTH, then Illinois Senate President Philip Rock established a task force comprised of 20 township officials from across the state to identify problems facing townships in the performance of their state mandated duties, and to determine how the State can provide needed support and cooperation in resolving these problems. The Senate Township Task Force consisted of eight supervisors, three clerks, three highway commissioners, five trustees, and an assessor. At the time, I was a new township clerk, just a year in office, and my State Senator at the time, the late Penny Severns, asked if I would be willing to be a member of the Task Force being assembled. I, being a very eager young official, quickly agreed to serve.

Beginning in July 1986, the Senate Township Task Force held a series of six hearings across the State to gather information and listen to concerns of township officials and other citizens. Testimony was heard from 66 township officials and other citizens. Concerns were voiced on a variety of topics ranging from increasing demands on township governments for general assistance to insufficient funding for rural roads and bridges, to the need to consolidate many of our State's special governmental districts. After hearing and reviewing the testimony offered throughout the state, and as a result of the task force members own experiences as township officials, several pieces of legislation were introduced to help townships throughout the state.

One of the pieces of legislation that was introduced, passed and signed into law at the time was Senate Bill 1390. The bill was sponsored by then State Senator Glen Poshard who later went on to serve as my Congressman for several years. As we know, even to this day, there are almost as many Special District governments in Illinois as there are township and municipal governments combined! The thought was that township government has proven that it is able to handle its responsibilities in an effective and cost-efficient manner and that it makes sense to utilize a resource such as township government to its fullest by combining the already existing township structure to take on added responsibilities, thereby making townships more identifiable and more responsible to the people.

The Township Task Force proposed and Senator Poshard carried Senate Bill 1390 which permits that in counties of 500,000 or less, the dissolution of special districts with their functions given to the townships, provided that the merge request is initiated by the special district.

Senate Bill 1390 as signed into law, amended the Intergovernmental Cooperation Act and the Township Code. It provided that in counties of less than 500,000, a special district may merge into a township if the boundaries of both are exactly coterminous or if the boundaries of the special district are entirely within the township. It provides for petition by the special, approval or disapproval by the township, and for a referendum procedure should the board of township trustees approve the merger.

Through the years since the law was passed I have referred to it often as a "good way" to improve the stature of township government. A willingness to step up and assume the duties of a special district by an already functioning and viable unit of government, the township. With all the talk in Springfield of "Consolidation" what better way to show that townships are willing to step up and assume responsibility and help "cut down" the number of "special districts" we have in the state.

Take a look at the Illinois Compiled Statutes, 5ILCS 220/3.6 which gives complete detail on this law. The law was even amended years later to remove the population cap and make it apply to all townships in all counties. It may have been passed in 1987 and signed into law but it holds a lot of ability for townships to show voters today they are still willing to step up to the plate. Think about it and if you have a "special district" in your township that might want to merge with the township, consider talking to them about this law. It may be over 30 years old but it's still on the books and available to townships. This is the type of consolidation we need more of today!