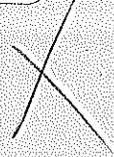


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Units of government in Wisconsin
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1958

Brief no.62

BRIEF NO. 62. UNITS OF GOVERNMENT IN WISCONSIN

Extracted by the Wisconsin Legislative Reference Library, March 1958

Wisconsin ranks fifth among the States in number of local governments, with 5,730 as of January 1957.

COUNTIES (71)

There are no areas in Wisconsin lacking county government. The county governing body is called the Board of Supervisors.

MUNICIPALITIES (547)

Municipal governments in Wisconsin are the cities and villages. Cities are divided according to population size into the following classes:

- First class.--150,000 inhabitants or more
- Second class.--39,000 to 150,000 inhabitants
- Third class.--10,000 to 39,000 inhabitants
- Fourth class.--less than 10,000 inhabitants

Villages must have a population of 1,000 before obtaining city status and any area containing 1,500 inhabitants and including an incorporated or unincorporated village may become a city. The minimum population requirement for incorporation as a village is 150.

TOWNSHIPS (1,276)

The township governments in Wisconsin are designated "towns" and are found throughout the State except in areas served by city and village governments or Indian reservations. Their governing bodies are town boards of supervisors. In addition to local road maintenance, Wisconsin town governments provide a variety of functions and, in some instances, undertake urban-type services.

SCHOOL DISTRICTS (3,758)

The following classes of school districts in Wisconsin are included in the Census count of independent units of government: Common school districts, union high school districts, and the Milwaukee City School District, legislated for under general law with special application. The above types of school districts are all administered by elected school boards which may issue bonds and levy local taxes. The amount of taxes to be levied for common and union high school districts is determined at the annual district meeting. Provision is also made for county high school districts, in counties of not more than 12,000 population, which are administered by boards appointed by the county board of supervisors and given the same rights and privileges as union high school districts. In addition, the joint county agricultural and joint county normal schools are treated for Census purposes as separate governmental units. Such a joint school system is governed by a board that includes, for each county participating, the county superintendent of schools and two members appointed by the county board of supervisors. Fiscal requirements of these joint schools are determined by the school board and are apportioned among the participating counties.

City school districts in Wisconsin are treated, for Census purposes, as agencies of the city governments they serve. A "district" operating under the "city school plan" may be administered by an elected board or by a board appointed by the city council. Its fiscal requirements are finally determined and provided for by the city government. The "city school plan" is mandatory for second- and third-class cities and permissive for fourth-class cities, but 1949 legislation set up a procedure whereby city school districts may reorganize as common school districts under certain circumstances. In January 1957 there were 67 city school systems classified as city agencies for Census purposes.

Other educational agencies and areas in Wisconsin which are not treated, in Census statistics, as independent governments include the 23 single-county agricultural or normal schools (treated as county government agencies) which are governed by 3-member boards consisting of the county superintendent of schools and 2 members appointed by the county board of supervisors, with their fiscal needs provided for by the county; and local boards of vocational and adult education, which are appointed by the sponsoring school districts and include an ex officio member from such school boards. Their fiscal requirements are determined and provided for by the parent districts and they are treated as dependent activities of the sponsoring school districts. "Superintendent districts" are administrative areas established by the county boards of education and having no separate governmental structure.

School district building corporations which erect school buildings and lease them to the school district are classified, for Census purposes, as adjuncts of the school district they serve.

SPECIAL DISTRICTS (78)

Wisconsin statutes authorize the creation of a variety of special districts or authorities that are included in the Census count of governmental units. These are discussed in detail below. The figure shown after the name of each kind of special district indicates the number of such units found to be in existence as of January 1957. (A zero entry appears for any authorized class of which no units appeared operative.)

Community center districts (1)

Districts to provide recreational facilities may be created by the chief executive of a municipality or town on petition of residents and after referendum. Such a district is administered by an elected board and may levy taxes and incur debt.

Drainage districts (27)

Drainage districts are created by the circuit court after petition of landowners to the county supervisors. The districts are governed by boards of commissioners appointed by the circuit court and authorized to levy special assessments and issue bonds. Since 1925, no new districts of this type may be established, but those already in existence continue to operate under these provisions. These are to be distinguished from drainage projects, which are

treated, for Census purposes, as activities of farm drainage boards as discussed below.

Farm-drainage boards (34)

Farm-drainage boards are appointed by the county court on petition of landowners or of the county or town governing body. This board administers the drainage projects within the county and has authority to levy special assessments and issue bonds. The individual drainage projects are treated as activities of the boards.

Housing authorities (13)

Wisconsin statutes provide for the creation of municipal housing authorities by resolution of the municipal governing body, and of veterans' housing authorities by resolution of the board of county supervisors or on petition of resident veterans. The authorities are governed by boards of commissioners appointed by the mayor or village board or by the county supervisors. The authorities may issue bonds, fix rents and charges, accept donations and, in the case of veterans' housing authorities, grants from the State Veterans' Fund.

Metropolitan sewerage districts (2)

These districts are created by the county court on petition of the voters of two or more cities, villages, or towns. The districts are governed by boards of commissioners appointed by the county court and authorized to issue bonds on the approval of the electors, levy direct annual taxes which the participating governments collect, levy special benefit assessments, and fix charges for services.

Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District

This district consists of two commissions, both established by general law with special application. The Milwaukee City Sewerage Commission is composed of five members appointed by the mayor and has jurisdiction over the sewage disposal plant and that part of the sewer system lying within the limits of the city of Milwaukee. The Metropolitan Sewerage Commission, composed of three members appointed by the Governor, has jurisdiction over the sewers and other appurtenances of the system lying outside the limits of the city of Milwaukee. Revenue for the district is derived from the sale of fertilizer and from direct annual taxes, levied and collected by the cities, villages, and towns in the district, the amount of which is determined by the Milwaukee City Sewerage Commission on the basis of sewage contributed. Milwaukee County is required to issue bonds for construction and expansion at the request of either commission and to levy ad valorem taxes to pay principal and interest. The operations of these 2 commissions are so closely integrated that the 2 entities are treated together as the operations of the Milwaukee Metropolitan Sewerage District and the combined entity is treated in Census statistics as a single independent unit of government.

Metropolitan (Milwaukee) Transit Authority

A 1949 law provides that, subject to local referendum, such an authority may be established in any county having a population of

500,000 or more (Milwaukee). Provision is made for a Metropolitan Transit Board, 3 members appointed by and from the city of Milwaukee, 3 by the Governor from other municipalities or towns in the area, and 1 nominated by the board and appointed by the Governor. The law provides authority for the board to issue bonds, fix rates and fares, and accept grants or loans from the Federal or municipal governments. The authority was not in existence as of January 1957.

Milwaukee Marketing Authority

A general law of 1947 applicable to first-class cities (Milwaukee) provides for the establishment of this authority by the Governor, to facilitate marketing of farm commodities, on petition to the director of the State Department of Agriculture. The law provides for a board of directors of nine members appointed by the Governor, plus the chief executive officer of the city or his appointee and the director of the State Department of Agriculture. The authority is empowered to issue bonds, fix and collect rents and charges, and accept appropriations from political subdivisions of the State. The authority was not operating as of January 1957.

Municipal power districts and municipal water districts (0)

These districts may be created by two or more cities, towns, or villages by their filing resolutions with the clerk of the county court, followed by a referendum. Provision is made for the administration of such a district by a board of directors, appointed by the chief executives of the municipalities and towns within the district. The districts are authorized to issue bonds, fix and collect rates and charges, and levy taxes to be collected by the participating governments.

SUBORDINATE AGENCIES AND AREAS

Shown below are various governmental designations in Wisconsin that have certain characteristics of governmental units but which are treated in Census statistics as subordinate agencies of the State or of other local governments and are excluded from the count of governmental units. Legal provisions for some of the larger of these are discussed below. (See "School Districts," above, regarding educational agencies of this nature.)

Soil conservation districts (county).--These districts are established by resolution of the county governing body. Each district is administered by a special committee on agriculture which consists of the chairman and 1 other member of the county board of supervisors, the county superintendent of schools, and 2 appointees of the county governing body. District revenue is derived from contributions from landowners for benefits received.

State public building corporations (State).--The University of Wisconsin Building Corporation, the Wisconsin State Colleges Building Corporation, and the Wisconsin State Public Building Corporation

were established under a Wisconsin law which provides that nonprofit-sharing corporations may be established to construct public buildings and lease them back to State agencies. These corporations, under the direction of State officials, may charge rentals and borrow money.

Other examples include:

State

- Flood-control boards
- Forest-fire protection districts
- Sanitary districts (State)
- Wisconsin Turnpike Commission

County

- County park commissions
- Reclamation boards
- Zoning districts (county)

Municipal

- Boards of public land commissioners
- City park boards
- City sewerage districts
- City storm water sewer districts
- Harbor improvement boards
- Utility districts (municipal)
- Zoning districts (municipal)

Town

- Town sanitary districts
- Utility districts (town)
- Zoning districts (town)

Wisconsin laws also provide for various types of local areas for election purposes and administration of justice.

Source: 1957 Census of Governments, Vol. 1, No. 3, Local Government Structure. U.S. Dept. of Commerce, Bureau of Census, Jan. 1958, pp. 80-82.