

FINAL BILL REPORT

SB 5287

C 36 L 97

Synopsis as Enacted

Brief Description: Repealing Title 45 RCW concerning townships.

Sponsors: Senators Horn, McCaslin, Wood, Prince and Hale.

Senate Committee on Government Operations

House Committee on Government Administration

Background: Townships in the United States evolved from the New England "town" which is a local general purpose government typified by the exercise of legislative authority by the entire citizenry acting at annual town meetings. The New England town and subsequent "townships" in the midwest historically had jurisdiction over roads, poor relief, and, in many cases, education. Towns and townships also sometimes had responsibility for other police powers, but, for the most part, townships have existed in rural areas with limited demand for government services.

The Washington State Constitution permits counties to adopt a township organization and grants townships general powers to enforce local police, sanitary and other regulations not in conflict with general laws. A statutory scheme governing the operation of townships was adopted by the Legislature in 1895 and has been only slightly modified since that time.

A county may divide into townships upon voter approval. When establishing townships, the entire unincorporated area of the county must be included. At an annual town meeting, the residents elect one of three supervisors, and in odd-numbered years, a clerk, treasurer, justice of the peace and constable. At town meetings, the electors may, among other things, determine the number of poundmasters, determine the time and manner in which dogs may be permitted to go at large, make provisions for snow removal, approve the purchase of land for a town cemetery, create a river improvement fund and regulate hawkers, theatricals and ferris wheels. Town supervisors serve as "fence viewers."

Spokane and Whatcom counties previously operated with townships, but disorganized them. Currently, no county has a township organization.

Summary: Title 45, townships, is repealed.

Votes on Final Passage:

Senate	46	0
House	97	0

Effective: July 27, 1997