

De-mystifying Cranbury Municipal Government

Feb 13, 2023

DISCLAIMER



- This is not a legal document; it is a discussion and education guide and is meant to answer basic questions about how our municipal government works and how you can engage with it.
- Answers are intended to be complete but may not address all potential situations.
- We have included Cranbury-specific information as appropriate.

This document was prepared by Michael Ferrante based on observations over the past five years, with feedback from residents. It does not necessarily represent the views of all the members of the Township Committee.

Today we'll address common questions about Cranbury Municipal Government (1 of 2)



- What is a Township Committee government and how does it differ from other governments in the area?
- What are the seats and terms? What are the primary departments over which Township Committee members oversee?
- Who works at Town Hall? Who hires Township employees?
- What are all the Township boards and commissions and what authority is delegated to them?
- What is OPMA (Open Public Meetings Act) and what does it mean for us?
- Why is there a closed session occasionally before or after a Township Meeting?
- When, if ever, are the minutes of closed session meetings made public?
- What is the public comment section during the Township meeting?

Today we'll address common questions about Cranbury Municipal Government (2 of 2)



- What is OPRA (Open Public Records Act) and what does it mean for us?
- What makes up the property taxes? How are each of the parts determined?
- What is equalized value mean? What is the tax rate? How do they combine to create the municipal revenue?
- What is an operating surplus and what does it mean?
- What is municipal debt and what projects are typically bonded for?
- What are the biggest components of the municipal budget?
- What is the operating budget vs. the capital budget?
- With which towns or boroughs does Cranbury share services?
- How can I keep in touch with what's happening in Cranbury?

What is a Township Committee form of government and how does it differ from other governments in the area?



- There are five common forms of local government in New Jersey
- The form of government doesn't always align with the actual municipality type
- Cranbury uses the Township form, increased to 5 members in 1990

	Borough	Township Committee	City / Village / Town / Other
# of Members:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mayor and 6 Council• Elected at-large• Council has staggered 3 year terms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 3 or 5 members• Elected at-large• Staggered 3-year terms	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Mayor-Council: Elected Mayor and 3-5-7 Council members
Mayor term:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Elected separately• 4-year term	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Elected by committee• 1 year term	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Elected separately
Mayor vote:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Votes only to break ties	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• 1 equal vote	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• May vote to break ties
Use:	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Most common form (> 200 municipalities)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• ~150 municipalities use this format	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Less common
	<i>Princeton, Jamesburg, Hightstown</i>	<i>Plainsboro, East Brunswick, West Windsor</i>	<i>East Windsor</i>

Your 2023 Township Committee



MAYOR



Michael Ferrante
First Elected 2018
Term Ends 31-Dec-24

- Liaison:
- Police/First Aid/Fire/OEM
 - Planning Board
 - Library Board
 - Cranbury Housing Assoc.
 - Personnel
 - Scouts
 - Communications

DEPUTY MAYOR



Eman El-Badawi
Elected 2021
Term Ends 31-Dec-24

- Liaison:
- Zoning Committee
 - Planning Board
 - Zoning Board
 - Development Review
 - Municipal Alliance
 - Communications



Lisa Knierim
Elected 2022
Term Ends 31-Dec-25

- Liaison:
- Economic Dev't
 - CBA/ CCOC
 - Board of Health
 - Historic Preservation
 - Historical Society



Barbara Rogers
First Elected 2019
Term Ends 31-Dec-25

- Liaison:
- Environmental / Sustainability
 - Shade Tree
 - Board of Education
 - Personnel
 - Traffic Sub-Committee



Matt Scott
First elected 2017
Term Ends 31-Dec-23

- Liaison:
- Parks Commission
 - Recreation Commission
 - Traffic Sub-Committee

Who works at Town Hall? Who hires Township employees?



- Denise Marabello, Township Administrator and Director of Finance
 - Manager of all township staff
 - Handles bonding, finances, budgeting and capital planning
 - Handles all personnel decisions (in consultation with Personnel Subcommittee)
- Debbie Rubin, Clerk and Registrar
 - Handles all filings, notices, agendas, minutes, OPRA administration
- Scout Beyer, Deputy Clerk
- Mary Ann Brown, Deputy Registrar
- Erin Lysy, Qualified Purchasing Agent
- Matt Crane, Deputy Treasurer
- Robin Tillou, Planning/Zoning/HPC Administrative Officer
- Jerry Thorne, Public Works
 - Oversees team of 6-8 Public Works employees who handle snow plow, brush chipping, and other public services

All Township departments can be found at www.cranburytownship.org

Department
Administration
Clerk / Registrar
Construction / Code Enforcement
Department of Public Works
Finance
Fire Safety Bureau
Police
Recreation
Tax Assessor
Tax Collector
Zoning Department

What are the all the Township boards and commissions and what authority is delegated to them?

This is where the work of local government gets done

Example - Land Use:

- **Planning Board:**

- Prepares the Master Plan
- Reviews applications for development reviews
- Adopts Township Master Plan
- Reviews zoning ordinance changes

- **Township Committee enacts zoning ordinances**

- **Zoning Board interprets zoning rules:**

- Decides disputes that arise under the zoning ordinances
- Grants variances where a hardship on the property exists that impairs the ability to comply with the ordinances (such as an exceptionally narrow lot)
- Grants variances in particular cases and for special reasons

Committees	Boards	Commissions
Cable TV	Health	Recreation
Housing and Development	Planning	Historic Preservation
Clock Winding	Library	Environmental
Municipal Alliance	Zoning	Parks
Development Review		Shade Tree
Economic Dev't		

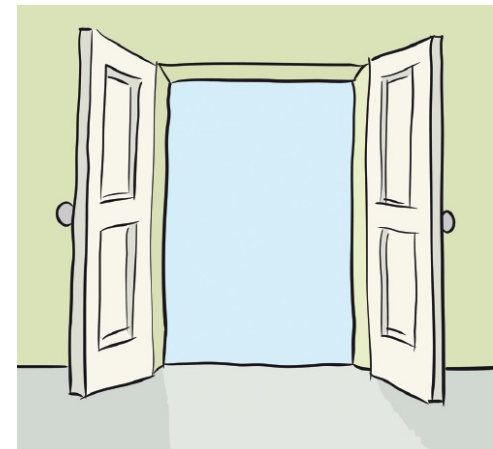
**SIGN UP TO
VOLUNTEER**

on the Township website!

What is OPMA (Open Public Meetings Act) and what does it mean for us?



- OPMA requires that public meetings be conducted under the view of the public under most circumstances
- Meetings (time and place) must be “noticed” via standard guidelines
- In Cranbury in-person meetings, Open Door = Open Meeting
- In Cranbury, open portions of meetings are live streamed via YouTube
- No three Township Committee members can meet and conduct business outside of a TC meeting
 - This includes emails: three or more TC members cannot engage in a discussion about public business over email



Search



Township of Cranbury

@townshipofcranbury1110

55 subscribers

Why is there a closed session occasionally before or after a Township Meeting? When, if ever, are the minutes of closed session meetings made public?



- Closed sessions can be called for as needed by the Township Committee
- Closed sessions must be noticed just like regular sessions
- Only topics which meet one or more of these criteria can be covered in closed sessions:
 - Any **personnel** matter
 - Any matter deemed **confidential** by state, federal or court law
 - Any collective bargaining agreement or **negotiation**
 - Any pending or anticipated **litigation**
 - Any matter falling within the **attorney-client privilege**
 - Any material which constitutes an unwarranted invasion of individual **privacy**
 - Any matter involving the **purchase, lease or acquisition of property** with public funds



When the matter is completely settled or resolved, then the closed session minutes are released except for matters involving personnel.



What is the public comment section during the Township meeting?

- During the **Public Comment** section of the Township agenda, the public can directly engage with the Township Committee
- To keep the session productive, the TC developed guidelines for the Public Comment sections that are included at the end of each printed agenda
- These sessions are designed for members of the public to provide comment to the Township Committee
 - No action may be taken, or follow-up may be required
- After public comment session closes, the TC will address or delegate each comment
- The Township Committee summarizes the meeting's Actions Items after the Public Comment



What is OPRA (Open Public Records Act) and what does it mean for us?



- Government records shall be:
 - Readily accessible for inspection, copying or examination
 - Subject to access unless exempt

AND

- The Public Agency must safeguard personal information
- In Cranbury, the Municipal Clerk is the records Custodian
 - The Custodian is responsible for all OPRA requests received
 - All OPRA requests received by any elected official or employee must be immediately forwarded to the Municipal Clerk
 - Anyone can make an OPRA request, including residents
- The Custodian has seven (7) business days (from day after receipt) to respond to the requester with the data, clarification, or to request an extension

(not this Oprah!)



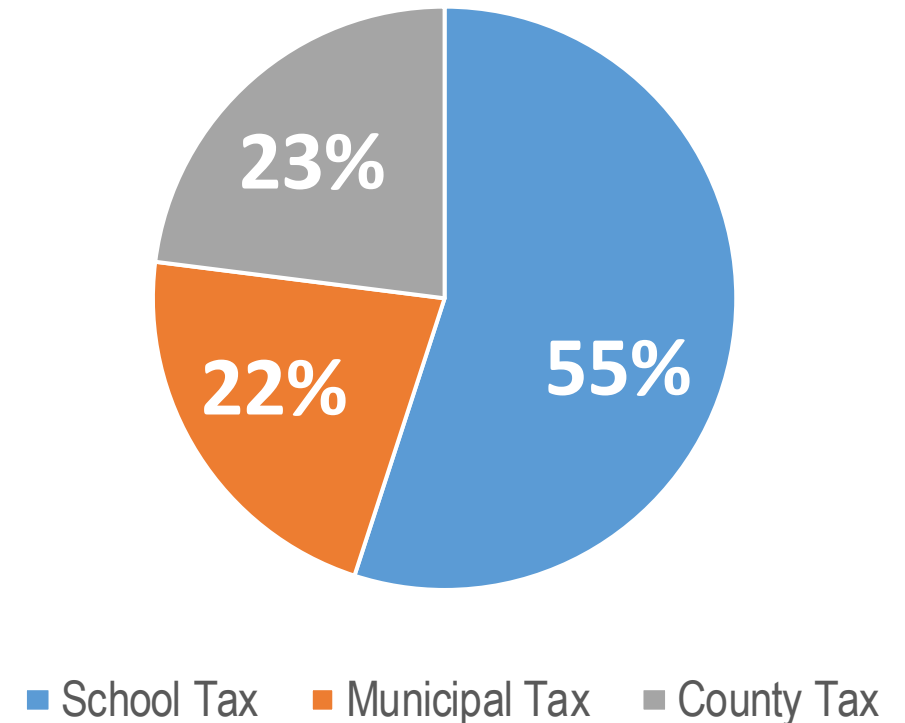
What makes up the property taxes? How are each of the parts determined?



- The tax year runs from July 1 through June 30
- Every resident gets a tax bill in August that includes four payments (August, November, February, May)
- The tax bill includes three major components (in 2022):
 - School taxes (55%) – set by Cranbury Board of Education, (capped at 2% growth per year)
 - Municipal taxes (22%) – set by Cranbury Township Committee
 - County taxes (23%) – set by Middlesex County Freeholders

<u>School Tax</u>	0.980
<u>Municipal Tax</u>	0.346
<u>Municipal Open Space</u>	0.020
<u>Municipal Library</u>	0.034
<u>County Tax</u>	0.371
<u>County Open Space</u>	0.031
 2022 Total Tax	 1.782

2022 tax breakdown



What does assessed value mean? What is the tax rate? How do they combine to create the municipal revenue?



- Assessed value is the value placed on each parcel of property by the Tax Assessor. The total of all assessments is the total tax base of the municipality.
- Tax rate is the number of dollars and cents per \$100 of assessed value, applied to the assessed valuation of all property, to produce the amount of money required to support the budget. This rate is then applied to each individual parcel to determine the tax of each property.
- Total Appropriations – Revenues Anticipated – Surplus Used = Amount to be raised by taxation
- Total amount to be raised by taxation / assessed value = Tax Rate

In 2022, “1 cent” in taxes equaled \$193,185 in revenue for the Township

The average property value in Cranbury in 2022 was \$607,380

The 2022 total Municipal Tax Rate is 0.40

The average household paid \$2,429 in municipal taxes in 2022 ($\$607,380 \times 0.400 / 100$)





What is an operating surplus and what does it mean?

- Surplus consists of an excess of revenues over what was anticipated, added tax assessments and the balance left in the prior years budget appropriations.
- May be used as a revenue item in the budget to support appropriations and offset the tax rate.
- Surplus allows the Township to buffer year-to-year fluctuations.
- Cranbury policy has been to look at the current budget and set at least 20% aside in surplus to maintain a AAA bond rating.

(not this AAA!)





What is municipal debt and what projects are typically bonded for?

- Municipal debt is principal and interest payments on a Bond Anticipation Note or Serial Bonds or other Bonds.
- Projects with municipal debt are included in the Capital Budget.
- Examples of Capital Projects:
 - Road repairs
 - Purchase of equipment and vehicles
 - Municipal buildings / improvements
 - Lake improvements
 - Sewer improvements

(not this Bond!)





What are the biggest components of the municipal budget?

- Public safety including police, office of emergency management, and contribution to fire and first aid
- Debt payments for bonds and bond anticipation notes funding capital items
- State-mandated pension payments
- Shared services
- State-mandated library appropriation
- Salaries and Social Security obligations
- Utilities including street lighting, water, gas, motor fuel and sewer



What is the operating budget vs. the capital budget?

OPERATING BUDGET

- Allows funds to be expended to run the municipality for current-year needs.
- Consists of appropriations, revenues, surplus and the amount to be raised by taxation.

CAPITAL BUDGET

- A three-year program to plan for capital projects.
- Projects must have a useful life of more than a year.
- Does not authorize the funds to be expended; a capital or bond ordinance must be adopted in order to expend funds.

(not this Capitol!)



With which towns or boroughs does Cranbury share services?



- East Windsor – Sewer Maintenance
- Plainsboro – Municipal Court
- South Brunswick – Dispatch
- Middlesex County – Recycling, Sewer Treatment, Health Officer

How can I keep in touch with what's happening in Cranbury?



- Sign up for our Township E-Alerts!
 - Agendas, Minutes
 - Events
 - Service Reminders
- Come to a Township Committee meeting (or a Board, Commission or Committee --- they are all publicly noticed)
- Read Agendas and Minutes on our website



Other Questions?

