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Short Sight:

Today we're going to talk about ROAD FUNDING. (Oh, joy!)
Our township roads are in miserable shape.
Road repair is horrifically expensive – about \$350,000.00/mile.
We get about \$70,000.00/year from our current road millage.
The good guys are NOT coming to save us.
We have to fix this ourselves.

The View From The Cheap Seats:

Once upon a time in a county far, far away, there was a place flowing with milk and honey, where the bank accounts were full and the money ran like a river; where everyone who wanted a job had one, there were two chickens in every pot and a car in every garage and all the roads were blemish free stretching to the very horizons. The people went about their daily business untroubled by potholes, fragmented shoulders and road rash and when a crack did appear, they were confident that a note to the road commission would bring prompt and effective repair. Dead trees were removed, drainage ditches cleaned and culverts and bridges kept in good repair. Why, there was even a maintenance program designed to get the maximum life possible out of all the roads and infrastructure.

That was Jackson County and I am old enough to remember those days, as are many of you. But the fairy tale has ended – and in the cold light of day, we can see that the road less travelled is less travelled for a reason and our carriage turned into a pumpkin while we weren't looking.

I can remember a time when our roads were in very good to excellent condition and the County was responsible for maintaining all of them, at their expense. That was only fair, as the County insists on owning ALL of the roads, and they (still) get the lions' share of road funding dollars. But as the State's political landscape changed and the cornucopia of funding started drying up, financial responsibility for maintenance and construction was transferred piece by piece to the smaller governmental units. Townships and Villages are at the bottom of that food chain.

Today, road funding is split 70-30% between the Township and the County respectively, and we are responsible for our share of all facets of road maintenance, repair and construction within our borders. (While it is true there are County Primary roads, like Erie, North Concord and others the County is 100% responsible for, I'm not going to split those hairs; that just simply doesn't matter for purposes of this article.) If that isn't trouble enough, I've been told many times that the 30% the County matches in our road funding, they offer out of the goodness of their hearts and it could go away at any time, without prior notice, leaving us holding the bag all by ourselves. That is a huge problem for us; a cash intensive, time sensitive problem we need to address ASAP. And as the commercial says: "there will be pain..."

Now, let me try and offer a simplistic explanation of what we are up against. At present, Concord Township levies a tax of less than 1 mill (maybe 0.93 or 0.95) to fund our road work which brings in a whopping \$70,000.00 per year. Last year, we contracted with the County to resurface Parsons and Warner Roads, the total cost was \$386,000.00+. Our share of that was \$250,000.00; it would have been \$270,000.00 but for excellent negotiating by Jamie Ley. Because we didn't have that kind of money laying around we had to borrow it; a sum we are paying back at \$70,000.00 per year. So do the math: $\$250K \div \$70K = 3.6$ years. If you're following this, you can see we've committed 100% of our entire road millage income for the next 3.6 years to pay for work we had done last year. Inquiring minds might ask: "Well, if we're spending everything we have coming to pay for old work, what will we have to pay for repairs or maintenance this year, or next, or the year after?" At this point I would have to answer: "Nothing." That is unless we come together as a community and do something to fix this.

To further compound our troubles, the work we had done on the Warner/Parsons project was a resurfacing, where we laid new asphalt over the old road. I've been told by JDOT that it is imperative we chip seal those roads, at the latest by summer of 2018, more preferably this season. If not, moisture will penetrate the asphalt and we will start getting radiation cracks and in a short period they will revert to the mess they were in when we started with them. Chip sealing will cost us another \$102,000.00, which, if we work on our present cash flow, won't be coming in to our coffers for another 3 years – or about the time those roads have fallen apart. And let's not forget, while all this is going on, there is no money for any other road work of any kind, anywhere in our Township. So is this serious? I dunno, you tell me.

This is what we're facing today: The Township has about 56+ miles of paved roads according to the JDOT report. JDOT grades them on a 1 – 10 scale (called a PASER report; no, I have no idea what it stands for) with #1 being the lowest, at complete failure; and #10 being excellent. Of the county local roads (those we are responsible for) we have 27 miles (by my rough calculations) that are graded at #4 or below and 25.5 miles of those are graded at #3 or below. So literally 50% of our township roads are in generally miserable condition, and unfortunately, this will only get worse with age.

And while I'm on a roll here, I might as well tell you one more little tidbit: One of the quickest methods of road repair is what they call a crush and resurface process. They run a large machine over the road which grinds up a portion of the asphalt, re-lays and levels it, then covers it with a depth of new asphalt. This is about \$350,000.00 per mile. Not including the anteceding chip sealing. Sure, there are other things we can do in certain circumstances which come in at differing prices per mile, but that's not the point. Read the last paragraph and this one then do the math. It's not rocket science.

To sum this up for you so we can move on let's take 7 things from this post:

- The amount of money we have for roads is so miniscule it's pathetic.
- All of that money has been spent for the next 2 years at minimum.
- Our roads are literally falling apart underneath us and
- They are incredibly expensive to repair/replace/maintain.
- There are no good guys coming to save us – we have to do this ourselves.

- I can see no other option but to ask for a millage to fund our road repairs.
- If we don't get a road millage passed soon, the problem will get worse and cost more.

For those who missed it, we had JDOT at our last meeting to give us a presentation on the state of our roads and how much (approximately) it would cost to fix them. They told us it would be somewhere between \$6MM and \$9MM. Please. Let that percolate for a minute.

Never in my wildest dreams could I have ever imagined I would be asking to increase taxes, but as much as I detest the idea, that is what I am forced to do. But by all means, if anyone sees another alternative – I'm all ears. I'd love to hear it. As always, I eagerly welcome any input you may have, email, call or visit me in the Dungeon. And stay tuned for further developments.....

Respectfully,

Al.