

► **To the point**

A new millage to address local road problems is a fitting question for voters to decide.

Bedford road tax worth considering

The poor condition of roads across the state and across Monroe County typically generates a lot of talk, but little action.

But now Bedford Township voters will have a chance to do something about the roads in their community.

Township officials recently voted 6-1 to place a 10-year road tax on the ballot during a Nov. 8 special election.

The 1-mill tax would generate more than \$970,000 a year to help repair, maintain and improve roads within the township. The cost to the owner of a \$200,000 home would be about \$100 a year.

This tax proposal didn't develop overnight, of course. The township has been considering a road tax for years. A special committee was formed to study the issue and gauge the prospects for a road tax more than two years ago.

Last year, the idea of road tax was shelved after public hearings were held to gather feedback.

In the interim, the township's roads haven't gotten any better.

Among township board members, only Clerk Robert Schockman voted against putting the proposal on the ballot this year, noting that his objection was based on timing, not on principle. He explained that rather than putting the question on a special election ballot, the township could save as much as \$15,000 if it set it for a regularly scheduled election early next year.

It's a good point, but raises the question as to whether the township can afford further delays in tackling its road problems. Will certain roads suffer more than \$15,000 in damage through winter and spring? Scheduling it for a regular election also might mean it could be on the ballot with other issues, adding to confusion or distracting the voters.

To their credit, town-

ship officials are holding a series of public meetings to explain the proposal and answer questions. The first was held Friday and drew mixed reactions.

But there seems to be some backing for the effort. Township residents were asked this summer to fill out a survey to determine whether they would be willing to support such a tax. Of the more than 700 surveys returned, about 75 percent said they would support the township's road improvement plan.

Regardless of the outcome of the vote, residents should understand that a new tax won't be a cure-all. Considering that about \$11 million a year in grants and other road revenue sources has been spent on township roads in recent years, the additional revenue will take time to make an impact.

Bedford residents also should realize that they are casting an economic vote against better Michigan roads every time they drive across the Ohio state line to purchase cheaper Ohio gasoline. Those gas taxes go to road work in Ohio, not Michigan.

It's also fitting and proper for township officials to allow residents to decide for themselves whether to shoulder the proposed tax. With recently declining home values, it's also possible that residents won't feel the impact of the tax as greatly as they might have had it been levied several years ago.

Local road taxes have made an impact in other communities around Monroe County that have taken this bootstrap approach to road improvement. Given that Bedford is the most populous community in the county, the local road tax is an option worth exploring and certainly an issue residents have the right to decide directly with their votes.