

► TO THE POINT

Bedford Township should move forward with the board's assessment idea — but with limits.

Road assessment plan best option for now

The appalling state of roads in Monroe County, particularly in Bedford Township, is infamous. South-county residents saw how nice driving could be earlier this year when funding came through for Samaria Rd. The demand for road repairs never ceases.

To address this, the Bedford Township Board of Trustees has begun exploring options for how to deal with the crumbling infrastructure.

They believe they need about \$925,000 a year to properly repair the area's streets and roadways. State funding in that amount doesn't seem likely in the foreseeable future, so the township is left with two options to generate this type of revenue.

The first option is a one-mill tax increase. This would bring in about \$975,000, costing the owner of \$200,000 home about \$100 each year, and would require a majority vote by residents to happen.

The second option they are exploring is the idea of a township-wide road assessment. The assessment, which could be implemented by board vote, would cost about \$75 a parcel each year for at least five years, generating about \$925,000 a year.

On Sept. 9, the board held a town hall meeting to gather feedback from the public about which option they prefer. Residents took turns telling the board their thoughts and opinions, many saying they believed an assessment was not in keeping with the democratic process.

So when township Treasurer Paul Francis paused the comments to ask how many there would prefer a millage to an assessment, an overwhelming majority raised their hands. Yet in a follow-up question, Mr. Francis asked how many would support that millage by voting yes should the township place it on a ballot. This time, very few hands were raised.

Bedford Township residents have voiced time and time again that they

want their roads worked on and repaired and they would rather their tax dollar be used for that task than any other.

When the Bedford Public Schools Board of Education held similar town hall meetings regarding a \$70.35 million bond project, the condition of the roads always came up as a priority.

Again, when asked for additional funding for the Bedford Branch Library, some residents asked why penal fines are given to libraries and not to roads.

So, why now, when the focus is shifted to road improvements, is the proposal being met with such opposition?

Understandably no one wants to pay more taxes. Then what about the special assessment of just \$75 a year from each parcel?

The township does have some cash on hand which could help with special repairs and projects, but it is not prudent governance to drain those reserves first.

Perhaps the township board could sell the road assessment plan to residents with some reassuring tweaks to the proposal.

A guarantee that the assessment would not be raised or extended without voter approval might make it more palatable. The township board needs to understand that the residents are nervous about giving their government officials a free hand. They don't want surprises later should the amount of the assessment go up or they find out it's forever.

Also, the record of work accomplished during those five years with that amount of money would be the selling point or the death knell for the next five.

Residents, for their part, need to understand that they are going to have to pay something to get their roads repaired. Money will not fall from the sky, or Lansing, no matter how long they procrastinate. They have to accept some plan and let the work begin.