

From The Chair – August 2019

By Janell Bradley

The Cost of Doing Nothing (or not enough)

In recent months, your County Board of Supervisors has had numerous discussions with the County Engineer related to the condition of our asphalt roads.

Yes, it was also a tough year for MOST of the 900+ miles of gravel roads in Fayette County as excessive rains fell late in 2018, and then froze into the ground in a winter of severe temperatures. The scenario was complicated with a rapid thaw and spring flooding, earning Fayette County a presidential declaration under Disaster Resolution DR-4421. Additionally, some heavy haulers aggravated the problem as roads remained soft longer than is typical. As a result, we spent more than \$1 million placing rock on damaged roads, well into July as frost boils continued to be a sore spot with motorists and ag business people.

And even though those concerns were enough for any County Board of Supervisors in Iowa this year, we can't continue to look past the fact that in Fayette County, our asphalt roads are failing at a significant rate. It's the Board's consensus that the Cost of Doing Nothing – would be much greater than the cost of repair at this point. We need to reconstruct many of our asphalt-surface roads soon to mitigate significant future damage from weather, heavy loads and even snow removal.

After the county's team of engineers and assistants analyzed the HMA (Hot Mix Asphalt) road system failures this summer, they reported 86 miles are in a state of near collapse.

The cost of *under investment*: It's a lot to expect that the original asphalt would last for 40-50 years with only intermittent seal coats and pothole patching! Fayette County spent \$217,000 for patching in 2017, \$124,000 in 2018 and \$135,000 in 2019. That last figure will go up and would nearly double, if Secondary Roads had spray patched all the potholes instead of using cold mix on many of the roads slated for possible reconstruction.

And if driving these rough county blacktops isn't enough to convince us all, the Board of Supervisors has also heard about the economic impact to local businesses. With no rail lines, ag cooperatives in the center of the county rely 100 percent on delivery by truck and in some cases, have lost customers as a result.

To begin remedying our shared concerns, the Board of Supervisors with our Engineer propose a General Obligation, Essential Purpose Bond of \$5 million to mitigate past and future damage to Fayette County asphalt roads.

Once implemented, the GO Essential Purpose Bond would mean that projects that aren't now on

the five-year road plan – but should be, should have more likelihood of being funded with expected funds from Road Use Tax, Gas Tax and county taxation.

Although the board hasn't yet voted to set a proposal into action, our intention is that with reasonable interest rates (currently around 2.50%), we'd engage in a \$5 million bond with a 10-year payback. The proposed impact to taxpayers is not yet set in stone, but we perceive the payment on the debt to be around 50¢ per \$1,000 of valuation. For a home that has an assessed value of \$100,000, the debt payment would equate to an additional \$25 per year in property taxes on the home. The County's average taxable value per acre of ag land is \$1,220 (tax values are not calculated off the market value of ag land). This would equate to an increase of \$0.61 per year in property taxes per acre of ag land, or the equivalent of \$24.40 for 40 acres.

To move ahead with the \$5 million bond, construction for next summer would include paving of an estimated 26 miles of surface. The areas include:

- 2.2 miles of W14 (Rose Road) near St. Lucas from B44 through the St. Lucas city limits, which last saw a 6-inch asphalt base laid in 1965; yes, – 54 years ago. There were seal coats in 1970, 1975, 1983, 1989, 1995 and 2002.
- a six-mile stretch of W14 from the Hawkeye city limits, south to Highway 93 that had rolled stone and seal coat from 1959 until 1978 when it got a 1.5" asphalt base. That six miles has also had several seal coats since, the last being in 2008 – 11 years ago.
- the HMA portion of V68 within Waucoma city limits
- the HMA portion of 255th Street (Johnson's Mill Road) and 247th St. around the village of Alpha
- 4.2 miles of B66 (210th St.) from V68 to W14 (to Hawkeye) whose first asphalt surface was 1978 when 7-inches was laid. Sealcoats followed in 1995 and 2000. (see picture)
- C50 (40th St., Rose Rd., and 35th St.) from V68 to Oelwein city limits. (see picture)
- Outer Rd (Eastline Rd N) from Hwy 3 through 40th St. (Sixth St. NE, Oelwein.)

As proposed, two additional sections of W14 going south, (Hwy 93 to C33 and C33 to Hwy. 3) and Echo Valley Road near West Union would see new asphalt in 2022.

The Board recognizes that this is a lot of information to digest. To help anyone with additional questions understand the impact, a public meeting on the topic will be hosted Thursday evening, Sept. 5 at the Fayette Opera House, beginning at 7 p.m. Your county supervisors, the engineer and a representative of Piper Jaffray will be on hand to provide an overview, offer hand-outs and answer questions. We invite you to attend.

B66 West Near Hawkeye



C50 Near Oelwein

