

Consideration For A Bedford Weighmaster

Nancy Tienvieri, Trustee

There has been considerable discussion regarding a Weighmaster position in Bedford Township for the purpose of protecting our newly improved roads. This discussion has taken place during Township Board meetings, on social media, and in the newspapers. The topic is very complicated and requires much more than can be settled in a single Board meeting, a newspaper account, or on Facebook in casual conversation between people who have not investigated the facts. Consequently, the topic has suffered a great deal of unfortunate and undue criticism supported by very little factual information.

My initial interest in having a Bedford Township Weighmaster was for the benefit of the public to protect the investment the Township has made in road improvement in the last four years, and to provide revenue for road improvement. In September 2014 the citizens rejected an idea put out by a Township Board Member to impose a Special Assessment District (SAD) on each property owner charging \$75 per parcel which would form a fund that would be used for road improvement. The public wanted road improvement, but not by digging into taxpayer pockets again. With that overwhelming rejection by the public, basically at a Town Hall Meeting, the Board agreed to my original suggestion to use the money in the Fund Balance (around \$3 million at that time) to fund road improvement for as long as it was feasible and not reducing the Fund Balance to a dangerously low level. To this day, 4 years later we are still able to use the Fund Balance to cover costs for road improvement when needed. We have not asked the taxpayer for any new funding, millage or SAD. We have been able to put nearly \$10 million in road improvement since that day. So, in lieu of asking the Bedford residents let's think about dollars from the overweight trucks that contribute to our roads needing maintenance. If the trucks are not over the weight limit, there is nothing to worry about; if they are they should compensate for the damage.

Now that our roads are greatly improved, we need to find ways to protect them so that we do not end up back where we were four years ago, with many unacceptable roadways. Granted everyday traffic puts wear and tear on the asphalt as does the weather in Michigan, which means improvements made this year won't last forever. However, a serious cause for roads not reaching their expected "life-cycle" is vehicles carrying greater weight loads than the road is designed to hold. Hiring a person to monitor the traffic of overweight loads on local and primary roads is a suggestion for consideration, and weighing the positives against the negatives. The weighmaster idea presented for discussion only has been muddled by people confusing this opportunity with another committee that was formed to investigate the possibility of having a Bedford Police Department. The two ideas have nothing to do with one another. Rumors have spread that having a Weighmaster means another policeman hired by the Township and not the Sherriff's Department. This confusion is merely political and has

no bearing on a Weighmaster employed to protect our roads. If Bedford already has an employee able to fill the Weighmaster position (minus the cost of training and purchase of the scales), and this employee is willing to add this to their daily responsibilities, at no extra salary where is the extra financial burden? There is none. There is no duplication of effort with the ten deputies we now contract for with the Sheriff's Department. None of the ten deputies are qualified as Weighmaster, so they have no authority to stop overweight trucks in order to protect our roads.

Also, there is a thought that receiving revenue for overweight trucks on Bedford roads would cause an over-zealous reaction to write more tickets each day to collect more revenue. This does not follow logic. If trucks are not overweight, there would be no fine collected. There would not be an opportunity for abuse. If the trucks were not over the weight limit, there could be no excessive ticket writing. Besides, truck drivers find the routes that they can travel away from Weighmasters whenever possible. My brother owned a trucking company and he has educated me on this.

The Michigan State Police (MSP) has a Motor Carrier Division that is responsible for the Commercial Vehicle Enforcement. Motor Carrier Officers perform a full range of enforcement duties including the detection and apprehension of individuals who use commercial vehicles in their criminal activities. MSP Officers intercept illegal drug and alcohol shipments, seize weapons and other contraband being transported on Michigan roadways, investigate the transporting of hazardous waste, ticket for speed enforcement, and other activities. None of these law enforcement duties performed by the MSP Carrier Enforcement was intended to be a part of a Bedford Township Weighmaster. The MSP was contacted regarding the oversight of overweight vehicles on Bedford roads, but they said their main focus is on state and interstate roads, and they do not have enough officers to place one in Bedford full or part time. Also, and more importantly, if the MSP were to issue a ticket to an overweight vehicle they would issue the ticket on the State statute, and the fine money collected would go solely to the library system. The library system is a worthy recipient, but it does not help Bedford regarding road funding because only ticketing on the local Ordinance would benefit Bedford roads.

The Township has the right under Public Act 181 to adopt an Ordinance to cover truck enforcement. For tickets written under this law Bedford Township would receive 70% of the fines collected from overweight trucks on our roads and the Library would receive 30% of those fines. That would be all new money and would not be taking fines away from the library since we currently have no Weighmaster enforcing in Bedford Township. In truth this would be finding an additional 30% more money collected for the library. Please note that this is for truck enforcement, not law enforcement. There was never an idea presented to seek a person for law enforcement beyond ticketing overweight trucks that are damaging Bedford roads.

In addition, a rumor has been circulated that local stores and companies could not receive their shipments since their trucks may be overweight. The law allows

trucks/vehicles making deliveries within Bedford Township to reach their destination. No trucks carrying goods or cargo designated to be delivered within Bedford Township would be ticketed. No Bedford business would be harmed with trucks coming or going.

A quick mention of Seasonal Weight Restrictions is also needed to clear up confusion. The Monroe County Road Commission (MCRC) designates truck routes during certain times of the year. They post signs on specific roads to inform truck drivers that the MCRC's load limits have changed for a period of time until the MCRC lifts those limits. These signs limit the maximum weight that can be carried over that road at that time. This usually happens during unseasonable thawing and re-freezing. Also regarding a Weighmaster, the MCRC is looking into a County Weighmaster, but again the fine money would not come to Bedford to assist in road improvement.

So then, why wouldn't Bedford Township want to protect the investment made to their roads with taxpayers' dollars? Why wouldn't Bedford Township want to collect money from trucking companies who are causing deterioration to township roads? The law already is specific about trucks being over the established weight limit. The alternative to this source of funding is to put another millage before the voters, or for the seven-member Board to enact an SAD to obtain revenue for the purpose of road repair. We all know the State does not fund the Monroe County Road Commission sufficiently to improve all of the county roads, not to mention the local township roads. So road funding is an issue and will be one for many years into the future. Revenue from overweight truck fines may not be the end-all, but it certainly could generate something and leave the local taxpayers alone. Discussion and investigation into any idea to support funding road maintenance is in reality a good thing. Discussion in an open meeting should not be feared or prevented. Discussion on any topic that affects Bedford Township infrastructure, spending, and taxpayers in any fashion should not only be conducted it should be invited! Without the discussion of both pros and cons we end up with a system that is ruled and controlled by less than a few making decisions that affect everyone.

June 2017