

Investing in YOUR Infrastructure

By: Wayne E. Bates, PhD, PE – Town Engineer

On behalf of the DPW, I would like to thank the voters at last year's annual Town Meeting for the overwhelming support in funding numerous infrastructure improvements. A great deal of progress has been made over the past year in our efforts to transition from a reactive to a proactive DPW. There is a tremendous amount of work remaining and I am concerned that the long-range infrastructure funding could be de-railed at the upcoming Town meeting. As a professional in the field of civil and environmental engineering, I would like to emphasize the importance of continuing to fund the proposed infrastructure improvements. The DPW has been under-funded for years and until recently, the staff had been reduced by 30%. These staff reductions and a general lack of investment have occurred during a period when the infrastructure and population have grown by over 30%.

Unlike fine wines, a community infrastructure does not age well with time. Each year that an unattended infrastructure ages, the relative cost to repair it increases more dramatically. Most equipment owned by the DPW, if operational, is antiquated and prone to breaking down. You rely on this equipment to plow, sand, and sweep your streets. The DPW garage is dilapidated with a leaking roof, flooding floors, and no space to store equipment. You rely on this building to provide the DPW employees with a safe working area and a place to store your antiquated equipment. The Highway Department maintains 50 miles of aging and failing roadway and drainage. You rely on these roads and drains for safe transportation. The Water Department owns 35 miles of water main, half of which is over 50 years old. Residents with town water rely on these pipes to provide safe and clean water. The Sewer Department owns numerous pump stations, one of which is nearly 30 year old. Residents with town sewer rely on these pump stations to transport waste away from their homes and to the City of Woonsocket.

The Town of Blackstone infrastructure is YOUR asset. Like any asset, its value is directly impacted by the number of investments and the amount invested over time. So, how should you invest in your infrastructure? When saving for retirement or a child's education, most investors would advise you to invest early and often with consistency. I offer the same advice when it comes to investing in the Town of Blackstone infrastructure.

It is understandable that in these tight fiscal times there may be a tendency to delay infrastructure investments. I caution the voting public that these investments have been put off longer than recommended. The old saying "pay now or pay later" holds true in this case and the Town of Blackstone is currently paying for its historical lack of investment. Further postponement in addressing these critical needs could result in regulatory fines, an infrastructure failure requiring enormous financial investment under emergency conditions, or worse yet, a terrible accident. In an effort to assist the Town of Blackstone in rebuilding its infrastructure, I strongly recommend that you understand the infrastructure investments being proposed and cast your vote based on your own knowledge of the issues and potential ramifications.