



What a Mess

March 17, 2009

by Jay Henry

There it was – nestled snugly between the announcements of the annual vehicle sticker winner and Joe Schmitt's retirement – the report from the village engineer. Didn't really look remarkable on the village board meeting agenda ... but turned out to be very informative – and disturbing.

Tom Lang from Robinson Engineering gave a report on the road improvement and maintenance needs for the Village of Alsip last night (March 16, 2009). Here are some points he made:

- Chippewa subdivision is highest area of need; several other areas were mentioned as being in critical need of work as well
- There is "about" \$227,000 of funds available for projects right now
- Annual revenue (from 2 principal sources) for road projects is approximately \$1,000,000
- A routine maintenance schedule (all roads addressed about every 12 years) would take approximately \$1,600,000 annually
- Because of the poor conditions of many village streets – there is currently a need to spend a minimum of \$4,000,000
- To get on track with an annual maintenance program, the village might need to spend as much as \$10,000,000
- At the conclusion of the engineer's report, a representative from the village's municipal bond issuer spoke briefly and indicated that the village's Standard and Poor's "A" rating would mean a rate of 4.5% to 5% on a 15 year bond issue

As is typical, there weren't any handouts of the engineer's report available – so the synopsis above is from my notes.

What should we make from all of this?

Well, only one question was raised by any elected official (Dan Godfrey) – and that had to do with the potential bond issue and rate. Nothing more was asked. Because this was a Board Meeting and not a Committee Meeting – no one from the public was permitted to ask a question.

Well, I have a few questions ... and maybe you do too. Here are some of mine for starters.

- Why is there only \$227,000 available for annual road projects when the village collects much more than that from its home rule gas tax (\$0.03 per gallon – usually around \$500,000 per year) and its share of the State of Illinois Motor Fuel Tax (MFT)?
- What happened to the rest of those funds?
- Where was Greg Palumbo, Village Finance Officer, to provide insight into these matters; why wasn't he at a meeting where important financial matters were planned on being discussed?

And most importantly ...

- **How can we trust that the current administration will effectively manage funds raised through a bond issue when they can't manage funds that had been allocated for road improvement and maintenance already?**