

## THE COST OF INFRASTRUCTURE REPAIR & REPLACEMENT – REALITY SETS IN

Many communities are coming to grips with the reality that the infrastructure that serves as the backbone of their municipality is in serious condition. In many areas, elements of public water, sewage, and streets are in serious need of repair. The horse pill that has been hard to swallow is that grants to pay for infrastructure construction, repair, or replacement are limited compared to the overall tasks to be completed.



### Taking Responsibility

Communities now realize that even if they are fortunate enough to receive some economic assistance, they must stand on their own two financial feet when it comes to being responsible for their infrastructure, and “being responsible” are the key words. Officials can no longer cross their fingers and hope that things last long enough until retirement. They are finally saying with conviction, “I will not leave this problem for my children and grandchildren.” Hooray!

But the costs are staggering, and climbing. “How do we get started? What should we do first? Can we really afford this? What if we don’t have great records of our facilities?”

### Getting Started

Firstly, don’t be deterred by cost. Figure out what you can afford to do and do it! A \$100,000 project in 1913 cost \$300,000 in 1945. Today, that same project cost \$8,000,000! That’s right, an 80-fold increase in less than 100 years. Increases are part of our economy. Accept it and move on with identifying what you can afford to do this year.

And don’t be discouraged if you are having a hard time getting a handle on your needs. Everyone is saying “What pipe is the oldest, what’s in the worst condition, what valves can’t be turned?” It goes on and on, but a little discipline and common sense will get you on your way so you don’t have to respond to cave-ins, main breaks, or something catastrophic. You hate that, and so do your workers and the public.

### One Municipality’s Example

Ken Myers, recently appointed Manager for Huntingdon Borough, is getting his feet wet; well, maybe



plunging into it would be more accurate. “We have started to list all of our shortcomings: water, sewer, storm sewer, streets, and treatment plants. Our department heads are familiar with our problems and are very pleased that we are developing a plan to address them. But, the cost we are facing is worrisome, and at present inflation rates, doubles

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*– Ken Myers,  
Borough of Huntingdon*

about every 10-15 years. But, we have the support of Borough Council.”

### Another Example

A great example of a simple, disciplined approach is that of the Millersburg Area Authority (Dauphin County, PA). Authority Manager, Jere Troutman, looks back with satisfaction at what the Authority has done over the past 30 years: replaced 35,000 feet of encrusted water main: cut unac-

*“We did it on our own, a little at a time as we could afford it.”*

*– Jere Troutman,  
Millersburg Area Authority*

counted for water from 60 percent to 10 percent; installed a filter plant, storage tanks, VFD’s, and premium motors. “We did it on our own, a little at a time, as we could afford it. In the long run it has saved us money on operating costs and headaches. Our rates are about \$20 per month for 4,000 gallons of use.”

### Smart Planning

According to EPA/DEP’s Lee Murphy, smart planning includes setting funds aside each year in your operating budget, and doing affordable repairs each year, even if they are relatively minor in nature.

“For the big stuff, have designs ready to go so you can take advan-

*“Don’t start by concentrating on the entire system. When time and money is limited, focus on the worst situation first.”*

*– Lee Murphy,  
EPA/DEP*

tage of favorable construction markets. It can be done! Don’t start by concentrating on the entire system. When time and money are limited, focus on the worst situation first. You can develop and implement a full blown plan within 5 or 10 years. Simple is best.”



### In the Trenches

We find that at the level where the people in the trenches are doing the repairs, the problems are well known and a real concern to them. But somewhere in the process, their understanding and concern is not

being fed to and accepted by the officials that set budgets. So much of the problem lies with the perception that rate increases are not acceptable. “You’re not doing your job if you can’t control rates.” We have all heard it and know that’s wrong. We all understand that a home owner is responsible to see that the family assets are properly managed. Infrastructure can no longer be ignored. It must also be managed.

As Lee mentioned when we interviewed him: “The challenge in the Commonwealth is huge and once complete will entirely revamp how people look at infrastructure use, repair, and replacement.”

In upcoming issues of *etcetera*, we will look at some of the tools available to assist communities in this process.

*Written by Ray Myers, Principal Engineer and Manager of CET’s Huntingdon, PA office.*

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