

Recently some questions were posed in reference to decisions that we as a council have made both recently and in the past. One such question was why are we involved with the cleaning of a railroad culvert tile? I can answer this in the same way as it was previously answered at our last council meeting. A few months back Frank Pressley called me to discuss a problem that he had been having with a flooding basement on one of his properties, Frank asked if there was anything that I could do to help with his problem. I assured Frank that I would look into the problem and see if anything could be done, without making any particular promise to him that I or anyone could do anything to solve the issue. After hanging up with Frank I called Brent Shull and described the situation to him, Brent told me that he knew some of the people that are involved in the railroad operation, and that he would talk to them. A short time later a meeting was set up to discuss the possibility of the tile that runs under the railroad tracks being plugged and not flowing as designed. Attending that meeting was Myself, Will Nuttle, Larry Gilbert Steuben county surveyor, Milton. Gale Shultz from the railroad and Justin Stouder. The discussion revolved around the tile being plugged, who owned the tile and if there would be some way of opening a plug in the tile, Gale said that the tile was a 24 inch pipe and that it wasn't currently causing a problem per se for the railroad. Larry Gilbert said that he had also been contacted numerous times by Mr. and Mrs. Pressley in reference to an issue of backed up drainage in the area of their property. I asked Justin if he thought that the boring machine that the Town had on hand could possibly be used to clean out the tile. Justin stated that it may be possible to do. We discussed the possibility of cleaning a 10 inch opening through the tile and inserting a 10 inch pvc pipe through that, as there was concern about not trying to do the full 24 inch opening so as not to disturb the railroad bed or structure. The meeting lasted about an hour or less and we all left with the understanding that Mr. Shultz would draw up an agreement between the railroad and the Town and if all parties agreed to the document then we would go forward with trying to address the issue. Mr. Shultz created the agreed document and it was discussed at an open council meeting and I suggested that we sign the agreement and go forward Dan Brinkerhoff gave some input such as making sure that we were covered by our insurance carrier for any possible damage that we may create while trying to clean this tile, Dan also took a copy of the agreement to read. By the next monthly council meeting we were notified that we would in fact be covered for any unforeseen damage by our insurance carrier, I once again moved that we sign the agreement with the railroad and try to clean the tile a

vote was taken and by majority vote we agreed to sign the agreement which set out all of the terms of the scope of the project and what costs would be split between the parties involved. At no time was any consideration given to any location of any property owned by Town clerk Hester Stouder and Justin Stouder and for anyone to imply that this was ever agreed to with the Stouder's in mind would be ridiculous and stated by someone that has not taken the time to follow the timeline and know the facts of what took place to get to where we are in the process. Also the implication that a new town board member was unaware of what was going on is simply untrue as well, the town manager Milton, has assured me that he had made sure the newest council member had copies of everything that had been discussed and decided on within the past year so that he could be up to speed on everything. I personally did not see trying to address this problem any differently than last year when there was a drainage problem over in Brookside park and a house one away from our newest council member was getting water up around it. I had gotten a call from the property owner John, and I went and looked at the problem and took pictures, I then asked some questions and within the next month between our street department and the County surveyor the drainage issue in Brookside was corrected and I even received a call shortly after it was fixed from Larry Grantham, thanking me for helping fix the problem, I assured Larry that all that I had actually done was ask some questions and it got fixed, to which Larry replied well even when I worked for the town I couldn't get it fixed so thanks and I said thank you for calling.

Another question that surfaced recently was in regard to the newest municipal parking lot and why we even have a new parking lot. In answer to these questions you need to go back 3 years to when the engineering firm D.L.Z. first presented their prints for the downtown revitalization project and in reviewing those plans it was noted that not only were the current parking spots on the south side of Bellefontain eliminated the suggested additional parking spots for the north side of the road in front of the grocery store were not in the plans. All of these spots were in the conceptual plan, but we as a council were told by the engineer that there simply was not room available to have the additional spots or even the current spots on the south side of the roadway. When asked if there was any way to at least save the parking spots on the south side, due to there being ongoing business in that area, the reply that we were given from the engineer was, that to make a change like that would cost \$100,000 dollars. Needless to say there were some upset business owners and people that had worked on this project

from day one including Bob Howard, Bob even spoke out at a council meeting being against the removal of the parking spots along the south side of Bellefountain. In further meetings the council decided that we would do a parking lot behind the Open to Change Salon in some sort of compensatory way for the business owners losing two spots in front of that business and two spots in front of their Insurance business and one spot in front of an additional business of theirs on the South side of Bellefountain.

We also decided that to do so we would allocate \$50,000 toward the project because that would be half of what the engineer stated it would cost to retain the current spots. We as a council asked the engineering firm DLZ what it would cost for them to design a parking lot for the town, a short time thereafter the engineer told us that to even design the retaining wall would cost in excess of \$18,000 just for the design. The parking lot did not get constructed immediately and in the interim the business owners of open to change salon approached the town council about just buying the ground where the proposed parking lot would be sited. The council discussed this and it made sense for the town to own another parking lot that would be worth at least \$50,000 instead of simply building a parking lot that would enrich only those particular business owners. So the council purchased the land from Dennis and Dawn Mullins and the plans proceeded toward developing a parking lot. We had another engineering firm design a parking lot and subsequently decided not to go with that particular design due to the fact that it would be too costly to accomplish. In the mean time the town manager Milton continued to work on the details of getting a parking lot built so that we could have this project completed and go forward from there. The law in reference to this parking lot and the amount that the town council intended to spend only required the town manager to request three quotes to build the parking lot. There is no requirement that he actually receive three quotes. If this did not happen then how is this the responsibility of the council? We need to be able to trust that the information that is presented to us to vote on is correct and proper, if it isn't then why would we need a town manager? We voted on completing this parking lot with the impression that we were good to go on doing so. As far as the location of the newest parking lot and that location supposedly not making sense. Due to the fact that the entire North and South side of Bellefountain from the stop signs to Rickman's car lot is all zoned commercial we feel that a parking lot in this area makes perfect sense. Once this parking lot is completed it will be an asset that will benefit the entire downtown area as we have suffered from a lack of ample parking for years.

I still believe that everything that the council did in reference to this parking lot was not only responsible but cost efficient as well.

In reference to questions on drainage issues and the current council wanting to partner with residents to alleviate drainage concerns from storm water. As the Town continues to develop the issue of storm water will only continue to get worse, although the writer of the article doesn't see this as a concern for the Town, it ultimately negatively affects all of us, the storm run off has to go somewhere and if we as a Council can help direct which way that it goes and the impact that it makes on our residents, then I feel that it is appropriate to help out for the greater good of all property owners. To make a statement that the Town benefits from sidewalks, but not from addressing drainage is akin to sticking your head in the sand and hoping the issue will resolve itself. Now on to lawn mowing, I can assure the writer that the Town has no interest in being in the lawn mowing business. The intent of the high fees isn't to make money but to discourage land owners from letting their grass and weeds get so high that it devalues the surrounding properties. I have to ask on this issue, what exactly would the writer of the article have us do that would be satisfactory to her and address the obvious problem? If in fact it wasn't a problem, then there would be no lawns to mow. The writer goes further to state that she finds that the Town mowing properties to be fiscally irresponsible. So my question is, would the writer prefer these properties that are in violation just be left to grow out of control? That would certainly be a nice representation of how our Town would look to prospective citizens considering moving here and making Hamilton their home. As for the statement that the writer lives in a Town where money grows on trees, I would put our budgets of the last few years up against any other city or Town for comparison on responsibility. Now to the last statement of guessing that the streets will be paved of gold with the wealth that the Town government apparently has. Please feel free to point to any factual actual extravagance that this current Town Council has supported. We have worked diligently to keep costs down, in a responsible fiscally as possible manner as we can and yet provide the services that our taxpayers expect and deserve.