

Trustees

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Many years ago, local leaders and planning professionals had a vision for growth. That is one of the reasons why right-of-ways were established. According to the Institute of Transportation Manual, when planning residential street layout, the residential streets should link our neighborhoods to traffic carrying streets. With that said, when you say or hear the word vacation in reference to our right-of-ways, most township trustee's react adversely. One of the main reasons it draws a negative reaction is that vacation of right of ways, in most cases, is forced upon the townships. Yet it is a tool that can be used to promote growth, economic development, and cooperation between neighboring districts. This can only happen when a collaborative environment is created. Simply put, that collaborative environment can only be created if the vacation request requires that all leaders agree on it.

Today, the laws for vacating right-of-ways do no promote collaboration or cooperation. Current law gives the sole power to the Board of County Commissioners to approve or disapprove the vacation request. In most cases county commissioners are unplugged from the vacation scenario, so they rely on staff recommendations to make their decisions.

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We at Springfield Township, Lucas County, recently experienced the vacation of one of our right-of-ways that was approved by our County Commissioners at the expense of our township. Every department or staff member that advises the Commissioners provided testimony in opposition of the vacation request. The Planning Commission stated “the proposed vacation is in direct conflict with the Lucas County Subdivision regulations that require one (1) or more access streets to undeveloped land. Also, the preliminary plat of the subdivision was approved in 2004 and the plat was approved with a condition that stated the existing paper street or right-of-way shall be constructed with the subdivision.” The Lucas County Engineers Traffic Office recommended against the vacation due to the Institute of Transportation Engineer’s (ITE) Manual of Residential Street Design and Traffic Control when planning (local) residential street layout, the residential streets should link to neighborhoods to traffic-carrying streets in a way that simultaneously provides good access to other parts of the community and region, but which minimizes the chances of the residential streets use by through traffic.

Finally, Springfield Township Trustees, who are the front line elected leaders for the township, testified that when the development was initially approved, one of the requirements was that the development shall proceed by connecting to the existing right-of-way and utilizing that as a second connection point in harmony with connectivity requirements and public safety principals that recommend multiple access points for safety purposes.

With all of the well-reasoned testimony and guidance from a very knowledgeable staff, department heads, and local leaders, the County Commissioners unanimously approved the vacation request. In our view, they failed the system, the professionals, and the people of Springfield Township. The County

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Commissioners closed their eyes on every planning principal and compromised the safety of the community.

If you pass this bill, then going forward, vacation of right-of-ways can be a tool that is used as a collaborative mechanism that promotes growth, economic development, and improvements to the general community. Vacation of right- of- ways does not have to be viewed as a negative ideology. We urge that you give the Township Trustees who know their community and are in charge of maintaining these right-of-ways the voice that their residents elected them to have.