

Funding Local Road Improvements: Options for Townships

Townships are not legally required to contribute to the construction, reconstruction or maintenance of county roads. However, Act 51 does limit how much state funding the Road Commission can spend on local county road construction. Often WCRC is limited to no more than 50% of the project's total cost. The other 50% of a project's cost must come from a "local source" – which often takes the form of a township contribution.

While the recently approved countywide millage and new state revenue will help improve our primary road system, we still have 1,060 miles of local roads that need maintenance and repairs. Washtenaw County is not alone in its challenges securing needed funding. Looking beyond county lines, we see townships throughout Michigan turning to township millages or special assessment districts as a tool to generate the revenue needed to repair and maintain roadways.

In 2016, 75 townships throughout Michigan placed a road millage on the ballot. 93% of the millages passed; 70 passed, and only five failed. The average rate of passage was 67% of voters. We saw our county-wide millage pass by 71% during the November election. We have found that voters tend to support road taxes when there is a detailed plan and a commitment to raise and keep the funds local.

Described below are three options available to townships to raise revenue that can match WCRC's contributions on local road improvements:

Act 51 Millage

Act 51 established the Michigan Transportation Fund (MTF) which distributes state-generated funds to county road agencies, cities/villages and the Michigan Department of Transportation. Act 51 also outlines two options for townships to raise revenue for the maintenance and improvement of local roads.

- Township boards can levy a property tax of no more than 3 mills in any year, without a vote of the people, for the maintenance or improvement of county roads within the township.
- With voter approval, township boards may levy a property tax of no more than 6 mills in any year for the maintenance or improvement of county roads within the township.

Read more in Act 51, section 247.670 "UNEXPENDED BALANCES OF TOWNSHIP FUNDS; APPROPRIATION FOR LOCAL ROAD MAINTENANCE OR IMPROVEMENT"

Township-wide Millage

Section 6 of Article IX of the Constitution of Michigan of 1963 authorizes townships to levy millages with a majority vote of the people. Ypsilanti Charter Township used this option in 2016 to place Proposition C on the ballot to fund recreation, bike paths, sidewalks, roads, parks and general operating purposes. The measure passed with 58% of the vote.

Special Assessment Districts: Township-wide or Neighborhood-to-Neighborhood

Public Act 188 of 1954 allows townships to pay for road improvements through a special assessment district (SAD). Act 188 outlines a specific process for levying a SAD. Scio Township's Board approved a township-wide SAD in 2013 which will raise \$500,000 annually for ten years and will fund improvements on all the gravel roads in the township. Numerous other townships in Michigan have taken this approach. Scio and Lodi Township have also approved neighborhood SAD projects, which are generally initiated by neighbors in a specific subdivision.