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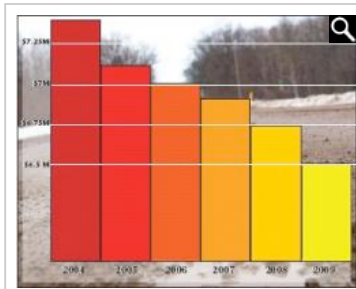
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Front Page January 3, 2010 Search Archives Search

## Declining funding takes toll on county roads

Revenues have fallen 15% over the last five years  
**BY NANCY ANGELLOTTI STAFF WRITER**



**MAYFIELD TWP.** — At their last meeting of the year, members of the Lapeer County Road Commission approved a law enforcement contract with the Sheriff's Dept. for deputy and weighmaster Orrie Smith, which reflects both the success of the program and the impact of diminishing revenues.

The former full-time contract now calls for a combination of full-time and part-time months throughout the year, calibrated to address peak times. The position provides enforcement for commercial traffic, as well as road patrol support, particularly in construction zones.

LCRC Managing Director Rick Pearson said that the road commission has seen a funding decrease of \$949,000 since 2004. "That's a significant change along with increases in costs," Pearson said.

That nearly \$1 million loss in funding over five years represents about 15 percent of the \$6.5 million the county received from the MTF in 2009.

Pearson worked with the Sheriff's Dept. for several months to negotiate a contract that would fit the changing constraints. "This has been an evolution process," he said.

Cost allocation of the county's administrative services also has continued to be a thorn in the side of contract negotiations. Undersheriff Bob Rapson said that he did not expect county administration to be "very pliable" on the matter of the dramatic increase in that category. On the upside, a decrease in cost allocation numbers could come next year.

Also on the upside, Rapson said that successfully prosecuted arrests of intoxicated drivers will now net returns to the police agencies. That means there may be a little more money in the sheriff's department coffers. "You'll get a \$100 fee back for your time and trouble," said Rapson. Fees were previously split between the prosecutor's office and the courts.

Deputy Smith was on hand Wednesday for the approval of the contract between the road commission and the sheriff's department. Chairman Doug Hodge told him: "We know you're doing a good job for us. It's just unfortunate we've got to cut corners."

"It's a win-win position for everyone," said Undersheriff Bob Rapson. "With a collaborative agreement between us, it does serve the public very well."

Along with Smith's contract, shrinking revenues also will have an impact on other road commission personnel. Pearson said that with contract raises due the first of the year, the

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5-member management team, which includes Tami Erickson, Linette Daily, Bill Meinz, Ryan Doyle and Rick Pearson, accepted a wage freeze for the second year in a row.

"I guess I'm just proud of them," Pearson said of team members, commending the step aimed at keeping people in their jobs. He said the road commission operates with a skeleton crew.

Foreman Jack Jostock agreed. "We've got a good, dedicated crew out there."

While funding cuts have impacted the roads, Pearson said that the pending Michigan Transportation Fund payment is actually up for January 2010. The MTF is the primary source of road funding and is tied to gasoline sales.

The \$493,000 payment reflects an increase of \$18,600 over the January 2009 payment, Pearson said, although he noted that last year's January payment was \$48,000 less than 2008.

During 2009, total state transportation fund payments to the county came to almost \$6.5 million. Road commission funding, along with some township contribution, must be spread over more than 1,300 miles of primary and local roads in the county. The cost of rebuilding one mile of primary road approaches \$1 million. Winter maintenance also is a significant expense.

Road commissioners also made organizational decisions for 2010 at their last meeting of the year. Doug Hodge will continue to serve as chairman of the commission. He also will chair the finance and labor committees.

Joe Suma will serve as vice chair of the commission and chair the townships committee. He also will serve as the liaison to the county commission.

Dale Duckert will chair the citizens advisory and M-53 corridor committees.

Rick Pearson continues to serve as managing director and trunkline superintendent.

Bill Meinz will continue in his capacity as county highway engineer and set seasonal weight restrictions as required.

Tami Erickson continues as chief financial officer. Linette Daily is the road commission secretary and privacy officer for the health plan.

James Gatton and Ryan Doyle are authorized agents for checking vehicles for size, weight and load operating on Lapeer County roads.

The road commission will continue to meet bi-weekly during 2010 with alternating morning and evening meetings.



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