RLA Roads Report – June 2022

Neighbors, by now you have read the news that the RLA Board of Directors voted unanimously to raise Retreat landowner annual dues by $200.00, to $500.00 a year. This decision is in large part due to my presentation to our Board in April regarding our roads. I would like to share with you the same information that I shared with our Board members.

I built my home in the Retreat in 1987 and have been a year-round resident ever since. This is the third time that I have taken-on the responsibility of road maintenance and equipment operator. During my time as a resident, wear and tear on our roads has increased dramatically and funding for road maintenance has not kept up. Not by a long shot. We have 12 miles of private roads in the Retreat that we maintain, not including Dunraven Glade, which the county maintains. In order for us to maintain our roads in a safe and reliable condition they must be graded regularly and road materials must be added every year. Drainage ditches and culverts must be maintained for proper drainage, and a certain amount of forestry work (limbing and clearing of trees) must be done. In order to accomplish these things we must have good equipment, trained operators and the means to maintain, repair and replace equipment as appropriate. I was well aware that our current road maintenance budget was inadequate, but even I was surprised at how far behind we have gotten. Looking through some of my old RLA files, I found a copy of the RLA budget from 2006 and compared it to our current budget numbers. Let me share my findings with you:

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| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Line Item** | **2006 Budget** | **Current Budget** | **Variance** |
| Culvert upgrades | $2,000.00 | 0 | ($2,000.00) |
| Dust Treatments | $1,500.00 | 0 | ($1,500.00) |
| Equipment Fuel | $2,000.00 | $1,500.00 | ($500.00) |
| Equipment Rental | $1,500.00 | $2,000.00 | $500.00 |
| Equipment Repair & Maintenance | $5,000.00 | $3,000.00 | ($2,000.00) |
| Road base/materials | $15,000.00 | $15,000.00 | $0 |
| Payroll taxes | $1,000.00 | 0 | ($1,000.00) |
| Payroll wages/Contractor Expense | $3,000.00 | $6.300.00 | $3,300.00 |
| Signs/Mirrors | $200.00 | $200.00 | $0 |
| Total Road Maintenance | $34,200.00 | $28,000.00 | ($6,200.00) |

Note the following facts:

* The current road maintenance budget is $6,200.00 LESS than it was 16 years ago
* The amount budgeted for road base in the current budget is the same amount that was budgeted 16 years ago
* The current amount budgeted for fuel is $500 less than what was budgeted 16 years ago
* Cumulative inflation from 2006 to 2022 is 40.73%. If all we had done was keep up with inflation, the current road maintenance budget should be $48,130.00
* Fuel and Road base prices have exceeded the average rate of inflation
* The number of year-round residents and subsequent traffic from residents and service providers (Propane delivery, Trash, Water, Septic, UPS/FedEx, Contractors, etc.) has increased significantly in the past 16 years. Our 12 miles of roads receive far more wear and tear than they did 16 years ago and yet we have not increased our road maintenance to compensate.
* One mile of recycled asphalt (4 inches thick and 12 feet wide) is approximately 1,162 tons of material. The best price for “RAP”, delivered to the Retreat, as of the end of March 2022, was $33.50 per ton, or $38,927 for one mile of material. Last November the price was $29.00 per ton, delivered. I have not received a recent quote, but with the increases in the price of diesel fuel, I’m sure that trucking costs have pushed-up the price of delivered materials again.
* With 12 miles of roads, it would be optimum if we put down two miles of road base each year, but that is obviously cost prohibitive. But based upon our current budgeted amount we could only afford to put down 1/8th of a mile.
* Capping our roads with recycled asphalt is about half the cost of using class 5 road base, such as is used by Larimer County on Dunraven Glade Road.
* Maintaining a minimum of four inches of road base on roads makes maintenance quicker and causes less wear and tear on our road equipment.

Below is the road maintenance budget that I proposed for the 2022-23 fiscal year:

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Road Maintenance** | **Current Budget** | **Proposed Budget** | **Increase** |
| Wages | $ 6,300.00 | $ 11,550.00 | $ 5,250.00 |
| Equipment Repair/Maint. | $ 3,000.00 | $ 3,000.00 | $ - |
| Signs, Mirrors | $ 200.00 | $ 500.00 | $ 300.00 |
| Fuel | $ 1,500.00 | $ 2,750.00 | $ 1,250.00 |
| Road Base | $ 15,000.00 | $ 50,500.00 | $ 35,500.00 |
| Equipment Rental | $ 2,000.00 | $ 3,500.00 | $ 1,500.00 |
| **Total Roads Expenses** | **$ 28,000.00** | **$ 71,800.00** | **$43,800.00** |

Maintaining good roads is important for maintaining good property values, less wear and tear on our vehicles, good drainage, and is important for our safety, ensuring good access for emergency vehicles and the ability for on-coming vehicles to be able to pass each other in most locations. I will be retiring from YMCA of the Rockies in February and I look forward to having much more time to devote to improving and maintaining our roads in the upcoming years. You will note that in my proposed budget, wages increased by over $5,000 annually. That is not due to an increase in the pay rate, but rather to a significant increase in the number of hours of work on the roads.

**Black Creek Drive and Lower Streamside Drive update:** As most of you are aware, last year we endured flash floods from the Miller Fork River, Black Creek or both on 12 separate occasions. Streamside Drive, from County Road 43 to where Miller Fork River goes under it at the furthest west location, is platted “public access”. All of Black Creek Drive, from the intersection of Streamside Drive to the intersection of Copper Hill is also platted public access. They are still Retreat roads, that we maintain and improve, but if public access is not maintained, the county can step in and re-establish access. During the 2013 flood, Black Creek was completely washed-out and a large portion of Streamside Drive was also impassable. The county came in and spent a lot of money to re-build these two roads. Likewise, after the second and third flash floods last summer, when we realized we did not have the resources to continue to restore these roads, the county came in with materials and equipment to restore access. After their materials were continually washed away, Black Creek Drive was closed for the remainder of the summer and engineers from around the state were brought in to develop options to restore the roads and improve the resilience to future high water events. The first recommendation from the diverse engineering team was for the county to abandon Black Creek Drive and buy-out the landowners along it, stating that there is no way to build an affordable road that can coexist with Black Creek through that narrow canyon. Larimer County Road and Bridge quickly rebuffed this as not an option they would consider for even a moment. The option that was eventually embraced was what we have now. Two four foot corrugated steel culverts on Streamside Drive were replaced with six foot concrete culverts. Two sections of stream channel embankments were reinforced with concrete block and the narrowest section of Black Creek was widened with a combination of blasting and impact hammer and then concrete and curbing were installed through this narrow section to ensure it would not washout again. Six culverts were removed and low-water crossings and water bars (berms on either side of the crossings) were built. The theory guiding this design is to allow high water events to move through the river channel without washing-out the road. In each case where the river crosses the road, berms ensure the water is funneled back into the channel rather than down the road. It makes sense and looks like it should protect our roads, but it has proven less than friendly to most low clearance vehicles. During the winter, ice build-ups at the low water crossings created problems and this spring, the larger volume of water has deepened some of the crossings, making them problematic for low clearance vehicles. We will continue to work with Larimer County Road and Bridge to develop improvements to the design that ensure the greatest protection for the roads without causing damage to vehicles.

A couple of things to keep in mind: The work that has been done on Black Creek Drive and Streamside Drive has cost Larimer County nearly $2 million, a price tag we could never afford. The same experts who accurately predicted our flash floods last year, subsequent to the Cameron Peak Fire, are saying we should expect, at the very least, another two to three years of flash flooding. In general, they expect the number of floods to decrease each year, but point out that none of the flooding last year was caused by rainfall of more than one inch of rain within an hour. It is common for one or both of these drainages to receive at least one storm a year that drops more than an inch of rainfall in an hour. We should expect fewer high water events, but could see one or two flash floods that exceed anything we experienced last year.

Some residents have asked why we don’t install culverts or bridges where the low water crossings are. By doing so, we would be ignoring what the engineers have cautioned, that culverts will plug during a high water event and washout the roads. To install crossings that would withstand the predicted high water events would require concrete bridges at a price tag in excess of $80,000 each. Our best approach is to work with the County to reach a happy medium for the next few years, until the risk of flash flooding is significantly reduced. In the meantime, we should be setting aside funds for new crossings when that time comes.