Those utility costs are really an investment in the total infrastructure of the city and replaces water & sewer lines that are many decades old. At tonight's meeting, representatives of Umbaugh and Associates, the City's financial advisor on the project, presented a report that indicated the average residential monthly bill would need to increase as little as \$1.00 for wastewater, \$1.24 for water and \$2.57 for electricity. Wastewater and electric rates in the city have not increased for more than 5 years and the last general water increase was in 2012.

"The remaining approximate \$2 million represents the City's share of paving and other surface improvements," stated Wellman. "If you think about it that means the State is covering 88% of the cost of the surface work, which is very reasonable compared to other State highway projects." As was explained at the meeting, this \$2 million bond would be re-paid from Tax Increment Financing (TIF) revenues paid by those present and future businesses that have built or expanded within the City's three TIF districts.

"While this will require utility rates to increase slightly," Wellman said, "we can do this project without raising taxes one bit. And the utility work is something that will eventually have to be done anyway."

Besides utility infrastructure, the project calls for splitting the project into three distinct segments, east, center and west. The design in each segment will be unique to each, but include improvements such as new curbs, sidewalks, multi-use trail, street lights, ADA access ramps, and much-needed improved drainage.

Wellman and Nick Jahn with VS Engineering explained that it is possible that utility work in the east and west sections of the road could be done as early as next year, with paving and concrete work in those two segments to come in late 2019 and 2020. The largest section between East Third and State Streets will take longer as the funds from the State will only be available in annual installments out to the year 2023.

Wellman stated, "The City has the option to do nothing and watch INDOT fill potholes occasionally and maybe put a surface layer of asphalt down in a few years, but that doesn't truly solve the problem. There remains work to be done before a final agreement is inked with INDOT, and once signed, the project will still take 4 or 5 years for completion."

In the final analysis," Wellman concluded, "it should be a project that citizens can take pride in and certainly have a smoother ride and more pleasing appearance for residents and visitors."

======= (For more information, contact Mayor Wellman, 812.254.5575.) ========