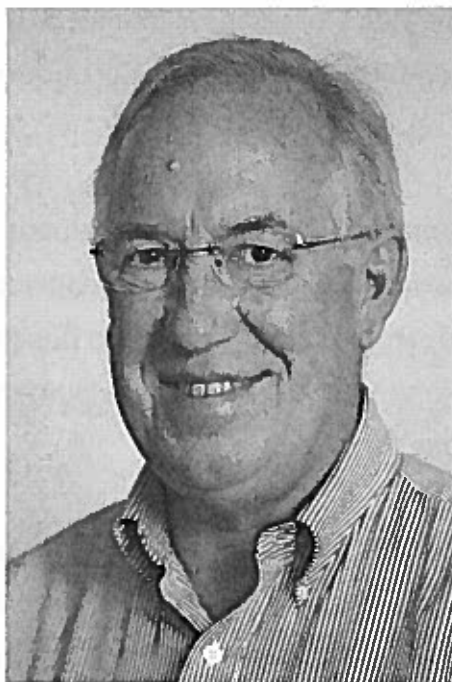


http://www.record-eagle.com/opinion/op-ed-bill-would-undermine-local-professionals-control/article_58b2076e-791d-5675-8bf9-9f7585adb974.html

Op-Ed: Bill would undermine local professionals, control

BY RICHARD LEWIS Apr 11, 2018



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Out of sight out of mind could easily describe the thought process of most Michigan residents when it comes to underground infrastructure. Unlike roads, we cannot easily see the deterioration and wonder why or how this could happen. Many individuals, when they turn on their faucet or flush their toilet, never think about how it gets there or where it goes, but if you are the community operating that system that is all you think about.

According to Gov. Rick Snyder's 21st Century Infrastructure Commission, most of the drinking and wastewater systems throughout our state need to be repaired or replaced. The commission has found that most of our major water infrastructure systems are between 50 and 100 years.

Clearly, solutions are needed. But we must be careful to wind up not creating another problem in our attempts to address this issue. What our communities don't need are constraints that prevent Michigan communities in rebuilding their infrastructure with the materials they think work best for

their system.

These municipal systems are operated locally and local governments have the obligation to design, operate and maintain them to ensure the protection of the public's health and safety. Several times now, legislation that would restrict the ability of local project managers and engineers to decide the best pipe materials to use in their communities has been introduced by Michigan lawmakers. These bills have been introduced under the guise of opening municipal bids to more competition and driving down costs. Unfortunately, all this legislation does is undermine local water professionals and local control.

This proposed legislation will fundamentally alter the procurement process in Michigan and eliminate the collaborative design process between utilities and their engineers. Currently, engineers work closely with their utility and local government to develop and design these systems. This collaborative process is critical for long-term planning, development, maintenance and cost-containment of public projects across the state.

In Traverse City and communities across Michigan, we utilize several types of materials in our system. Not all pipes are suitable for every project, due to a number of different factors such as weather or soil conditions. We firmly believe that the choice of pipe materials should always be based on function and reliability.

The people who are the most knowledgeable and have the most experience to make the right decisions are our local water professionals who have many years of training, education, and experience in this arena. It is – and should remain – up to them and our communities to determine what works best for our systems.

Elected officials in Lansing need to understand that engineers and local communities are not asking for this legislation. Instead, local communities oppose it because there is no problem with the current procurement process. Let's hope our state lawmakers will oppose Senate Bill 157 and House Bill 5723 and support our ability to protect your health and safety and leaving the decisions of control at the local level, not with the state.

About the author: Richard I. Lewis is a city commissioner in Traverse City and trustee with the Michigan Municipal League.

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