

Township Commissioners, or Road Improvements and Maintenance on a Business Basis.

Many councils are now considering the question of road improvement and maintenance. It is well known that most municipalities have no particular plan other than that which suggests itself as the work becomes necessary. The adoption of a business-like system would result in superior work and decreased taxation.

Human nature is the same the world over, and the favoring of doubtful voters and ward magnates in the purchase of material, and by giving small jobs of work, has been known to be the means of continuing in office many representatives who, under other circumstances, would never have thought of violating the solemn obligations to which they subscribed when assuming office.

The direction and oversight of municipal improvements should be placed in the hands of a supervisor or commissioner, who should be a man specially adapted to the work, and whose tenure of office should be as secure as that of the average clerk or treasurer. The supervisor should have charge of all road and bridge improvement, and should be required to report to the council at each meeting; no works should be undertaken until they have been reported upon by him and approved by the council. He would not necessarily be actively engaged during the whole year. He should have charge of all township machinery and material required in the work connected with this department. The many economies that would result will readily suggest themselves to councilors of experience.

PATHMASTERS.

Road divisions, or "beats," should be about three miles in length. A pathmaster should be a permanent officer, and his division should be such, that the most of his travel will lead him over the greatest portion of it. He should not receive a salary, but should, as a slight recompense be preferred in doing small jobs under the supervisor, where the work is not considered of sufficient importance to be let by contract. He should in addition, give special attention to all emergency work, such as washouts, broken culverts and bridges. If the time required to oversee statute labor in this division, is more than would be needed for his own statute labor, he should be paid for such excess under certificate of the supervisor or council, the object being to secure proper supervision of all work performed; the council or supervisor to determine whether the excess time was actually necessary to oversee the work of the division in accordance with the local by-law of rules and regulations, which should provide for this.

DUTIES OF SUPERVISOR.

1. The supervisor should prepare a plan of his district, or township, showing all

roads, and the location on them, of all culverts, bridges and watercourses, classifying roads according to their requirements.

2. He should prepare a list of all culverts and bridges, showing dimensions, material used in construction, their condition, and the direction of the watercourses passing through them, with memoranda as to the source of the water and location of the outlet.

3. The plans and records should show, as to roads, whether they are of gravel, stone or earth, graded or ungraded, the system of drainage, and nature and extent of traffic upon them. He should carefully study the present and future requirements of traffic on all roads, the class of roads best suited to such traffic, the width and depth of metal, width of graded portion, amount of crown and other details of construction.

4. He should possess full information as to location, extent and quality of material suitable for road construction and amount of plank and timber obtainable from ratepayers in the township or district suitable for repairs.

5. He should report to the council as early as possible in each year, showing the number and location of culverts and small bridges to be rebuilt or repaired, with a detailed statement of all material required for this work, and an estimate of the cost. It would also be advantageous to have a probable estimate of material required during the following year, presented each fall so that, if thought advisable, it may be purchased and delivered on the ground during winter months, or other most convenient season, so as to utilize as much as possible the labor of ratepayers during the slack season.

6. His report should specify the condition of all bridges, indicating those which require repairs or reconstruction together with an estimate of cost, and a statement dealing with such special protection work on streams as he may deem worth the council's consideration. There should also be a reference to any needed re-location or deviation of existing roads, with a view to doing away with bridges, culverts, expensive grades, cuts or other features which tend to prevent permanent work and economic maintenance.

7. He should consult with all pathmasters and report to the council, showing the number of days' labor in each division, the work to be undertaken, and the amount of money which should be appropriated by the council to properly utilize the statute labor.

8. He should arrange with divisions desiring to compound statute labor for a term of years, with view to construction of permanent and finished work.

9. He should take stock annually, and report to council on all machinery and implements, showing their condition and where kept.

10. He should carefully examine all

parts of the township where gravel and stone exist, and should, by borings and tests, determine the quality and extent, and report thereon to the council. All material, stone, plank, gravel, etc., should be purchased by the supervisor in large quantities, and under instructions from the council, the required amount to be determined by his estimates referred to above. As far as possible the material should be purchased by tender, and due consideration should be given to any ratepayer having material for sale. When purchased it should be delivered and stored at convenient points, and placed in charge of, and used by the pathmaster, subject to the order of the supervisor and in emergency work.

11. He should prepare specifications of all work for which the council makes money appropriations. Contracts should be awarded to lowest bidder, if proper security is given, but the work should be subject to the approval of the supervisor, and all accounts should be certified by him before payment.

A municipality is merely a business corporation, the people its stockholders, the council its board of directors, and the officials the managing staff. If as much attention were paid to the management of a municipality, as is devoted to a business enterprise of similar proportions, economy in many directions would follow. No business enterprise could afford to change its board of directors or manager each year, or trust its affairs to an inexperienced executive.

The present system of electing councilors by wards, together with the ward system of expenditure in operation in many townships, is the cause of much municipal extravagance and mismanagement. The great bane of municipal government is the ward system. There is not inducement offered the ward member to interest himself in the general affairs of his municipality. The idea of a council elected irrespective of ward division is the correct one. It enlarges the constituency of a councillor, and calls for a wider application of his influence. The aim should be to adapt the public expenditure and improvements without consideration of ward boundaries.

The township is a small enough unit for local government. It is impossible to find a township, the four wards of which require the same amount of money each year. Then again, there is a great difference of opinion as to how such money should be expended. Some are inclined to be economical and others opposite, with the result that each member tries to get the lions share. A councillor who, by manipulation, succeeds in securing this, is sure of re-election. The ward is his first, last, and only consideration. On the other hand, in a council elected by a whole municipality, the members are not interested in any particular section, and each receives what its actual requirements demand.