

# The LEADER OPINION

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## Selling city water a good idea

**THE ISSUE** | Repairing the city of Corning's failing infrastructure.

**OUR OPINION** | Selling the city's water to natural gas drilling companies is the way to go.

If you live on a city street that does not have cracks, bumps or pot holes, consider yourself lucky. Then take a drive down say ... East Fourth Street ... and see how the rest of us live.

Don't forget to buckle up, because it's going to be a bumpy ride.

You don't need to go to East Fourth, pick almost any street. Dodge Avenue? We should change our name to Dodge City.

Swerving to avoid cracks, bumps, pot holes and craters is a way of life for Corning residents. So are broken tie rods and bad tires. And we all know how much it costs to get a vehicle aligned (approximately \$69.95).

Most city streets have cracks and small pot holes. Others are best to avoid entirely.

Take East Fourth Street, which has a 20 percent quality rating, out of a possible 100. A rough winter and snow plows will make it even worse.

On second thought, *don't* take East Fourth. Corning residents have long complained, shook their heads and looked for someone to blame for the embarrassing condition of their roads. It's time to do something about them.

Unfortunately, for years, if not decades, little has been done to repair or even maintain the streets as the City Council short-changed the road budget in an attempt to keep taxes low.

Meanwhile, the streets were deteriorating, and big problems are usually expensive to fix, and this one is.

In this year's budget the council spent about \$600,000 on street repairs. That's not nearly enough, and councilmen know that. A council committee formed to tackle the problem found that 40 percent of the city's streets are deficient. Last week, the committee released a 14-year preliminary plan to pay for the necessary work to bring the overall road quality rating from 52 percent to 70 percent.

Of course, it comes with a hefty price tag: \$31.7 million. Over 14 years, that breaks down to an additional 3 percent in taxes in 2012 and an additional 2 percent each of the following 13 years.

That means, if the plan is approved by the full council later this year, street funding would increase to \$1.2 million in 2012-13 and to nearly \$2 million by 2015-16.

Who is going to pay for this? Unless another avenue of funding is located, the taxpayers.

Now, councilmen aren't stupid. They realize the plan will result in higher tax bills than many residents can afford to pay. So they are looking for other ways to pay for the repairs.

And while they're at it, they are also mulling funding options to pay for the city's aging water and sewer lines. While out of site and out of the minds of residents, the pipes, many 100 years old, are deteriorating as quickly as the city streets. Repairing the lines won't come cheaply, either.

According to estimates, it would likely cost \$125,000 per block to replace sewer lines and about \$250,000 a block to replace water lines.

We urge them to consider all options, no matter how controversial. For example, selling water to drilling companies to be used in natural gas drilling. Although, it's banned in New York state, high-volume, hydraulic fracturing natural gas drilling is legal in Pennsylvania.

Gas drilling companies need millions of gallons of chemically-treated water and sand to break up the shale and release the gas buried in the Marcellus.

According to city officials, Corning has plenty of water to spare.

Steve Panton, city director of water distribution services, told *The Leader* that on average, city customers use about 1.35 million gallons of water a day. The city's five water wells can provide up to 6 million gallons daily, he said.

Right now, officials are in private talks with a drilling company as they keep an eye on a deal in the works between the Village of Painted Post and Shell Oil. The village could earn approximately \$2.5 million annually selling a million gallons of water a day.

The Town of Erwin is already earning \$500,000 a year selling its water.

Now, we have heard from readers who believe selling water could hurt the city if there were a drought. However, it would take a Texas-sized drought to affect our water levels, and if that did occur, perhaps the city could have a clause in its contract allowing it to sell fewer gallons or suspend sales altogether.

If the city fails to reach a deal to sell its water, they'll have to explore other funding sources. But right now, there aren't many.

Would you like to buy a few raffle tickets? How about a few *thousand*?

Seriously, we're at the point of no return. Something must be done now to fix our city streets, and sewer and water lines, and it's going to cost us.

"There's no easy way out," Panton said. He's absolutely correct.

Selling our water to natural gas drillers is the way to go.