

“What are 3 top priorities your local town government officials should pursue to improve the quality of life in your community?”

Written By: Ella Hansen, Waterford Union High School

Town government is closely connected to the people they serve. People in the community can voice their concerns at town board meetings or call their elected officials directly when needed. My community, the Town of Norway, has beautiful farmland, lakes, nature, and homes scattered throughout. I have grown up in an amazing town, however, there are improvements the town government officials should pursue to make it even better. The improvements would include: expanding broadband internet, construction of bike/walking trails throughout the town, and upgrading some of the roads.

According to a 2024 report from BroadbandNow, only “78.3 percent of state residents had access to broadband or high-speed internet” (Kaeding, par. 3) and Wisconsin ranks 45th in the nation. Broadband internet is not available in some areas of my town, but it is an important and necessary resource for individuals that live and work in the community.

The people in the more rural areas either live without internet, or use unreliable slow satellite internet, due to the unavailability of high-speed service. The lack of high-speed internet creates a hardship for students as it takes longer to complete their online homework assignments, and they can lose connection during virtual school snow days. Rural businesses are less of a global economy as their orders for goods outside of the community may take longer to process and are forced to sell only locally.

According to the Public Service Commission (PSC) of Wisconsin, “the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law created the Broadband Equity, Access, and Deployment (BEAD) Program

with a goal of providing high-speed internet for all Wisconsinites.” (psc.wi.gov, par.

1). Wisconsin is allocated over \$1 billion in federal funds through a formula based on the state’s proportion of locations lacking access to broadband service using Federal Communications Commission (FCC) maps. Besides the Public Service Commission of Wisconsin (psc.wi.gov), the University of Wisconsin Extension on Community Economic Development (economicdevelopment.extension.wisc.edu), and the Wisconsin Office of Rural Prosperity (ruralwi.com) webpages are all helpful resources for town officials who have any questions on how to navigate funding for residents in need.

The construction of bike/walking trails throughout the town would be beneficial for not only the health benefits of walking and cycling amongst nature but also connecting residents with others from subdivisions to rural areas. The county has a walk/bike trail in a small portion of the town that runs along a state highway. If I wanted to walk or ride on the trail, I would either walk or bike a couple miles on a busy narrow town road to reach a portion of the trail or drive my car to a parking lot close to the trail.

My friends and I enjoy walking for enjoyment and exercise. When a car drives on our 45 or 55 MPH roads, we do not have a lot of room to walk on the side of the road and some cars do not slow down or move over, which is a safety hazard. Constructing trails would allow the community to walk safely while seeing parts of the town we normally don’t experience from a car such as wildflowers, farm fields, and nature.

Most of the roads I drive on in my area of the town are in fairly good condition. I don’t encounter many potholes or large bumps. When I was thinking about priorities my town should pursue, I decided to drive to sections of the town I often do not use. There, amongst the farm fields and subdivisions in the outskirts, I found roads that were very bumpy from deep cross

cracks, narrow with little to no shoulders, and many had pothole patches and rough surfaces. When many of the town roads were first paved, the town was smaller, people did not travel as much, and roads were used primarily by agriculture and school buses. Today there are more residents who travel for work, school events, and children's extracurricular activities. I recognize that the cost of maintaining or reconstructing all the roads in the town is extremely expensive. It is my hope that town officials continue to pursue funding assistance programs from the state and federal government that can help with more road work being completed.

When I attended Badger Girls State this past year, I learned the importance of government officials working together with their community on decisions for the betterment of all. Local town government officials are attentive to the needs of the community because they live here, are accessible, and participate in community events. Although funding restrictions and other priorities may supersede mine, I believe many community members and perhaps board members share my same view of priorities to improve the quality of life in my community.

Sources:

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