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RIVERDALE - Mayor to county: 'Take my road, please.'

(by Leslie Scott - Staff Writer - February 24, 2009)

RIVERDALE - Twenty years ago, Riverdale took possession of Newark-Pompton Turnpike from Morris County. Mayor William Budesheim said he now wants to give it back, which would save money.

"If we have winter like we've been having, you are probably looking at a saving over about \$10,000 a year," he said.

Budesheim wants to give the road back to get more back from the county. In 2008, the mayor said the municipality collected \$880,687 through the courts, though \$304,116 went to the county and \$248,287 went to the state.

A portion of the funds the county collects goes into the Motor Vehicle Fines Dedicated Trust Fund that is used to repair roads and bridges and purchase vehicles and supplies like salt trucks and sand.

The mayor said that according to the county, it takes in between \$4 million and \$5 million annually from municipalities. Also, the county spends less than \$4 million annually from this fund, and at the end of 2008, it had a balance of \$8.25 million sitting in the account.

In 2008, the mayor said, the county only reimbursed Riverdale \$17,000 for making improvements to the Hamburg Turnpike and Mathews Avenue intersection, which was a project that cost about \$150,000.

"They take so much money out of the towns from the tickets we write and process and we are getting so little in return. So in a sense of fair play, if we would hopefully prevail, they would agree to take back the road," the mayor said.

The mayor announced he will request the giveback and tell the county it should also purchase one police car for each municipality in Morris County using this fund at the next Freeholder board meeting.

Purchasing the cars would cost \$1.2 million and the county would still have \$7 million left, the mayor said.

"In light of our police department that is writing all these tickets and is sending these funds, I think it would be appropriate that they buy all these towns a police car," said the mayor.

The mayor has expressed opposition to this fund for some time now. He said he has spoken with Assemblyman Alex DeCroce, who agreed to write legislation that would do away with it.

"So when you look at that tax, it is a disproportionate amount of money we are sending to the county, and it's our police departments that are working out there that are hustling and doing their job and bringing in this money. I think it is unfair," said Budesheim.

Morris County supervising engineer Christopher Vitz said the county has not established or re-established roads in a while.

"(Budesheim) would have to take it to the Freeholders and the county engineer. I don't think we've taken any roads other than John Street in Morristown because we built a county jail facility on that street (in 2000)," Vitz said.

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