

## **‘A very patient man’**

**Bob Taylor**

**North Bethlehem Township,**

**Washington County**

**30 years of service**

BY BRENDA WILT, ASSOCIATE EDITOR / PENNSYLVANIA TOWNSHIP NEWS

If there’s one thing Bob Taylor has learned during his three decades as a public servant, it’s patience. The North Bethlehem Township, Washington County, supervisor is known for allowing residents to take all the time they need to express their concerns and opinions at public meetings.

“Bob doesn’t set time limits on public comment,” township secretary-treasurer Russell Mowl says. “He wants to let residents be able to say what’s on their mind. He’s a very patient man.”

That’s just part of being a good supervisor, Taylor believes. “You have to be able to listen to what people have to say,” he says. “Depending on what they’re looking for, you may not be able to help them. Sometimes the law may not allow you to do what they want. Then you have to be able to explain that to them.

“Of course, if there’s something you can do for your residents,” he adds, “it doesn’t hurt to go out of your way to do it.”

## **Good things come to those who wait**

Change has come slowly to North Bethlehem Township, which is just fine with its chairman. He says one of the things he's most proud of is staying on track with the little bit of controlled progress the township has seen.

Most of the roads are still dirt and gravel, although Taylor has done his part to make sure they're good roads. He started at the township in the public works department before being elected supervisor.

"I've enjoyed learning how to do the road work," he says. "I've tried to keep up with anything that helps us do that better, such as training through the Dirt and Gravel Road Program."

When he first joined the township, roads were resurfaced with red dog, a byproduct of burned coal or slate and a plentiful resource in the coal-mining region.

"It changes from black to a yellowish red material, which is how it got its name," he explains. "We used to break it up manually to spread it on the roads. Now, we use limestone. We have done a number of road projects through the Center for Dirt and Gravel Road Studies."

Taylor has also learned to bide his time when spending township money. "I've learned there's no one way that is best for purchasing equipment," he says. "You have to shop around to get the best deal."

One of those ways has turned out to be sharing the expense with a neighboring municipality. Last year, the township joint-purchased a paver with Somerset Township.

"We have worked with Somerset and other municipalities for several years, seal coating roads, sharing equipment, and so on," he says. "It seems like over the years, each

municipality has purchased equipment the others don't have. It just makes sense to help each other. It's been beneficial to everyone involved."

### **Being fiscally conservative**

Patience for Taylor's township has also meant not pushing for programs and services that are economically unsound.

"For a long time, we had a police department, but it became unaffordable," he says. "We looked into regionalization with the help of the state Department of Community and Economic Development, but it's still too expensive."

Taylor says the proposed legislation that would charge townships that receive State Police coverage a flat fee per capita would bankrupt the township. "Once you get into the third year of the proposal [which would charge municipalities \$156 per capita], it would exceed 50 percent of our budget," he says. "That's just not feasible."

Another prospect that the township has considered and rejected is public sewer. "Ninety percent of the township has onlot sewage systems," Taylor says. "We have made an effort to extend the public sewer, but no one has come up with a way to do that cost-effectively."

This fiscal conservatism has served the township well, the supervisor says. "We have never had an audit come out as anything but exemplary," he says proudly.

### **'A municipal family'**

Taylor is quick to point out that he's only one cog in a well-oiled machine. He points to his family as a helpful resource, especially his wife of 33 years. "We are a

municipal family,” Taylor says. “My wife worked as the secretary-treasurer for a neighboring borough for 10 or so years and now works full-time as secretary-treasurer for Union Township.” The couple has a grown son and daughter and a grandson.

“It drives the kids crazy sometimes when my wife and I talk about township and borough issues,” he says. “I can offer her suggestions about road issues, while she helps me with my weakness: paperwork.”

Taylor’s municipal family also includes his fellow township supervisors and staff, as well as residents.

“We have a good board [of supervisors] right now,” he says. “We come from different backgrounds and skills, and everyone brings something different to the table.”

Secretary-treasurer Russell Mowl says Taylor is well-respected among the other townships in the county and the residents.

“You never hear anyone say anything bad about Bob,” he says. “He’s well-liked in the community. He’s the one everyone goes to when they have a problem.

“I think the residents are very lucky to have someone like Bob as a supervisor,” he continues. “I’ve always said that when Bob goes, I go. If he gets voted out, I’m going with him.”

Taylor jokes that that isn’t likely to happen for a while. “I don’t know if there’s something about this particular seat,” he muses, “but the gentleman I replaced was in office for 44 years. I can’t imagine running more than one more time, but who knows?”

Township residents who wonder how long Taylor will continue in the job will just have to be patient.

**PHOTO OUTLINE:**

North Bethlehem Township's Bob Taylor, a supervisor for three decades, doesn't believe in imposing time limits on public comments. "He wants to let residents be able to say what's on their mind. He's a very patient man," secretary-treasurer Russell Mowl says.

*(Socolow Photography)*