

OPINION

EDITORIAL

Council should reconsider charging for reports

The Wauseon City Council is currently studying a proposal to bill insurance companies of out-of-town residents involved in vehicular accidents for copies of accident reports. While their intentions – to raise money for the city’s coffers – are good, experience in other similar communities such as Wapakoneta shows not much money is to be made, and billing creates more ill-will than that small amount revenue is worth.

Here are the arguments on both sides of this issue.

The council can argue that, if, put into place this policy does not hinder a person’s right to access public records. Council can cite the state allowing them to recoup costs of rescue runs on health insurance plans. So, they might argue; why shouldn’t they be allowed to bill auto insurance for accident reports?

Insurance companies say this will raise the cost of car insurance, and this will be passed on to policy holders. Insurance companies must prove increased costs to the state. However, as most insurance companies refuse to pay these fees, and are not obligated to pay, their costs will not go up.

Police spend significant time, resources and equipment investigating accidents. Why shouldn’t the municipality be reimbursed for this, council can argue.

However, accident reports are already part of the public record, and except for a small charge for photocopying and mailing, charging fees above and beyond those already established by the state, we believe, is wrong.

If this issue receives council approval, then what will towns and other govern-

ment entities begin charging for next?

The council says residents, those within the city limits, will not be charged for copies.

This is tantamount to hanging out a “Visitors Not Welcome Here” sign. For example, a visitor from a nearby community, such as Delta, is in Wauseon, shopping at the grocery store, at a pharmacy, purchasing clothes and hardware items and fuel. He is spending money in Wauseon, providing revenue for local businesses, helping local employment, and, therefore, helping put revenue into city coffers.

Unfortunately, he has an accident and his insurance company is asked to pay for a copy of the incident report. His personal reaction, understandably so, might be to stop shopping in Wauseon.

We are already paying for these records to be made and to be kept and now let’s pay to have access to them, as well.

Second scenario. A visitor from Metamora also works in Wauseon. Metamora has a one percent income tax. That is withheld and paid to Metamora. The visitor also pays a half-percent of income tax to Wauseon. Shouldn’t he be treated the same as a tax paying Wauseon resident?

Are we being absurd? Isn’t this a logical extension? Public employees (elected, appointed and hired) are the maker and keeper of public records, not their owner. The residents own these records.

Wauseon does not have a financial crisis. In fact, it is enjoying a well-balanced and conservative budget. There is no need to generate additional revenue or to alienate visitors to our community.