

Abayateye: Secor – for the greater good

Self-interest and self-preservation: These are important motivations of individual action.

We can all claim to care more about others than ourselves in every situation, which could probably be true – sometimes. But the truth is that commitment to impeccable altruism tends to fade away when we realize that our right to self-preservation is challenged.

I think this is what explains the contentions around the proposed expansions to the section of Secor Road between Bancroft and Central.

It's not that people feel the expansion isn't needed; it's more about whether they're willing to make the necessary sacrifices in order for it to happen.

No matter its form, the proposed expansion would require residents to forfeit aspects of the lifestyles they're used to. It may mean leaving the neighborhood altogether or losing the benefits of a luxurious Ottawa Hills school district education for their kids or, yet, the worst: losing good chunks of their yards.

The question that we must all answer, however, is whether these sacrifices are necessary – of course, for the greater good?

We should ask ourselves if it's right for us to expect these people – most of whom have lived in their homes for decades – to just give up this right. And would they be greedy in choosing to double down and stay put, especially in a society that prides itself in guaranteeing protections for private rights and properties?

Frankly, I'm in a dilemma about these issues, and I hope you are too because these don't lend themselves to a simple "yes" or "no" answer.

I do think that individuals have the right to seek personal preservation. Yet, in severe situations such as this I believe that the collective good should take precedence.

Let me put this situation into perspective. That stretch of road has two lanes in both directions with each measuring nine feet wide. It's a very narrow stretch, one which had 199 crashes between 2013 and 2015 alone. It's probably fair to call it one of the most terrifying roads in Toledo, regardless of whether you're an experienced driver or just a novice.

The City of Toledo and Village of Ottawa Hills presented residents with four proposals to consider.

The first two would widen the existing lanes, add a left-turn lane and a median as well as two roundabouts at both the Bancroft and Kenwood intersections. The only difference between these is the additional walkways on either side included in only the first proposal.

City officials and engineers would prefer one of these choices, but the residents criticize the negative impacts they come with. Particularly, they pointed to both potential personal losses and revenue losses to the Ottawa Hills school district. Instead, they would rather have two broader lanes with a turn lane at the middle or, rather, leave the road as it is presently.

What is not in dispute is that motorists know something needs done about the situation. But, clearly, that'll not happen if we continue to count on these residents to know and do what is right by society.

It helps the democratic process that the authorities are trying to explain all the benefits of expansion and get them

to support it, but if all of what they see are the personal losses, it'd be hard to get this support.

It's in these types of situations that established authorities become important. Both the city and the village have legitimate power to get these residents to do what they must do.

The federal government does this well when it invokes the "eminent domain" clause. This clause allows the government or its agency to take private property for public use after providing some compensation. Local authorities have their own ways around this issue too.

That leaves us with the other question about whether expanding this road is an urgent public need. Each person's response, I'd imagine, depends on where he or she stands on the issue – especially whether he'll or she'll be directly affected by the construction.

Yet whatever our motivations are for answering the question, I hope that we'll all agree to do right by the public.

I understand that it is hard for a person to give up a place that he or she has become emotionally attached to, but is that emotional attachment worth the possible loss of human lives?

The truth is that sometimes I feel safer on I-75 with all those semi-trailers and box trucks competing over the highway with me than I feel on Secor.

And the fact that I feel that way, and I have reason to think others share this feeling, should matter to the people entrusted with making the difficult but necessary policy choices for this city.

It should also matter to Secor's residents that the majority of their fellow city residents feel this bad about something they're so unwilling to let go.

Of course, these people are entitled to staying put and enjoying the sanctity of their properties, but so are the majority of us who care about our safety on Secor.

So back to the question of whether it is right for the majority of us to expect the residents to make these sacrifices: I say yes. Yes, not because I care less about their right to self-preservation, but because in this case, I feel the greater good justifies that request.

Philemon Abayateye is a Ph.D. student in the Department of Geography and Planning and the IC's Opinion Editor.