

November 1, 2007

Proposal could mean redistricting, extra election

Consolidation decision is expected in mid-December

By Robert Annis

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Even though a new Zionsville Town Council will take office Jan. 1 following next week's general election, new districts may need to be drawn and another election held if a proposed reorganization ultimately passes.

Earlier this year, Zionsville and Union and Eagle townships formed the Communities of the Zionsville Area for Better Government Committee to discuss possible consolidation. The committee's recommendation is expected in mid-December.

At a recent meeting, committee member Alan Townsend said if the consolidation is approved, new town council districts may need to be drawn to incorporate Union and Eagle townships.

Instead of a whole new election in 2008, the council could decide to appoint two new members to serve until the next scheduled council election in 2011, Townsend said. Indiana law allows three to seven members to serve on town councils, and the Zionsville council currently has five members.

Although each candidate must live in the district he or she represents, the entire community votes for all of the candidates.

Eagle Township Trustee Judith Essex said other options also are being considered. She encouraged residents to attend the committee's meetings, with the next one scheduled for at 7:30 p.m. Nov. 15 at Zionsville Town Hall.

The last time the town council expanded was 2001, when James Ray and street department supervisor Lance Lantz were appointed by the council. Lantz resigned his post in 2003 to assume full-time duties as department supervisor. Art Harris was named as his replacement. Ray lost his District 5 seat to Michelle Barrett in this year's May primary.

Union Township Trustee Candace Ulmer said representation on a consolidated council should be equal. "We have three different areas with three different tax rates," she said. "But when we're talking about governing, we need to be as equal as possible. For this (potential consolidation) to survive and have everyone accept it, we really need equal representation from all three areas."

Harris said he is leaning toward appointing two members to the council, citing the expense of a new election. The May primary election cost \$19,000, according to Andrew Wood, elections and voter registration administrator for Boone County.

"If we can avoid that (another election in 2008) and it's legal, I would prefer it," Harris said.

In addition to the costs of conducting the May primary election this year, it was also the most expensive election in the town's history in regard to how much money the candidates spent to get elected. Campaign finance reports indicate challengers Barrett, Matt Price, Mark Plassman and Tim Haak spent about \$70,000 -- out of nearly \$100,000 spent by all of the candidates.

The strategy worked for Barrett, Price and Haak, who along with incumbents David Carr and Harris are unopposed in next week's general election.

Townsend said he didn't think a provision calling for an early election would mean the town council would reject it, but it wouldn't necessarily be its preferred alternative.

"I haven't gotten the sense from the council that it's weighing heavily on their minds," he said. "I know the three would be councilpersons because they've been coming to the meetings, but I really don't know the other two. Whether they're having discussions among themselves about that, I just don't know."

"I grew up in a family where my dad was a state legislator having to go through re-election every two or four years. They're not fun things to go through. I don't know of anyone in their right mind that would invite one." For the reorganization to pass, the three government entities must pass the proposal. It would then go before the voters in a referendum, tentatively scheduled for the May 2008 primary. If passed by voters, the new government could go into effect as soon as January 2009.