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Trustees could become Council members

Township leaders say it would be a good transition into consolidated government

By Robert Annis

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Township trustees Candace Ulmer and Judith Essex could be trading in their job titles for new ones if government consolidation is approved.

At last week's meeting of the Communities of the Zionsville Area for Better Government Committee, Eagle trustee Essex suggested the idea that if the Zionsville Town Council appointed two new members to represent Union and Eagle townships, it should be the current trustees. Ulmer is the Union trustee.

Ulmer, who previously had misgivings about a plan that didn't give the townships equal representation on the town council, said appointing the two trustees would be a good way to transition into the consolidated government since they were both elected to their positions.

Both trustees' terms end in 2010. In the current consolidation discussions, the two trustee offices would be dissolved and the duties spread among different departments of the expanded town. The Town Council isn't scheduled for another election until 2011.

Alan Townsend, the head of the governance subcommittee, said he thought appointing the trustees to the council was a good idea. It was unclear at the meeting if that provision could be inserted into the consolidation plan or if the Town Council would want to name its own new members.

Incoming Town Council members Matt Price and Michelle Barrett declined to discuss either possibility.

Earlier this year, Zionsville and the two townships formed the reorganization committee to discuss possible consolidation. The committee's recommendation is expected in mid-December.

After the plan is created, it will go before the Eagle and Union township boards and the Zionsville council. If all three bodies vote in favor of the plan, it could be put before the voters in a referendum as soon as May.

Gene Thompson, committee chairman, called the consolidation a way to make government more transparent while getting rid of unneeded levels of government redundancy. The committee has made it clear there are no plans to change an expanded Zionsville from a town to a city.

If consolidation is approved, redistricting would occur. The governance subcommittee is considering several options, including creating seven town council districts each with their own councilperson, five districts and two at-large seats, or no districts and all at-large seats on the council.

Indiana law allows three to seven members to serve on town councils, and the Zionsville council currently has five members. Although the area has seen extensive growth, the districts would be redrawn using data collected during the 2000 U.S. census. A special census would be cost prohibitive, according to the committee.

The next meeting is scheduled for 7 p.m. Dec. 13 at the Zionsville Town Hall.