

## **Reorganization plan could overburden town**

**By Ben Woodson/Times Sentinel writer**

Zionsville town officials worry the government reorganization plan may end up overburdening their departments, costing taxpayers money and reducing service levels.

“I have very deep concerns about how we move into the future and how the mission of the Zionsville Police Department changes,” Zionsville Town Marshal Rick Dowden said at a special meeting of the Zionsville Town Council to discuss reorganization Monday, Feb. 11.

Dowden is worried how decisions made by town council members representing rural districts might impact the police department, which would provide service to the town district only.

Reorganization would create a rural district and a town service district with two tax rates, served by different public service providers. The rural district would be served by the Boone County Sheriff’s Department and the Boone County Highway Department. The town district would receive police and street services from the Zionsville Police Department and Street Department. The services inside the town district would be more intensive and expensive.

The seven-person town council would have five members elected from districts, with two at-large members.

Dowden said those council members who have constituents in the rural district would have no “vested interest” in the services in the town district, and they could push to reduce the level of service there.

Chairman of the reorganization committee Gene Thompson responded that the rural residents would not have to pay for town services, and would have no incentive to try to reduce the service level.

Dowden disagreed and said many rural residents will think they will eventually have to pay the town district tax rate and may want to preemptively push that tax rate down by lowering the level of service in the town district.

“People in the rural district are going to see the writing on the wall and they are going to see what is coming,” Dowden said.

### **Council Pressure**

Dowden also worried that town council members representing the rural district could pressure town officials for help.

For example, if there were a crime wave in the rural district, Dowden could be pressured to provide more “mutual aid” runs to that area; a mutual aid run sends the ZPD to help the Sheriff’s Department outside the Zionsville border.

This could also extend to street services. Zionsville Town Manager Ed Mitro said the town receives calls every day from people who live outside town borders asking why they are not receiving street or police services. The callers say they live in Zionsville and want the town to take action, but town officials have to explain to callers they actually live outside the town’s borders.

Thompson said the rural residents should not have the expectation of ever receiving town services. They will be paying a lower tax rate because they are receiving a less expensive service from the county.

Mitro noted the concerns expressed by the town officials were coming from the very people who would have to put the plan into effect.

“(It is) the sincere expression of the concerns about what it is going to take to make those details work,” he said.

### Council Reaction

Zionsville Town Council president Matt Price thanked the officials for their “critical and cautionary” comments, and said while he wants to avoid any unforeseen consequences, the town also needs to take advantage of the opportunity reorganization offers.

He said the expansion of services is going to happen anyway through annexation, but reorganization gives the town greater control over that expansion by giving it planning control outside its current borders.

“Any opportunity that we can get to manage our edges, we should take it,” Zionsville Planning Director Terry Jones said.

A development on the border of Zionsville now is approved by the county and then the town only has the option of annexing it.

“We have lost the opportunity to mold that development. Instead we have to accept it,” he said.

Town Council member Art Harris said before he could support reorganization he needed to know exactly how it would affect town taxes and finances.

Town Council member Tim Haak said as long as the reorganization does not increase Zionsville taxes, he is in favor of the plan.

“We would have a revolt on our hands if (taxes) went any higher,” he said.