

Reorganization plan passes committee

By Ben Woodson/Times Sentinel writer

— The government reorganization committee approved Wednesday, March 12, a final consolidation plan that will be forwarded to Eagle and Union townships and Zionsville for consideration.

APPROVAL

The plan will be put to a public vote on the November ballot if it is first approved by the two townships' boards and the town council. A majority of voters in each area must vote "yes" for the plan to be enacted. And each entity must hold a public hearing before voting can take place.

If any board or council wants to make changes, the government reorganization committee must review suggestions. Any revised version would go back to the three governments for approval as both townships and the town must approve the exact same plan.

All three entities must approve the plan by Oct. 5, 30 days before the election, to allow the clerk's office ample preparation time.

If the plan is approved on the November ballot, it would be effective Jan. 1, 2010. State law says it cannot take effect in 2009 because it is the year before a census.

Committee member Allan Rachles said he thinks the three bodies will support this plan, and it should be forwarded to the voters in November. Rachles, who was appointed by the Zionsville Town Council, said he was instructed by the town council to make sure the plan is in the best interest of Zionsville. He believes he has accomplished that goal, he said, but also thinks the plan is in the best interest of rural residents, too.

Jay Parks, a committee member representing Union Township, agrees the plan also works for rural residents.

"We will have a greater voice and greater control over our destiny," he said. He added that the rural lifestyle will be protected because the ordinances concerning issues such as noise and firearms would not change.

SUMMARY OF PLAN

The committee made three major changes from the preliminary report issued in December, which divided the reorganized Zionsville into rural and urban districts that would receive different services and have different tax rates.

The changes affect how streets services are funded, adjusts representation on the planning commission and board of zoning appeals, and removes the ability of the town council to move noncontiguous portions of the rural district into the town district.

The services, tax rate and ordinances of each district would remain basically the same.

The major difference is in street and police services. The Boone County highway and sheriff's departments would serve the rural district; the Zionsville street and police departments would serve the town district. County services cost less than the town services, and will account for most of the difference between rural and urban tax rates. Currently, the Zionsville Fire Department serves the entire consolidated area; that would continue.

The most dramatic change involves planning and the town council. The Zionsville planning department and planning commission would be responsible for planning and zoning for the entire consolidated area.

Representation on the town council would expand to seven. Five of the members would be elected from districts, with two at-large members.

The initial border between the rural and urban district would be the town border at the time. Then any area that meets the criteria of being contiguous, not zoned agriculture or rural/equestrian, and served by water and sewer would move into the town district either at the time of development or, if already existing, after a biannual review by the town council.