

# Reorganization committee simplifies consolidation

By Ben Woodson/Times Sentinel writer

— The government reorganization committee eased many of Zionsville Street Superintendent Lance Lantz's concerns with its new method of dividing street services between the town and county.

The reorganization plan creates two service districts — rural and urban. The goal is for the rural district to be served by the Boone County Highway Department, and the urban district by the Zionsville Street Department. The difficulty is how to reach it.

The committee met Wednesday, Feb. 27, and will meet again at 7 p.m. Thursday, March 13, in Zionsville Town Hall to finalize the plan. It will then be sent to Union, Eagle and Zionsville in 20-to-30 days to either approve or reject.

The initial plan released in January allowed for Zionsville to collect all the funds for street maintenance and then contract with the county to service the rural roads. The new method avoids a contract with the county by having the county directly collect the funds for street services in the rural area from the state.

“We were maybe making it more complicated than it needed to be,” reorganization committee member and school board member Jim Longest said.

In a report to the committee released last month, Lantz said he's worried how the cost of the contract would be determined and the complexity of collecting street funds only to hand them back to the county. Also, he wondered what would happen if the county decided it didn't want to provide services inside Zionsville. Then the town would need to contract with a private company, which could be more expensive.

Lantz said the new proposal would fix many of the concerns stated in his report. He still has concerns about how reorganization would affect the overall service level in the town for police and streets, which have not been addressed yet, he said.

The new plan only changes how street services are paid for, and does not deal with the concerns of Zionsville Town Marshal Rick Dowden about how rural residents represented on the expanded town council could end up lowering the service level of the Zionsville police and street departments.

Boone County Highway Supervisor Tom Kouns said he supports the new plan, and likes it better than the initial plan.

Street services are mostly paid for from a street and road fund collected and distributed by the state. The funds are distributed to local governments from a formula based on street mileage for rural areas and population for urban areas, reorganization committee member Michael Andreoli said.

The county would still collect the street and road funds for the area it would serve while the town would collect those funds for areas it serves.

This is done by keeping the street inventory — a list of the streets that a local government will serve — of the rural district with the county, and inventory of the town district with the town.

When an area changes from rural to town, then the inventory would move as well, along with the funds needed to take care of the streets.

“It seems a much simpler way of solving this problem,” Longest said.

But this proposal has not been vetted with any of the local legislatures, and the committee

doesn't know if the new proposal is legal, committee member Michael Andreoli said. Andreoli expects it should be legal because most likely the state will accept whatever street inventory a municipality sends it, he said.

Kouns said the new proposal should be legal because it has been done in other locations.

School Board Member Chip Cravens said at the meeting he was concerned about the level of service the county would provide for the rural district inside the town. The county would know what parts of the rural district would move into the town district in the next year or two, and they might not provide adequate service in that area. For example, if the county knows the Zionsville Street Department will service a certain road in one year, the county could delay repaving it, even though it needs it.

Reorganization committee chairman Gene Thompson said he doesn't think that will happen because a similar situation already exists. The county knows what areas around Zionsville will be annexed in the future, but they still provide service to that area.