

Committee expects multiple tiers in consolidation

By Ben Woodson/Times Sentinel writer 9-26-2007

— Township residents concerned about how a proposed government reorganization plan will affect their tax rates, may have a little less to worry about.

While a binding vote was not taken, the consensus on the Communities of the Zionsville Area for a Better Government is to create a multi-tiered system with different service levels and tax rates for different areas. It also decided the consolidation plan should involve all three governments — Eagle and Union townships and the town of Zionsville. “That has to be the starting point,” committee member Alan Townsend said.

Committee Chairman Gene Thompson said he thinks residents will probably want to have a similar level of service and level of taxation as they do now. The residents in Zionsville should not lose services, and the township residents should not pay for services they don’t feel they need, he said.

Committee member Joe Turk suggested having two tiers called urban and rural zones. The urban zones would be similiar to the level of service and taxes in Zionsville with the rural zones being similiar to the service and taxes in the townships.

He also suggested having an automatic transfer method to move an area from the rural and urban zones.

The automatic transfer can be compared to an automatic annexation into the urban zone once that area meets certain criteria.

One possible mechanism for moving a development between the zones is that any area with all utilities and a certain density would automatically move from the rural zone to the urban zone, Turk said. The automatic transfer would not put the government in the position of deciding to force residents to accept the higher taxes of the urban zone, he added.

Committee Member Steve Freeland said one thing that people outside of Zionsville worry about is Zionsville’s ordinances being enforced throughout the whole consolidated area, and a multi-tiered system allows different sets of ordinances for the different areas.

“(The multi-tiered system) moves this monumentally it terms of getting it done,” he said. Planning and Land Use

The Planning and Land Use sub-committee was the first to make an almost complete recommendation to the reorganization committee. Sub-committee member Kevin Schiferl said the consensus among the subcommittee is to have a regional planning board including all of Zionsville and Eagle and Union townships, except for the portion of Eagle Township annexed by Whitestown, which cannot be part of any consolidation plan. The proposed make-up of the planning board is nine members, with at least one coming from Zionsville Community Schools, four from inside the current Zionsville borders and two from each township. He also proposed a five-member regional board of zoning appeals.

Schiferl said Zionsville’s Director of Planning, Terry Jones, told him that taking over the planning responsibilities for the larger area would involve hiring more staff. Schiferl said even with the extra staff, the proposal is revenue-neutral because planning bodies are self-funding through fees charged to developers.

Residents should not experience a dramatic change in the zoning around their homes if a

regional planning board took over, Schiferl said. The zoning maps and master plan of Boone County and Zionsville are similar for the area, and Schiferl said he would not expect the new body to quickly change those plans.

Parks

The parks and recreation sub-committee also thinks having a regional board for parks is appropriate, Parks Subcommittee Chairman Steve Freeland said.

“It is strategically a smarter way to work,” Freeland said.

Combining the parks boards of the townships and the town would allow for more efficient use of manpower, and planning would become more integrated. Many of the natural resources like Eagle Creek run through all of the entities and a regional parks board could plan to use these resources better, he said.

Also a regional board would be able to have a grander vision with larger projects and might be able to attract more private funding for such larger projects, he said.

The next step for the parks committee is to determine the number of representatives and how the different areas should be represented on the board.

If the consolidation expands the borders of Zionsville, which is one of three options for the consolidation plan, then the impact fees for Zionsville could be charged throughout all of the townships without the need for new and expensive studies, Freeland said.

Impact fees are charged to developers to help pay for the town’s infrastructure cost as a direct result of the development.

The other two options for the consolidation plan are to have a bunching of townships and municipal governments where each government still exists or to create a brand new governmental entity for the whole area from scratch, said Governance Chairman Alan Townsend. The committee did not come to a consensus on which of the three options to pursue.

Police

Law enforcement is an area where a multi-tiered system will probably be needed, Freeland said. Increasing the size of the Zionsville Police Department to provide the same level of service to all of Eagle and Union townships would be expensive, he said. Town Marshal Rick Dowden estimated it could cost \$4 million to cover the townships. The 2008 police budget requests about \$2.5 million.

A possibility is for part of the consolidated area to be protected by the Boone County Sheriff’s Department through an inter-local agreement and the urban area to remain protected by the ZPD, Freeland said. The sheriff’s department has a much lower number of officers-per-resident than the ZPD, and thus is less expensive, he said.

Name

Andreoli raised the question of what the new entity should be called, and the consensus on the committee was it should involve Zionsville.

“Something is lost if it is known as Southeast Boone County,” Thompson said.

Townsend brought up the point that the school system, which is composed of the same basic area involved in the consolidation plan, is called Zionsville Community Schools.

“Zionsville has a lot of brand value,” Turk said.