

Bellbrook and Sugarcreek Township  
Merger Study  
Lifestyle Focus Group Results

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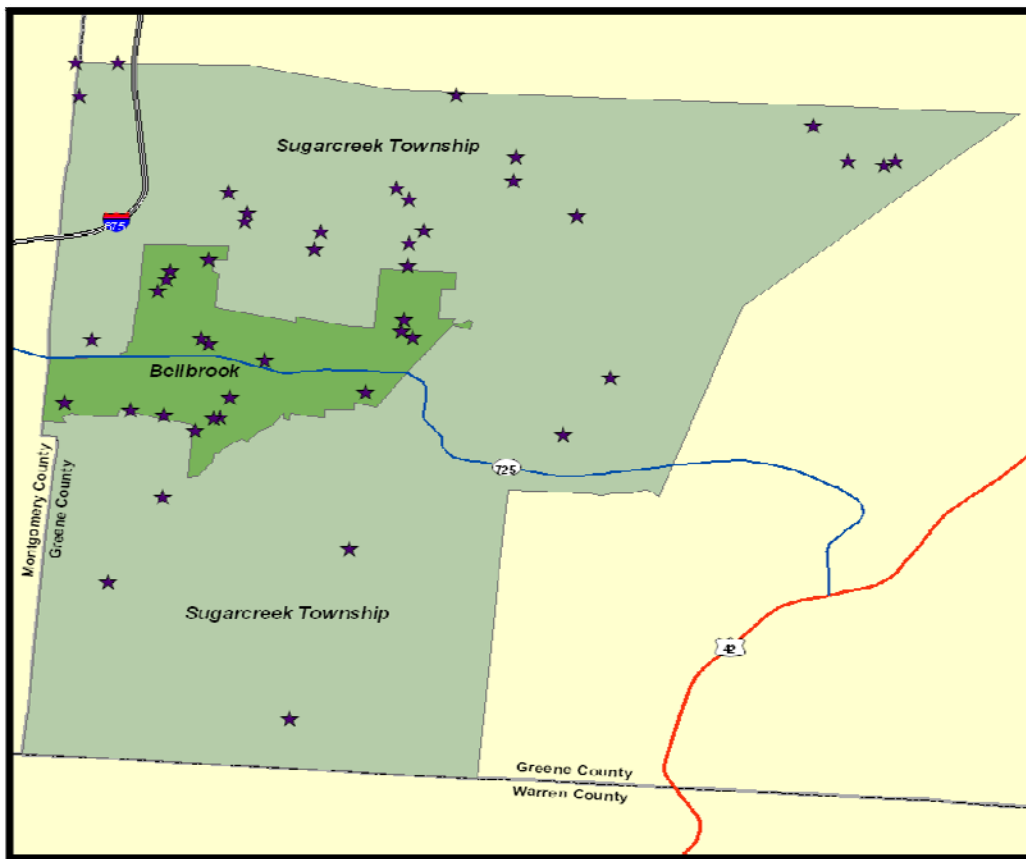
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## Introduction

Focus group sessions were organized with citizens of the City of Bellbrook and Sugarcreek Township to discuss their views of their lifestyle priorities and how lifestyles may be impacted by a merger if one were to be pursued.

To identify focus group participants, Wright State University used the Secretary of State Voter Registry database and augmented it with an electronic telephone directory purchased by Wright State to obtain phone numbers. Records were not used if Wright State could not match name and address to the phone number. Participants were sought for two 90-minute focus group sessions from each community. Both an evening option and a weekend option were offered to enable participation. All sessions were held at Bellbrook Middle School. Researchers mapped (See Figure 1) the addresses of those who were selected to participate, displaying that the residential geography of the two communities was well-covered by selected participants.

**Figure 1: General Residential Locations of Focus Group Participants**



Wright State used recruiting criteria to attempt to obtain a cross representative group of residents for the focus group discussions. The criteria were:

- Tenure in the community: 1-5 years, 6-15 year, or more than 15 years
- Gender
- Marital Status: Married/Single/Partnered/ Divorced/Separated/Widowed
- Children in the home under the age of 18 or not

The purpose of focus groups is to enable participants to reveal and expound on issues using their own words and based on their own experiences. Focus group results are strongest when participant experiences and perspectives are targeted as opposed to opinions and attitudes. Results are participants' perceptions, which may or may not be accurate.

Focus group results are used to provide insights to focus group sponsors that can guide their outreach, communication, and policy formulation activities. Therefore, the job of the facilitator is not to educate or correct misconceptions. The job of the facilitator is to report back perceptions so that sponsors understand their audience's views and can respond accordingly.

The focus group topic was *Lifestyle*, and questions pertained to what residents like about living in their community, how they would describe their community's and their own lifestyle, how they perceive that a merged community would affect their lifestyle, and the differences they see between the two communities' lifestyles. The ultimate objective of the focus group sessions was to summarize results of each communities' focus group sessions, and then to identify where there are overlaps and differences in lifestyle.

Discussions about lifestyle resulted in three major themes which provide a framework for presenting lifestyle perceptions. Viewpoints regarding how a merger may affect the lifestyles in the community, perceptions of differences in lifestyles between the two communities, and a brief summary for each community are also included. The three lifestyle themes are:

1. Physical and natural environment
2. Cultural and social wellbeing
3. Development and cost of living

## **City of Bellbrook Citizens' Lifestyle Perceptions Focus Group Session Results**

On February 2<sup>nd</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>, 2010, two different groups of citizens from the City of Bellbrook participated in a focus group session to discuss their perceptions of their community and how the community affects their way of life. Five citizens attended on February 2<sup>nd</sup> and 15

individuals attended on February 20<sup>th</sup>. An effort was made to attract citizens who had different lengths of tenure in the community, represented equally each gender, represented different marital status, and either had children living in their home under the age of 18 or not. Phone numbers were selected from the voter registry with data augmented by other databases used by the Wright State University research team.

### **Physical and Natural Environment**

Perhaps not surprisingly (given the beauty in this area), physical and natural environments are the attributes that residents like the most about living in Bellbrook and which compel residents to remain residents of the community. People treasure the small town atmosphere and convenience thereof, its quaint downtown and walkability, its proximity to major cities like Cincinnati and Columbus, its access to major arteries, its openness, mature trees, large lot sizes, and its quiet setting. Natural assets described by residents include the Sugarcreek Reserve, green open space, and sighting deer in the back yard.

### **Cultural and Social Wellbeing**

Such attributes engender a sense of community and safety—a place where children can play in the front yard and where neighbors know and watch out for each other. The number one asset impacting wellbeing is the schools. There is truly a sense of community ownership and pride regarding the schools. Residents were supportive of the schools whether they had school age children or not. Residents noted the excellence of the school system, and how important that is to property values.

Neighborhoods are also important to residents who like the uniqueness, quality, and diversity of homes that are not of the “cookie cutter” variety. Residents recognized that Bellbrook offers levels of housing for everyone. The full continuum of housing choice is perceived as available in Bellbrook, and everything from affordable to upscale housing is within walking distance of downtown. These residents perceive that Bellbrook has done a good job of creating a housing mix, where there is a balance of high end and affordable housing.

Perhaps as a result of a good housing mix, several members in the second focus group mentioned the “working class” culture in Bellbrook, wherein all types of mechanics, electricians, and other sole proprietors are present. And the community makes an effort to support these local businesses.

Bellbrook residents describe their community’s lifestyle this way:

*In the summer months, neighbors are outside most of the time in their front yards. Neighbors visit with each other and watch the kids play in the cul-de-sac. But there's enough space between houses that you don't have to socialize if you don't want to. We know each other by first name, have cookouts, are concerned about one another, and help each other. Garage doors are open all the time.*

## **Cost of Living and Development**

When residents were asked, what drew you to Bellbrook in the first place, many of the themes already described above were restated. However, another theme was made concrete. The type of home, value of home, the land you could purchase, the lot size—each of these was available in a lower price range than comparable communities. One person said they had looked in Washington Township, Kettering, Sugarcreek, Dayton, Huber Heights, Fairborn, Miamisburg and Germantown (around the year 2001). This resident could not find the house, price, lot, conveniences, and trees in any of these places compared to the value of what he could purchase in Bellbrook. Other residents concurred. Several of the focus group participants mentioned the value they could obtain while at the same time having excellent schools in a small rural community. This combination just couldn't be beat elsewhere in the greater Dayton region, especially given the absence of a city income tax.

Residents also discussed the good government services they receive, especially roads, fire and police protection. Residents in the first focus group session remarked on the City's choice over the years to live within its means, to manage its budget well and remain frugal. Bellbrook is considered by participants in the first focus group to have grown in a controlled, regulated, and planned way. They also mentioned that City government there has a low profile and has had stable leadership so that things are not constantly in a state of flux.

This cost of living discussion spurred concerns about what will be in the future. Residents in the first focus group session were concerned that new housing developments are lowering the value of existing homes. Most of the participants in the first focus group were also concerned that if a merger were to occur, that they would lose their great city services, which would have to cover a much larger territory. There is a perception by some that Sugarcreek has not been as frugal, has not lived as well within its means, and that they don't take care of their roads as well (a participant in the focus group session stated that the county is responsible for taking care of township roads). If development continues, Bellbrook residents in the first focus group perceive that their own city services will be stretched ever thinner, as the City would have to respond to police reports and emergency calls to Wilmington Pike. "Police may not be able to respond to a problem in the city because something is going on in the Wal Mart parking lot. We are used to

getting very good service in the 3 square miles.” And a big concern is development on Wilmington Pike – “putting in traffic lights, widening roads” – changing the character of the community.

### **Viewpoints on a Merged Community and its affect on Lifestyles**

Residents in the first focus group session were concerned that “increasing the [geographic] area by 10 times and doubling the population” will result in lowered quality of government services. Many residents in this first session perceived that Sugarcreek would be the “winner” in this sense; obtaining better services in a merged community than they have now (they cited snow removal on roads as an example).

On the other hand, a couple of residents in the first session could not envision any other alternative to protecting the open space surrounding Bellbrook. Their view was that Sugarcreek land would be on the fringe of Centerville, Kettering, or Xenia, and so would be less important to those cities and they would develop while not caring about the land. These residents believed that the natural environment in Sugarcreek would be more important to residents of Bellbrook, that the two communities have been intertwined for some time, and have a more similar lifestyle than Sugarcreek would have with those other listed cities. One thought shared by these Bellbrook residents was that perhaps a compromise could be sought and just merge land close to the City of Bellbrook so as to protect the open space most proximate to the City.

The counterpoint to this point is the belief by some that using the “chipping away” at the land argument is just to instill fear. And that so far, the Merger Commission has not made clear what the costs and benefits of a merger would be.

Another point of view was raised at the February 20<sup>th</sup> focus group session, and that was made by a couple of participants who argued that Bellbrook cannot survive as an island. They pointed out that a community cannot continue to provide great services, great homes, great schools, and at comparably lower prices if the City stagnates. Soon into this discussion, all participants in this second group articulated a consensus on these views. Participants of the second focus group pointed out that to remain viable in the long term, the City would need to diversify its tax base or else residents, with only a few commercial properties contributing to the tax base, couldn’t sustain the quality in the community looking 5 to 10 years out.

There was also a view shared in this second focus group session of the appearance of a lack of government leadership or a lack of clout inherent in Township government that caused the Dille property owners to seek out Centerville. “Quiet little towns have to get more powerful.”

This group believes that proactive discussions should be held with land owners, and more flexibility should be considered. Furthermore, this group believes that the quality of life in both of these communities hinges on a strong governing body, one that has and wants to hear new ideas. This momentum will be important to commercial development. And the group is not convinced that the Bellbrook governing body is suited for the task given the lack of vision and investment in Bellbrook’s downtown.

### **Perceptions of Substantial Lifestyle Differences between the Two Communities**

Two participants at the first focus group didn’t see differences between the two communities that could not be overcome. In fact, they said that residents in some newer plats in Sugarcreek may not even know that they aren’t Bellbrook residents. The other three residents in the first session basically could see no pluses in merging and left it at that.

Participants at the second focus group do not believe their lifestyles would change much if they were to merge with Sugarcreek Township. They recognize that Sugarcreek residents will have issues with “zoning, lot size, animals, and open burn laws.” The two communities will have to discern “where they do and don’t marry up well.” But overall, the sense is that residents in the two communities treasure many of the same natural and physical assets.

The fears about merging, according to this group, are due to the lack of information. This is becoming an older community, and people on fixed incomes are nervous about fiscal impacts. Participants believe that the initial costs may be substantial, but that this is a long term view, and therefore, we have to know the short and long-term costs and revenues. There was also a sense of urgency in this focus group that the land grab is underway and development pressures are continuing on Feedwire Road. There’s a belief that there will be greater control over that development if the two jurisdictions join together.

### **Summary of the Bellbrook Focus Group Sessions**

From the first focus group session—three of the five participants in the first focus group felt that they only had something to lose in a merged community. They expect that the cost of providing government services will go up while the quality of those services will go down as services are stretched to meet a much larger geography. The two other first session participants want to see data before they decide. Their views were that, in terms of lifestyle, Bellbrook is in a better position than any other municipality to protect the physical and natural assets that are important to both communities.

## **Sugarcreek Township Citizens' Lifestyle Perceptions**

### **Focus Group Session Results**

On February 4<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>, 2010, two different groups of citizens from Sugarcreek Township participated in a focus group session to discuss their perceptions of their community and how the community affects their way of life. About fifteen citizens attended both sessions, for a total of 30. An effort was made to attract citizens who had different lengths of tenure in the community, represented equally each gender, represented different marital status, and either had children living in their home under the age of 18 or not. Phone numbers were selected from the voter registry with data augmented by other databases used by the Wright State University research team.

#### **Physical and Natural Environment**

By far, Sugarcreek Township residents live and remain in the Township because of the physical and natural environment. Example comments include: "the rural character, beauty of the land, and people keep their places up"; "the open space, the ability to move around, the space between neighbors, and the personal liberty of the space"; "being able to watch nature, deer, bobcats, and hawks." "I want the darkness—not so many lights around me." Others are lifelong citizens and one was a third generation citizen. It should be noted that the Township has a range of citizens from those who own 100 acres and more to those who live in a subdivision with less than 1 acre lots.

Township residents also appreciate the fact that "we can get anywhere fast like the airport or shopping in a matter of minutes; we have great accessibility."

Residents describe the lifestyle of their community as "country living like hunting and target shooting"; "having friends over and having a bonfire"; farm fences, the ability to wake up to chickens, seeing my neighbors' horses or cows"; "you can do anything and your neighbor won't see;" "privacy, solitude, spread out, flexible, not imposing on other people, can basically do whatever you want."

## Cultural and Social Wellbeing

Sugarcreek Township residents also appreciate manmade assets in the City and the Township such as the schools, the downtown and its little shops, the houses, the post office, and the library. “Fantastic school system combined with rural character, unbeatable. It’s not easy to find both.” One person noted that there is great parental involvement in the schools. People in the Township and the City take pride in their schools. “This isn’t true in every community.” One person speaking for many said it is great to “have the downtown in our reach, close to everything, but with a very rural feel. We have the benefit of both—downtown and open space.”

These residents also like the freedom of a township, where there are fewer rules and restrictions. Quotes include: “I don’t have people telling me what I can drive, what not to do, what animals I can have”; “the rules are different, people can park on my lawn and I wouldn’t be able to do that in the city.”

Government services are perceived as being excellent in the Township. There is a perception that there is less crime in the Township than the City, due to density. Police in the Township know who is supposed to be around and who is not.

Several participants at the second focus group session stated that they have little faith in the leadership in either jurisdiction. “We would need a better political system if we merged.” (Participants provided the example of a 200 page document of new regulations developed by the Township, wherein the length of the document precludes citizen comprehension.) Another participant insisted that at least in the township form of government, major decisions have to go through a public hearing process. “It takes months for changes to happen and they have to be done in the open.”

## Cost of Living and Development

The most pressing comments, as the focus group discussion moved from what we like about living in the Township to how can we preserve our lifestyle, were like this—“We want to protect our lifestyle, preserve what we have here; we want to protect our land and property value, preserve our investment and quality of life, protect our community.” In the second Sugarcreek focus group session, one person said that Sugarcreek could take better charge of preserving its land if government leaders would meet with major land owners and treat them as important customers, and doing what they can to ensure that they are satisfied customers.

In this person's view, that action would discourage landowners from seeking annexation to other cities.

Several participants in the second focus group mentioned that there is a lot of burden on the property tax since there is no income tax. They stated that the burden is getting to be so great that "it is becoming difficult to afford to live where I raised my kids."

Others said, the "tax base is continuing to climb but it doesn't need to (spoken in the context of development on Feedwire Road). We are losing the quality of life that was our reason for living here." "There is continual approval for development on less than 5 acre lots. Our quality of life is going downhill already and we don't see it stopping."

### **Viewpoints on a Merged Community and its affect on Lifestyles**

Participants of the focus groups provided one quote after the other in response to the question, "Would a merged community influence the quality of your community and your lifestyle?" "How can we protect our community from being annexed?" "How can we let cities be cities and country be country?"

"A merger is basically an annexation." "A merged community will give Bellbrook the right to develop the land." "The land would not stay rural; it would slowly be developed." "The land would be used for the community good but not for an individual's good." "The purpose of a city is to grow. If a city has a lot of land then they will use that land for anything."

"I'm not trusting what people tell me because it won't be that way. They will say we have certain rules and then they will come back and say well actually you don't have this right and they'll take them away from us." Basically, "we cannot preserve the township lifestyle if we merge."

"We have a lot of Greene County services and we would lose those under a merger." "Government services would decline because there will be no money to pay for it." Or "we will pay a lot more for our services."

Most participants felt that Bellbrook had everything to gain in a merger. "They will no longer be land-locked; they would have lots of land and they would use that land; they'll be able to increase their tax base." Housing values in the City are lower and taxes are higher. "In a merger, they'll be sucking my money into that area."

A couple of participants in each township focus group said, “If we have to merge with anyone, I want it to be Bellbrook.” Probing into that perception, the thought behind it is that Bellbrook is more proximate to the land than other cities’ downtowns would be and therefore would be more vested. “We know the people, they are our neighbors and friends, and our children go to the same schools.” “Bellbrook is a small town like us.”

“Bellbrook is our community too. Township and City impact each other. We have to be a community where we talk to each other; work together. This will keep the quality of our lives up.”

### **Perceptions of Substantial Lifestyle Differences between the Two Communities**

Bellbrook “is ordinance driven—can’t burn trash in open areas, no bonfires, two pets.” “Bellbrook residents want neighbors and kids to have playmates close by, they want a community with young families.” They want police and proximity; they want safety and security.” “They want street lights, sidewalks, and want to walk to everything.” “They too have a casual lifestyle.” “Bellbrook [resident] sees that they have the best of both worlds – rural atmosphere and city lifestyle. Bellbrook residents see themselves as living in the country but they don’t have to support the lifestyle with higher property taxes.” Some Township residents used to live in Bellbrook. They “enjoyed their time in Bellbrook, had open fires with permission from the fire department.”

Sugarcreek residents believe that there are major differences between township and city living. “If you like to be close to residents then Bellbrook is for you. If you want space between neighbors, then the Township is for you.” “Bellbrook has more of a community feel.” “If you live in Sugarcreek Township, then you have some plats that can give you that same lifestyle as Bellbrook.” “Sugarcreek has something for everyone, while Bellbrook has one lifestyle option.”

### **Summary of the Sugarcreek Township Focus Group Sessions**

By the end of the first focus group session, participants were brainstorming amongst themselves how to preserve their land but not have to be annexed. “Can we incorporate ourselves? Can we purchase property?” were the questions being asked. Basically, neither focus group saw anything to be gained by them, only to be lost, in a merger. Some participants’ voices rose as they expressed what they had to lose in terms of the lifestyle they love. The only open question asked was, “Where is the value proposition? No one has articulated the value proposition to us.”

## Overall Summary of Focus Group Results

Table 1 depicts a side by side comparison of both Bellbrook’s and Sugarcreek Township’s perceptions of individual’s and community valued lifestyle assets for three categories: cultural and social well being, physical and natural systems, and cost of living and development issues.

**Table 1: Combined Lifestyle Focus Group Session Results: Qualities that Attracted and Retained Residents, and Cost of Living Concerns**

Lifestyle Categories	Bellbrook Perceptions of Individual’s and Community Valued Lifestyle Assets	Sugarcreek Perceptions of Individual’s and Community Valued Lifestyle Assets
<i>A Place for Domestic Life</i>		
Cultural and Social Wellbeing <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sense of Community</li> <li>• Manmade assets</li> <li>• Rules and Safety</li> <li>• Government Services</li> <li>• Government Leadership</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School excellence in a small, rural community is what makes Bellbrook desirable to residents.</li> <li>• Residents are supportive of schools, regardless of whether they have school age children</li> <li>• Neighbors watch out for and interact with each other</li> <li>• Safe place to raise children</li> <li>• Unique &amp; a range of neighborhoods</li> <li>• Quaint Downtown; walkability</li> <li>• Working class culture; many sole proprietors</li> <li>• Good road, fire, police services</li> <li>• Bellbrook has stable government leadership &amp; has lived within its means</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Great schools and rural atmosphere—can’t be beat</li> <li>• Enjoy the downtown and its shops, library, post office</li> <li>• Privacy</li> <li>• Excellent government services</li> <li>• Freedom: Sugarcreek has fewer rules &amp; restrictions</li> <li>• Township uses a public hearing process that keeps government decision making in the open</li> <li>• Participants have concerns about government leaders in both jurisdictions</li> </ul>

<i>A Place for Leisure</i>		
<p>Physical and Natural Systems*</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Physical environment and characteristics— Treasured Assets <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>○ Proximity, Convenient Location, &amp; Accessibility</li> </ul> </li> <li>• Natural environment</li> </ul> <p><b><i>*The key reason residents were drawn to Bellbrook and Sugarcreek</i></b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Close to Cincinnati, Columbus</li> <li>• Access to major arteries</li> <li>• Sugarcreek Reserve; green, open spaces</li> <li>• Openness, mature trees, large lots</li> <li>• Small Town Atmosphere</li> <li>• Quiet</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Rural Character, open spaces</li> <li>• Beauty of the land</li> <li>• Country Living; hunting, nature, bonfires, farm animals</li> <li>• Space between neighbors</li> <li>• Accessibility to shopping, airport</li> <li>• Quiet; dark</li> <li>• “Personal liberty of the space”</li> </ul>
<i>Pursuing a Reasonable Cost of Living</i>		
<p>Cost of Living and Development Issues</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Diversifying the Tax Base</li> <li>• Preserving Levels of Government Services</li> <li>• Affordability</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The school system is important to property values</li> <li>• When residents moved to Bellbrook, the home type, price and lot size were cheaper than in comparable cities</li> <li>• New housing developments are lowering current home values</li> <li>• New Commercial developments are changing the character of the community</li> <li>• Services and schools cannot survive at current levels of quality if the city stagnates</li> <li>• Need to diversify tax base to sustain quality of life</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Property tax burden is affecting the community’s affordability</li> <li>• Several participants said that as things are, they will likely be unable to continue to afford living in the Township</li> <li>• Tax base is climbing, however, at the loss of quality of life. “And we don’t see that stopping.”</li> <li>• Desire for preserving land, lifestyle, investments</li> <li>• Township could reach out to land owners, ensuring those customers’ satisfaction thus discouraging their petitions for annexation</li> </ul>

Table 2 depicts a side by side comparison of both Bellbrook’s and Sugarcreek Township’s perceptions of lifestyle changes that a merger would produce in three areas: cultural and social well being, physical and natural systems, and cost of living and development issues.

**Table 2: Combined Focus Group Session Results: Perceptions of a Merger’s Affect on Lifestyles**

Lifestyle Categories	Bellbrook Perceptions of Lifestyle Changes that a Merger would Produce	Sugarcreek Perceptions of Lifestyle Changes that a Merger would Produce
<p>Cultural and Social Wellbeing</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Government Leadership</li> <li>• Government Services</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sugarcreek’s government is not as frugal as Bellbrook’s</li> <li>• Appearance of a lack of Township leadership or clout (as a result of Dille property)</li> <li>• (First focus group) Loss of Bellbrook quality of city services if merged</li> <li>• Sugarcreek would receive better government services in a merger</li> <li>• (Second focus group) Costs may increase in the short run, but this is a long-term decision</li> <li>• The quality of life in both of these communities hinges on a strong governing body, one that has and wants to hear new ideas</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Little faith in either jurisdiction’s leadership</li> <li>• Need a better political system if merged</li> <li>• Bellbrook is ordinance driven, Sugarcreek has fewer rules</li> <li>• Less crime in the Township</li> <li>• Loss of services provided by county, cost of services may rise</li> </ul>
<p>Physical and Natural Environments</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Control and Protect Treasured Assets</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• (Second focus group) Do not feel they would lose their lifestyle in a merger</li> <li>• Bellbrook is in a better position to protect the physical/natural assets of Sugarcreek, as opposed to another city (especially given that the heart of other cities is many miles away from Sugarcreek)</li> <li>• The two communities are intertwined.</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A merger would regulate burning trash, bonfires, hunting, and number of pets</li> <li>• If there must be a merger, Bellbrook would be more vested than another city in preserving the Township natural assets; “Bellbrook is a small town like us.”</li> </ul>
<p>Cost of Living/ Development</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Tax implications</li> <li>• Loss of Land</li> <li>• Cost to tax payers</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Merger is the only alternative to protect open space</li> <li>• Land grab is underway</li> <li>• Greater control of Feedwire Road development if communities merge</li> <li>• Merger would increase tax base</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Bellbrook would no longer be land locked and would be able to increase their tax base</li> <li>• Bellbrook would slowly develop land if merged, not stay rural</li> <li>• Taxes would go from township into the downtown area</li> </ul>

## **Addendum 1: Recruiting Script**

**Good afternoon,**

**My name is \_\_\_\_\_ and I am calling from Wright State University. We are working with Bellbrook and Sugarcreek Township on the merger study that voters approved last November. We will be conducting a series of focus groups with City and Township residents to obtain views about living in your community, and wanted to ask you to participate. Would you be interested in attending?**

- 1) Yes
- 2) No (End Survey)

**Are you a resident of Bellbrook or Sugarcreek Township?**

If Bellbrook:

Focus Group 1: Tuesday, February 2<sup>nd</sup>, 7-8:30 (Large Group Room)

Focus Group 2: Saturday, February 6<sup>th</sup>, 1-2:30 (Large Group Room)

If Sugarcreek:

Focus Group 1: Thursday, February 4<sup>th</sup>, 7-8:30 (Room 106)

Focus Group 2: Saturday, February 6<sup>th</sup>, 3-4:30 (Large Group Room)

**All groups will take place at Bellbrook Middle School, at 3600 Feedwire Road. Do you need directions to Bellbrook Middle School? (See back)**

Would you be able to attend either of these times? If so, record which time.

We have a few additional questions to ask just so that we can get a good mix of residents in each focus group:

- 1) How long have you lived in the community?  
1-5 years, 6-15 years, More than 15 years
- 2) Male or female?  
Male / Female
- 3) What is your marital status?  
Married / Single / Partnered / Divorced / Separated / Widowed
- 4) Do you have any children under the age of 18?  
Yes / No

From Interstate 675- Take the Wilmington Pike Exit (Exit 7). Proceed north on Wilmington Pike, and then turn right on Feedwire Rd.

From St. Rt. 725. Turn north on N. Main St / Upper Bellbrook Rd. Proceed north until you reach Feedwire Rd. Turn Left.

## **Addendum 2: Bellbrook Sugarcreek Merger Discussion Guide**

### **Introduction**

On November 4, 2008, the formation of a Merger Study Commission was approved by the voters of both the City of Bellbrook and Sugarcreek Township. This Merger Study Commission is comprised of ten individuals (five are residents of the City of Bellbrook and five are residents of Sugarcreek Township).

The Merger Study Commission was formed according to the provisions of Chapter 709 of the Ohio Revised Code. Since December 2008, the Merger Study Commission has met on a regular basis, generally, on the first Wednesday of each month, to perform their required duties.

The website for the Merger Study Commission (<http://mergerstudy.com/>) states, “A lot of questions need to be answered before anyone can determine if a merger makes sense or not. This is the task that will be undertaken by the Merger Commission. Public participation in the merger study is vital and all points of view are important. “

This focus group session that we are holding today is a case in point. An area that the Merger Study Commission needs to know more about pertains to the lifestyle choices, preferences, and experiences of City and Township residents, and to determine how compatible those perspectives are. And your participation and sharing of ideas is essential.

This group discussion is expected to take 90 minutes. In that time, I will act as the facilitator and present questions to you and keep our conversation on track. The note-taker will capture your thoughts on the computer and project them on the wall. As this is done, a group who is off-site will be able to see those notes too. Members of the Commission would like the ability to listen to the discussion and see the main themes as captured in these notes in real time. It is very common to record focus group discussion so that we capture all the creative thoughts.

Confidentiality is being protected because we are not turning on the sound until introductions are over and no video recording device will be used. I will only proceed with this technology if I have the group’s permission. Do I?

Do you have any questions so far? If not, we’ll proceed.

### **Introductions and Question Sets**

Introductions (first name and one sentence about what motivated them to say yes to the invitation)

I want to tell you that I work at Wright State and I am not involved with the Merger Study Commission. If you have content questions regarding that Commission, I won't have any answers, but we'll be glad to capture your thoughts or questions for the first 5 minutes of the meeting and then we'll provide them to the Commission. Do you have any questions you would like us to forward on?

[After Introductions, turn on the equipment]

Let's first decide on a definition for Lifestyle. Merriam-Webster says, "a typical way of life of an individual, group or culture." Wordnet on the web says, "a manner of living that reflects the person's or a group's values and attitudes." The free dictionary says, "a set of attitudes, habits, or possessions associated with a particular person or group." Do these definitions resonate with you?

Question Set 1. How would you describe the lifestyle choices of the people you know in your town \_\_\_\_\_ [Bellbrook or Sugarcreek]? What kind of lifestyle do they have (in terms of activities, habits, and so on)? What lifestyle options do you think are most important to them? We have a cross representative group here with us today. Let's see if we have themes of lifestyle choices or preferences based on the length of time people have lived in this community; whether they have children at home or not; whether they are males or females. Can you help me to see the themes if there are any?

Question Set 2. How important was it to you to have certain lifestyle options available to you when you chose to live in [B or S]?

What lifestyle options were most important to you?

Describe what is still most important to you. What do you do in a given day or week that would provide evidence that this is so?

Question Set 3. Would a merged community influence the kind of lifestyle options you have available to you today? Five years from now? In what ways?

Question Set 4. In what ways, if any, do you see your lifestyle preferences as being different from those in the other community [B or S]? Are those significant differences or minor differences?

Is there anything further you would like to add?

## **Conclusion**

Thank you for the important contribution of time and ideas that you've made today! This kind of research cannot be undertaken without community participation and so we truly appreciate

it. If anyone would like to review the results of the focus group sessions, please make sure you gave us your email address and give us about 6 weeks to synthesize the results and provide them first to the Commission.