

City of Bellbrook and Sugarcreek Township Focus Group Session Overview

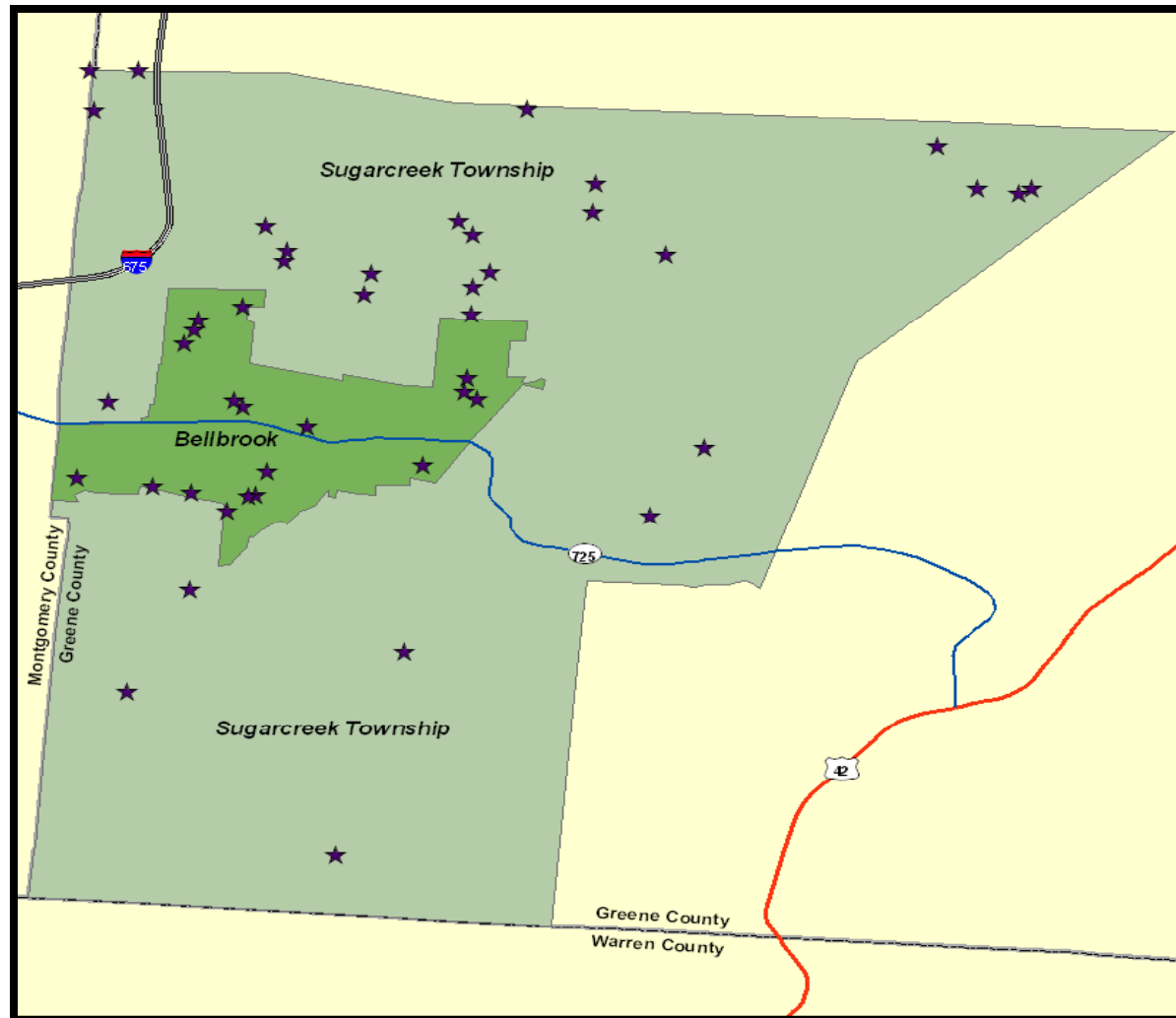
**Perceptions of Lifestyle Similarities
and Differences**

Reported March 3, 2010

Focus Group Options

- 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
- Bellbrook sessions were held on Tuesday, Feb 2nd at 7:00 PM and Saturday, Feb 20 at 1PM
- Sugarcreek sessions were held on Thursday, Feb 4th at 7:00 PM and Saturday, Feb 20 at 3PM
- All sessions were held at Bellbrook Middle School

Focus Group Participants: General Residential Locations



Focus Group Participant Recruiting

- Wright State University used the Secretary of State voter registry augmented by an electronic Telephone Directory purchased by WSU to obtain phone numbers.
- Records were not used if WSU could not match name and address to phone number

Participant Recruiting Criteria

- Tenure in 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

Purpose of Focus Groups

- Enables 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.

Use of Focus Group Results

- 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

- The Discussion Guide used during the session:
 - What do you like about living in ___?
 - What drew you to & kept you in the community?
 - How would you describe your community's lifestyle? What is most important to your community and your way of life? Is the community retaining those important aspects?
 - Would a merged community influence the quality of your community? How so? How would a merged community look in a year? 5+ years?
 - In what ways, if any, do you see your lifestyle preferences as being different from those in the other community? Are those significant or minor differences?

Themes found in the Results

- Comments shared about one's own, or the community's or another community's lifestyle could be coded into one of three themes:
 - Physical and natural environment
 - Cultural and social wellbeing
 - Development and cost of living

Qualities that Attracted and Retained Residents

Physical and Natural Environment

Bellbrook

- Close to Cincinnati, Columbus
- Access to major arteries
- Sugarcreek Reserve; green, open spaces
- Openness, mature trees, large lots
- Small Town Atmosphere
- Quiet

Sugarcreek

- Rural Character, open spaces
- Beauty of the land
- Country Living; hunting, nature, bonfires, farm animals
- Space between neighbors
- Accessibility to shopping, airport
- Quiet; dark
- “Personal liberty of the space”

Qualities that Attracted and Retained (continued)

Cultural and Social Wellbeing

Bellbrook

- School excellence in a small, rural community
- Residents are supportive of schools
- Neighborliness is important
- Safe place to raise children
- Unique & a range of neighborhoods
- Quaint Downtown; walkability
- Working class culture; sole proprietors
- Good road, fire, police services
- Bellbrook has stable government leadership & has lived within its means

Sugarcreek

- Great schools and rural atmosphere
- Enjoy the downtown and its shops, library, post office
- Privacy
- Excellent government services
- Sugarcreek has fewer rules & restrictions
- Township public hearing process keeps government decision making in the open
- Participants have concerns about government leaders in both jurisdictions

Qualities that Attracted and Retained (continued)

Pursuing a Reasonable Cost of Living

Bellbrook

- The school system is important to property values
- Good value in Bellbrook: home type, price and lot size were less expensive than in comparable cities
- New housing developments are lowering current home values
- New commercial developments are changing the character of the community
- (Focus Group 2) Services and schools cannot survive at current levels of quality if the city stagnates
- (Focus Group 2) Need to diversify tax base to sustain quality of life

Sugarcreek

- Property tax burden is affecting the community's affordability
- Some will be unable to continue to afford living in the Township
- Tax base is increasing, however, at the loss of quality of life
- Desire for preserving land, lifestyle, investments
- Township could reach out to land owners, ensuring satisfaction thus discouraging petitions for annexation

Perceptions of Merger Affect

Government Leadership

Bellbrook

- Sugarcreek's government is not as frugal as Bellbrook's.
- Appearance of a lack of Township leadership or clout – e.g., Dille Property.

Sugarcreek

- Little faith in either jurisdiction's leadership.
- Need a better political system if merged.
- Bellbrook is ordinance driven, Sugarcreek has fewer rules.

Perceptions of Merger Affect on Lifestyles (continued)

Government Services

Bellbrook

- Sugarcreek would receive better government services in a merger
- (Focus Group 2) Costs may increase in the short run, but this is a long-term decision
- (Focus Group 1) Loss of Bellbrook quality of city services if merged

Sugarcreek

- Loss of services provided by county
- Cost of services may rise

“The quality of life in both of these communities hinges on a strong governing body, one that has and wants to hear new ideas.”

Perceptions of Merger Affect on Lifestyles (continued)

Control and Protect Treasured Assets

Bellbrook

- Do not feel they would lose their lifestyle in a merger, but Focus Group 1 was concerned about lower quality government services
- Bellbrook is in a better position to protect the physical/natural assets of Sugarcreek, as opposed to another city
- The two communities are intertwined

Sugarcreek

- A merger would regulate burning trash, bonfires, hunting, and number of pets
- If there must be a merger, Bellbrook would be more vested than another city in preserving the Township's natural assets

Perceptions of Merger Affect on Lifestyles (con't)

Tax Implications, Loss of Land, and Cost to Tax Payers

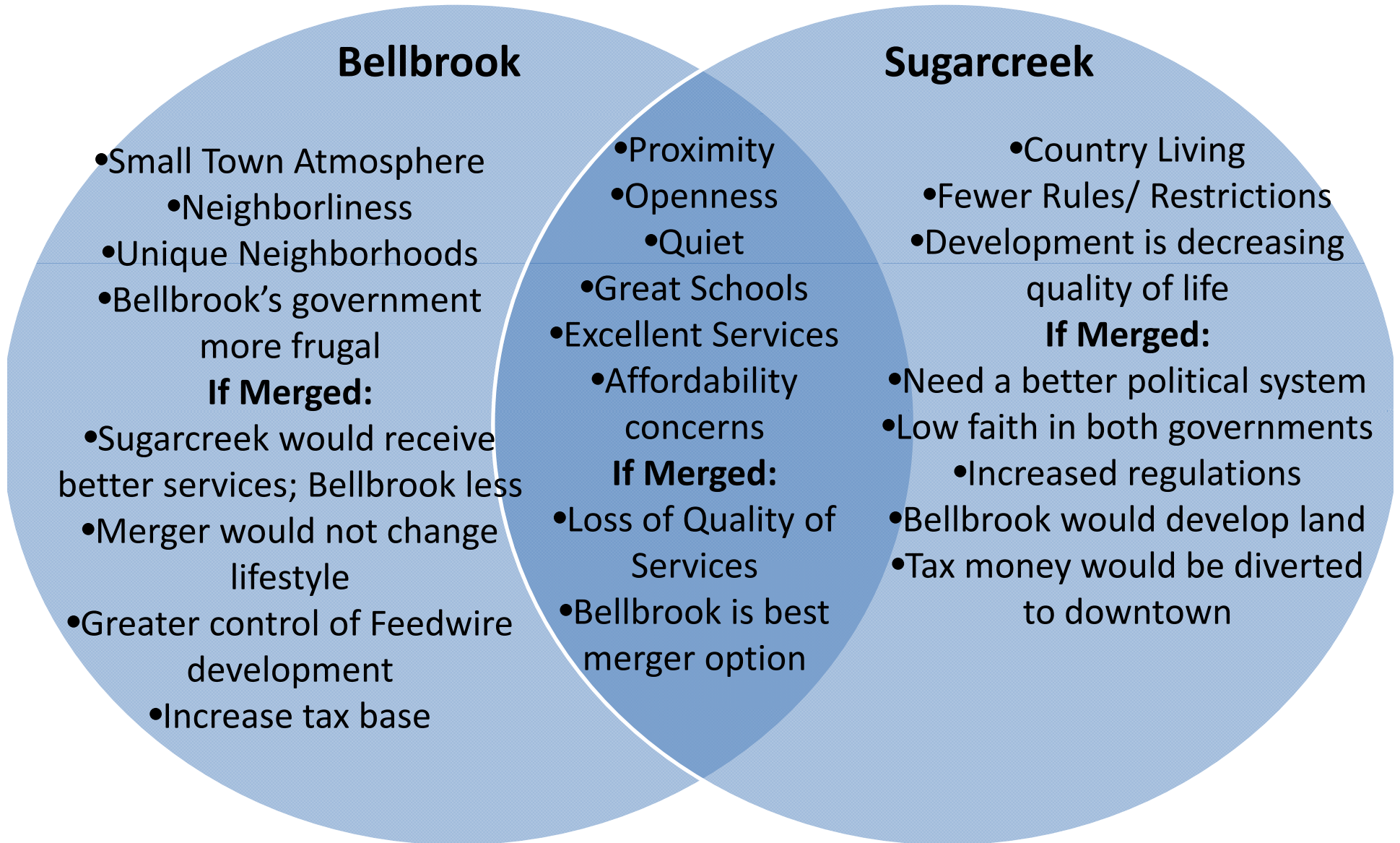
Bellbrook

- (Focus Group 1) Government service delivery would decline for Bellbrook citizens since there would be much more geography to cover
- (Focus Group 2) A merger's the only alternative to protect open space
- Land grab is underway
- (Focus Group 2) Greater control of Feedwire Rd if communities merge
- (Focus Group 2) Merger would increase tax base

Sugarcreek

- Bellbrook would no longer be land locked and would be able to increase their tax base
- Bellbrook would slowly develop land if merge occurs; the community would not remain rural
- Tax revenues would be diverted from the township to the downtown area

Shared Lifestyle Qualities and Concerns



Summary

Bellbrook

Participants live in Bellbrook for the small town atmosphere, school system and the neighborliness.

If merged, they feel their lifestyle would stay the same. They believe that Sugarcreek would receive better government services but (Focus Group 1) the quality of Bellbrook government services may decline.

Merging would increase Bellbrook's tax base and allow for greater control of development on Feedwire Road; it's a necessary long-term strategy (Focus Group 2)

Sugarcreek

Participants live in Sugarcreek

Township for the country living.

They enjoy having fewer restrictions on what they can do on their property and like having their space and privacy and appreciate the school system.

If merged, they feel their lifestyle would change. They have concerns that Bellbrook would develop the land and their tax money would be diverted to downtown, and the quality of their services may decrease.

They feel a new government system would need to be introduced if merged.