

Donna Hellmann

On December 4, 2008 my fellow commissioners and I began the process of studying the potential of merging the City of Bellbrook and Sugarcreek Township. We were given a packet of information on the Sunshine Laws and the Ohio Revised Code which became affectionately known by us as the ORC. We began this journey of gathering data, analyzing it and forming Terms and Conditions of Merger. Tonight we complete this process with our votes. We will enter the fraternity with the others before us around the state who looked at merging their communities. Some of their efforts resulted in merger and others did not. Regardless those commissioners like us took on the task for their community with a deep sense of commitment and gave their community the information to make an informed decision.

The Lifestyle focus groups that were conducted in February of this year showed that both of our communities value the small town atmosphere of the city as well as the open space feeling of the many farms that make up the township. Preserving this unique sense of community is a number one priority.

Over the past 20 months I have heard many concerns from a variety of residents. Each has their perspective depending on where they live. Some are concern of losing control over their open space because zoning will change that cherish element, other are concerned that the someday widening of roads by the county will take a piece of their property and drastically reduce their property values. Still others are concerned about additional annexations. Others want the facts to make an informed decision.

I feel the commission has explored and put together a wide variety of information to assist all citizens in making a decision on whether to merge or not merge. Contrary to some in the community, I believe the voters can understand the packet of information they will receive and be able to make an informed vote.

In the public hearings and public comments at the end of meetings I have heard the term "If it's not broke don't fix it". I have a problem with this analogy. Why are there ten commissioners studying this issue for twenty months? I think people realize something is broke or breaking. Whether merging is the solution remains to be seen. I do know change is coming. In the twenty one years my family has lived in the community there have been many changes. So many that sometimes I have to think back to how different it was in 1989 versus today. Change will continue and tough decisions will have to be made by all of us to keep the sense of community we have now.

The merger issue can be compared to a suspense novel you are reading. You are to the last page and there are two outcomes for this novel. The first outcome, those who believe that a merger is the beginning of the end of the lifestyle they have enjoyed and their wish to keep their sense of community. These folks need to cast their vote. The second outcome, those who see a vision of controlling the destiny of their community for future years to keep their sense of community. Their vote needs to be cast. I believe the voters who cast a ballot either for or against the merger study in November of 2008 should write the last page of this novel. And so I vote to put the merger issue to the voters on November 2nd.