

https://www.hoosiertimes.com/herald_times_online/news/local/public-input-sought-on-benton-township-joining-fire-protection-district/article_80fc4d08-db42-11ea-96c9-631317aa3612.html

FEATURED

Public input sought on Benton Township joining fire protection district

By Ernest Rollins The Herald-Times
Aug 11, 2020



Emblems of the Monroe Fire Protection District are seen on departmental items. (Chris Howell / Herald-Times)

Monroe County and Benton Township officials are interested in hearing from residents on the proposal for Benton Township to join the Monroe Fire Protection District.

Benton Township officials hosted three public meetings discussing the proposed merger and its potential impact on township residents last week. Benton Township Trustee Michelle Bright said the first meeting had the largest online presence. By the third day, numbers

dropped both online and in-person. Only one person showed up in-person on Saturday.

At least one Benton Township resident expressed concern after the meeting stated that the sessions were not engaging the public as much as the law and a local resolution requires, especially due to challenges of meeting in person due to the pandemic.

However, County Attorney Jeff Cockerill said that township officials' efforts were sufficient to meet the public engagement meeting process required before Benton Township can be considered to join the fire protection district. Bright said township officials also plan to post a recording of the public meetings on Facebook and the township's website so people can learn more about the proposal.

The conclusion of the third meeting on Saturday started the formal public input process for the proposed merger. It will last for 30 days.

Property owners in Benton Township are encouraged to indicate whether they formally support or oppose the township joining the fire protection district.

Supporters of the merger are being requested to fill out a petition available online at the township's website. Bright said residents can also contact the township office to indicate their support of the proposed merger.

Individuals who oppose the merger can file a remonstrance petition with the auditor's office. They can do so either by emailing auditor-fpd@co.monroe.in.us or by sending mail to 100 W. Kirkwood Ave., Bloomington, IN 47404. For assistance, residents can also call the auditor's office at 812-349-2510.

Cockerill said if at least 50 people file a remonstrance petition with the auditor's office, that will trigger a special public hearing, separate from the one required in order for the commissioners to vote on the merger. He said any resident of the existing district or of the township seeking to join can file.

Bright said the law states that only property owners are allowed to formally indicate support or opposition. She added each property owner gets one vote, but with a maximum of one vote per parcel. She understands that some residents of the township may not be property owners but that is just how the law is worded.

Cockerill said the county commissioners, who have the final say on whether the merger is approved, will consider both petitions and additional public feedback as they weigh their decision. If the commissioners approve of the merger before the end of the year, Benton Township could potentially join the district starting Jan. 1, 2022.

According to representatives with Baker Tilly municipal advisers, Benton Township residents could see their tax bills increase by 13.6% in 2022 if they were to join the fire protection district.

Currently, a Benton Township property owner of a residential homestead valued at \$100,000 pays an estimated \$461 in taxes, according to Paige Sansone of Baker Tilly. With the proposed tax increase joining the fire protection district would bring, that amount is estimated to increase by \$63 to \$524 in 2022.

She also estimated that other townships comprising the Monroe Fire Protection District — Perry, Clear Creek, Indian and soon-to-be Van Buren and unincorporated Bloomington

townships come Jan. 1, 2021 — would see their taxes decrease around 4%.

Sansone said residents interested in calculating their own estimated tax changes can do so by visiting the Department of Local Government and Finance website and using their tax bill calculator. Just apply the estimated percent change for each of the townships to get an idea of how much in taxes one can estimate having to pay, she said.

The trade-off for the tax hike, according to township officials, is improved fire and emergency medical services. This includes staffing the fire station in Unionville 24/7 with two full-time firefighters. The current fire station is staffed by volunteers.

Monroe Fire Protection District fire chief Dustin Dillard said last week there is the possibility of having a third firefighter posted at the station who would float around the district. Other service changes residents might see, according to township officials, include faster response times and potential homeowners' insurance savings if the company the resident contracts with relies on Insurance Service Office ratings.

For more information about the proposed merger, visit the township's website or contact the office at 812-339-6593 or email bentontownshiptrustee.org.

Contact Ernest Rollins at 812-331-4357, erollins@heraldt.com or @fromernestdesk.

Sponsored Content on HTO

7 Healthy Snacks for Kids Playing Sports



BY REID HEALTH

We've rounded up some of the best sport snack ideas that your growing athlete will love.

Ernest Rollins