

Markle could grow with voluntary annexation

By
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The town of Markle could increase its size by approximately 53.6 acres, after the town council unanimously approved a resolution outlining a fiscal plan for voluntary annexation of the property.

At its regular meeting on Wednesday, Oct. 17, council members heard from two economic development officials during a public hearing, both in favor of the annexation of land owned by Warpup Farms LLC-Brian Warpup.

"Voluntary annexation requests are frankly the best and only opportunity at this point that provides that opportunity for a community to grow," said Mark Wickersham, executive director of the Huntington County Economic Development Corp. "In that collaborative spirit, it always works when you have a property owner who is proud of the community, genuinely believes that the value of his property will be increased by being part of the town, wants to be helpful, wants to be that collaborative person involved. In that case, I know Mr. Warpup and our board would very much encourage you to support his request for annexation."

Wickersham's counterpart in Wells County, Chad Kline, director of Wells County Economic Development, agreed, saying the request of property owners to voluntarily annex into Markle is the envy of most communities.

"As you can probably see in Fort Wayne, it's a consistent battle of annexation, because the state has made it very difficult to do anymore," Kline said.

According to Resolution 2018-6, the Markle Volunteer Fire Department already provides service to the Warpup Farms property and street lighting is presently provided. Police protection and trash collection will result in a slight increase in cost to the town, which will be provided for in the annual budget. Council President Jeff Humbarger said the town will have three years to run water and sewer lines to the area.

The annexation ordinance, No. 2018-10, had its first reading after the ap-

proval of the resolution, and will be voted on in the next town council meeting, which is Nov. 21.

Residents who are currently living within town limits and are served by Waste Management will soon have a change in what materials they can recycle.

Humbarger said information will soon come in the mail to Markle residents outlining the new recycling guidelines. He noted that no more recycling materials will be accepted in plastic bags; they must be placed in the recycling bins.

Also, glass will no longer be accepted for recycling.

Clerk-Treasurer Carolyn Hamilton said it was her understanding that recycling went to China, but that country will no longer take recycling materials from the U.S.

Neither Hamilton nor the council or staff knew when the new guidelines would become effective.

On another matter, properties with complaints of code and safety violations were again brought before the council by Marla Stambazze of the Huntington Countywide Department of Community Development. Four properties were presented, two of them involving new complaints.

Stambazze said the first, located at 480 N. Clark St., owned by Matthew Schrodi of Fort Wayne, was up for a tax sale and did not sell. The building was formerly used for some type of manufacturing operation, she said.

"Parts of this building are really unsafe; parts are not ... there is quite a bit that is very structurally unsound," she reported. "The back is separating; the cement blocks are coming away from the building, and that could fall on someone. Plus, there is an open space in the garage door that kids could kick in or adults could kick in and get in."

Stambazze said it could cost more than \$10,000 to demolish the building and she doesn't know what was manufactured in the building that could also involve hazardous materials such as asbestos. The owner has not responded to attempted contacts by the DCD and

Markle Town Marshal John Markley and has not paid taxes.

At the council's direction, Stambazze will begin a title search as part of the process to address the complaints.

A second new complaint on a property located at 320 W. Morse St., owned by Natalie Gill, was given until Oct. 12 to comply with an order for repairs on an accessory structure with a caved-in roof or contact the DCD. Stambazze said Gill has done neither, and has ordered a title search on the property.

The council gave her permission to proceed with the process.

The third property, an ongoing case located at 425 Clark St., owned by Travis Lee, was given 120 more days to repair violations including repairing the roof of the house. Stambazze said the owner has complied with all of the DCD's requests with the exception of the roof. However, the order to make repairs has now expired, she said.

Lee's sister, Terri Bartrom, said they are trying to get the repairs made, but her brother is in the hospital and is on a fixed income. She has been in contact with a roofing contractor and she and Lee are waiting on him to come back to complete the work.

Bartrom also said after the repairs have been made they will likely put the property up for sale as an "investment property."

Stambazze reported that another ongoing property situation at 235 Wilt St., which was owned by Seth J. Tracy, of Fort Wayne, has been purchased at a tax sale by Dawn Harvey of Good Faith Happenings LLC. Stambazze said Harvey must wait a year after the tax sale to get the title and make any repairs. She recommended that the council keep the order of enforcement in place until it expires in August 2019. By then Harvey should have the deed to the property and can start work to reach compliance. The council agreed.

Stambazze said in the meantime, Harvey has kept the property mowed and maintained.

In other business:

• The council voted 3-0

to approve Resolution 2018-5 and also 3-0 on its first reading to adopt Ordinance 2018-9, which replaces Chapter 34 in the Markle Town Employee Handbook. The resolution addresses updating human resource issues in the handbook to make them consistent with current laws.

• Town council members signed the Title VI Implementation Plan, which addresses discrimination policies and meeting requirements for nondiscrimination.

Town General Assistant Mike Grant, who is the Title VI coordinator, said the town completed the Title VI plan in 2016 but never received a copy of it.

"If we don't get that in place, it could jeopardize any future grant opportunities we may have," he explained.

• Grant also said the town's 1990 model leaf vac machine has broken down, delaying the removal of leaves. While it would only cost \$3,072.53 to repair, the replacement parts are no longer being made and are becoming harder to find. He said it would be in the town's best interest to pay \$15,575 to repower the machine with a new engine, new fan and rebuilt radiator, among other refurbishments.

A new machine would cost \$50,000, Grant added.

The council voted unanimously to refurbish the machine.

Brown Equipment Co., of Fort Wayne, provided the estimate and will perform the service.

• The council also directed Wastewater Superintendent Scott Spahr to get the emergency dialer system at the wastewater plant fixed. It has been showing a false alarm and trying to dial town officials. It started acting up during the town's recent power outage, Spahr said.