

For Immediate Release
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VILLAGE OF ONEKAMA AND ONEKAMA TOWNSHIP TO CONSIDER CONSOLIDATION

COMMUNITY FORUMS SET FOR FEB. 10 AND MARCH 23

Onkama, Michigan - Onkama Township and the Village of Onkama will begin a process to consider options for consolidating their township and village governments into one governmental entity.

The process will be facilitated by the Citizen's Research Council of Michigan, (CRC) a nonprofit 501 (c) (3) corporation that promotes sound government policy through factual, objective and independent research. This is one of the latest chapters in Michigan's history that a township and village have jointly decided to consider consolidation.

In announcing the project, Village President Robert Blackmore and Township Supervisor David Meister said that the community interest in exploring consolidation stems from:

- A shared interest in looking at options for containing the costs of government and government services in Onkama.
- A common interest in unifying the community around sharing its visions, goals and objectives to improve economic well-being and quality of life.
- An interest in streamlining and simplifying public access to government.

Meister and Blackmore emphasized that no decision has been made to proceed with consolidation. The purpose of the project is to determine if a consolidation option is feasible and desirable. A decision to consolidate the two entities would require a vote of the electorate. They said that every effort will be made to involve all interested parties in the process, including two community forums co-hosted by the Village and Township.

On February 10, 2011, the first community forum will be held from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at Onkama's Village Hall. The purpose of that forum will be to discuss the purpose of the project and to identify community questions and opportunities that the project should address.

On March 23, 2011, the second community forum will be held from 6:30 p.m. to 8:30 p.m. at Onkama's Village Hall where the Citizens Research Council will respond to questions, concerns and opportunities and talk in more detail about consolidation options and implications.

There will be several additional efforts made to invite questions from the community, including an insert in the Onkama News that will be mailed to all residences in the Township in early March and questionnaires at the Village and Township and other community locations. The Alliance for Economic Success is helping to coordinate the project and answer questions. Questions or concerns about the consolidation project may be sent at any time in any number of ways.

email: jami@allianceforeconomicsuccess.com; mail: AES, 1361 US 31 South, Manistee, MI 49660; fax: 231-723-4325. Names of individuals or organizations submitting questions will not be required. All questions will be provided to the Citizens Research Council for their research and response.

The project is funded by a grant from the Michigan Municipal League's (MML) Shared Services Initiative, a grant from the Portage Lake Watershed Endowment Fund and through funding provided by the Township and Village. The Township and Village contributed \$2,250 to support the project. The Shared Services Initiative was recently created at the MML's recognition that "Michigan's local governments are facing the most significant budget crisis in our lifetime."

The process will include: an assessment of consolidation options under Michigan law and their implications for the Onekama community; the development of the "business case" for consolidation options for consideration by the Township and Village; and a report that will define the financial, legal and contractual, and operational implications of the options considered. Several community forums will be held throughout the process to obtain input and share information about consolidation options and implications. In the event that the township and village choose to pursue consolidation of two governments, CRC will work with the community to prepare ballot information and a ballot proposal.

The project will be completed in June or July 2011. The Alliance for Economic Success assisted the community in securing the MML grant and will help coordinate the project.

NOTE: Individuals or organizations that want to receive future updates, news releases or other information about the Onekama Consolidation Project should contact the Alliance for Economic Success at 231-723-4325 or at jami@allianceforeconomicsuccess.com. Notices will also be posted at the Township and Village offices at various locations in the Onekama Community.

Background - Collaboration in Onekama Area

Portage Lake Watershed Forever Plan. In 2008, over 150 people participated in developing what is now the approved Portage Lake Watershed Forever Plan that encompasses the township and village. That effort recognized the importance of community engagement in establishing priorities and action plans for the watershed. Community input reflected the importance of communication and collaborative planning among local units of government. The Plan specifically recognized the importance of local government collaboration to "ensure that growth and development in the watershed is directed to areas of the watershed with existing adequate infrastructure in a compact manner, allowing for the conservation of existing open space and farmland." The Plan also recommended local government collaboration to support unified storm water management; use of compact development for new developments near headwater area; preservation of farmland; buffer ordinances and appropriate setback requirements; and protection of groundwater production and other purposes.

Onekama Community Master Plan. In 2010, the Onekama Community Master Plan was approved by the community. The joint master plan developed in part as an outgrowth of the Portage Lake Watershed Forever Plan recommendation. The master plan establishes a forward looking blueprint for the Village and Township. A joint planning commission has been formed to guide Plan implementation and a community ordinance is currently being considered. Interest in consolidation of the Village and Township was expressed at several community forums held to obtain input.

Community Master Plan.

Other collaborative efforts in the greater Onekama area include:

- The creation of a township-wide Special Assessment District for controlling aquatic invasives which has been highly successful in controlling/eradicating phragmites.
- The completion of an economic development strategy for the "Gateway to the M-22 Corridor" which encompasses both Onekama and Arcadia Townships.
- The expansion of the "Farm to School" program from Benzie County to Onekama Consolidated Schools, introducing locally grown food into the school lunch menu.

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