

Open Letter Regarding One Form of Government on South Bass Island

There has been a lot of information going around regarding switching South Bass Island to one form of government with quite a bit of emphasis on moving the entirety of South Bass Island only to a Village form of government and the Trustees feel that this is not in the best interests of all residents of Put-in-Bay Township.

One argument is that expanding the Village would allow more people to run for council. There used to be more people who lived in the Village but they were pushed out. For example, Lorain Avenue used to be residential, but zoning changes to benefit the businesses changed all of those homes to commercial zoning classifications. The spread of commercial businesses has now pushed past the Reel Bar, as well as past Mossbacks. Where does it end?

We already know that living on an island can be expensive, however, it would be much more costly if all of South Bass Island were to become a Village. Granted, Township residents utilizing Village water pay a higher rate than Village residents, but those savings would pale in comparison to how many other expenses would go up for Township residents. The State of Ohio used to offset levy costs to help local residents financially. This has now changed, and any new levies would lose the prior exemption (which remains in place for Township residents under the current Township levies). All current levies would need to be rewritten for a new form of government. Basically, whatever you are currently paying in taxes would go up by at least 10%.

In addition to levies, there would be additional expenses that would need to be covered by an expanded or newly formed Village. In the Township, we have agreements in place to minimize costs to island residents. We work with the County to obtain grants and share paving and maintenance costs. If the island becomes a Village, the County will no longer be responsible for Langram Road and Catawba Ave. It also no longer needs an agreement for maintenance so the financial offset for non-County roads disappears. To put this in perspective, the Township only paid approximately \$50,000 to repave Trenton Avenue. The total cost of that project was approximately \$200,000. The upcoming repaving of Langram Road is projected to be over \$1,000,000. Currently, Township residents are not responsible for any of this cost. Under a newly formed Village government, residents would be 100% responsible for this cost.

Other new expenses would include snowplows and other road maintenance equipment. The Township has worked collaboratively with the Put-in-Bay Township Port Authority to obtain grants to purchase snowplows, backhoes and other equipment to minimize costs for Township residents. Under an expanded Village, this type of equipment would need to be purchased by the Village, and there would not be help from the Port Authority.

In addition to road equipment, safety service equipment would need to be purchased. This would include, but not be limited to, ambulances, fire trucks, rescue airboat, and related safety service equipment. This equipment is currently owned by the Township as is the Township Fire Station and Township EMS Station. The equipment cost alone is well over \$1,000,000.

Policing the island will be an important issue when moving to one form of government. The Mayor and the Village Police Chief have stated that it would take a budget of \$2,000,000 and at least 20 officers to police the Village at its current size. There is not enough housing for that many officers, let alone housing for the additional officers that would be needed if the Village expanded to all of South Bass Island. Hiring 20 officers would be very difficult and the Village has struggled with hiring enough police officers in recent years. Furthermore, this expansion would increase the budget considerably. Currently the Township provides police services for both South Bass Island and Middle Bass Island under a contract with the Ottawa County Sheriff's Office for \$750,000. There would also be a sizeable increase in liability insurance that would have to be covered by residents if all policing on South Bass Island fell under the Village Police.

The Township is also able to maintain and service the upper islands because of the shared costs from the Port Authority and the County here on South Bass Island. These islands get many of their services because of the cooperative agreements made to benefit the entire Township, not just the portion of South Bass Island thereby allowing the residents on the islands to benefit from a pool of equipment and services because of they are part of Put-in-Bay Township. These services would not normally be available to communities of that size. If the Township no longer included South Bass Island, what repercussions would Middle Bass Island and North Bass Island face?

Lastly, the notion of home rule has been a topic of debate when discussing one form of government. To clarify, home rule allows for local ordinances/laws to be passed. The Village is able to do this, whereas the Township has to follow Ohio Revised Code. Ordinances are often enacted without community input, such as the parking permit ordinance. While it is easy to pass an ordinance, it can be difficult to enforce. Usually, only the local municipality can enforce ordinances. The Township, however, can work with the Ohio Legislature to get laws passed that apply specifically to the islands. One example of this is ORC 4519.41. This law allows island residents to operate ATVs on the roads between November 1st through April 30th.

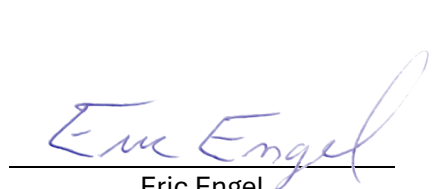
The Township has worked hard to maintain a balance between residents and businesses. We have managed commercial growth and kept strong zoning in place. From constructing a thriving Senior Center to contracting with the Sheriff's Office for protection, the number one focus for the Township has been the people who call the islands their home. Moving to one form of government would end up creating an unnecessary financial burden and unstable future for Township residents. Although two forms of government on a small island may seem excessive, both forms bring different benefits to the island residents and visitors. It is this combination of services that helps Put-in-Bay thrive.



Matt Miller
Township Trustee



Chris Cooper
Township Trustee



Eric Engel
Township Trustee