

OPENING STATEMENT – Laura Fogg, Citizens Research Group Presentation

PIBPOA Meeting, September 14, 2024

For those of you who don't know me, my name is Laura Fogg. When I moved here, almost 20 years ago, I was struck by the close-knit community. Of course, along with the benefits of being here, I also became aware of the unique challenges of living on an island. And, I became increasingly aware of the challenges faced by those in public service due to the remoteness of the islands and the small size of their populations.

Over time, it became clear that some of those challenges stemmed from the form of our local governments, which is why I'm so passionate about the work we're doing today. I'm working with a group of citizens which was formed to study improvements to the structure of local government in the Village of Put-in-Bay and Put-in-Bay Township. Our group, Citizens Research Group (or CRG for short), has been working together for over a year and is now a 501c4 nonprofit organization.

Before I hand you over to BGSU, I'd like to help you understand why we are here.

Last summer a survey was conducted. One topic covered by the survey was how respondents felt about the current dual forms of government vs only having a single form of government. The results of that survey indicated that over 80% of the people who responded thought that a single form of government was worth pursuing.

In light of these survey results, last year, we formed the Citizens Research Group (CRG) to study whether it might be advisable to pursue re-defining the governance of the Bass Islands. We've met at least monthly for over a year, with many hours of work being done in between each meeting.

There are 8 members of CRG, made up mostly of year-round residents, many from multi-generational islander families. Our group consists of village residents, township residents, business people, non-business people and residents of both South Bass and Middle Bass Island. Present here today from our group are myself (from the township on SBI), Dave Schafer (village) and Sara Booker (township). Others who were not able to be here today are Billy Market (township), Kim Morrison (township), Brian Cultice (township), John Fisher (township), and Kate Richardson (Middle Bass Island). CRG is not connected to, nor does it include, any member of either the Village Government or the Township Trustees. Although, we have frequent communication with many stake holders of the community including Village officials, Township officials, community leaders, fiscal officers, the county engineer, residents (of SBI and MBI) and others in order to gain a better understanding of the various concerns throughout the community.

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As you may be aware, in 1987 Bowling Green State University did a study of this topic and again in 2001 they did another study. Both of these studies can be found on the Property Owners website. This year, we obtained a grant through BGSU to update the 2001 study and gather community feedback. BGSU has been interviewing residents, conducting focus groups, and recently conducted a survey focused on the topic of governance of the islands which they will discuss shortly. The University's role is to gather and present its findings, but not make any recommendations.

To that end, CRG has also hired a professional government consulting company called Local Gov Consultants. They are comprised of experts in the municipal government sector, including former city managers/township administrators, a police chief and an attorney with expertise in this field. Charlotte Colley, from Local Gov Consultants, is here today to my right. The consultants have been collecting information about taxes, services, zoning, etc and, at a later date, will take the next step of making recommendations based on the findings of the research.

Our group has no pre-conceived notion of where the combined efforts of BGSU and Local Gov Consultants will lead. However, it is anticipated that with this in-depth study, ideas will be generated that could lead to improvements to meet the needs of all of the residents of the islands. To be clear, there are no scenarios that have been ruled out. Possible solutions may include:

- Annexation of only a portion of SBI into the Village
- Annexation of all of SBI into the Village w/ the village remaining as part of the twp
- Annexation of all of SBI into the Village w/ the village NOT remaining as part of the twp
- Including NBI and/or MBI in any annexation, or not
- Dissolving the Village altogether, leaving only the Township
- Making no changes at all
- Or any other recommendation made by the consultants

We understand that any change to governance can feel uncertain, but we want to assure everyone that this is a process built on community input. No direction is being pursued yet, and every voice matters. We ask that you also be patient in waiting for all the information to be gathered, studies to be concluded and reports to be presented before forming your opinions. This process will take time...much more time than just today.

And now I'll hand you over to Lisa Lawson from BGSU...