

## **Bridgewater's Future**

In March 2018 the Town Board initiated a strategic planning discussion with the basic questions:

**What are the challenges and opportunities for the Township over the next 20 to 30 years?**

**Are there actions we should be taking now to deal with them?**

### **The time frame reflects**

- The termination of the Northfield annexation agreement in December 2019 and the expectation that a new 20 year agreement will be negotiated during 2019.
- The expiration of the Dundas annexation agreement in 2033.
- The probable closing of the Rice County Landfill in 20 to 25 years resulting in the demise of the host fee which provides about 25% of the Township's revenue.
- The anticipated northward expansion of the Faribault industrial park with an interchange at 35W and CR9, the southern boundary of the Township.

### **Long-term challenges:**

- Loss of the Landfill Host Fee (about \$150,000) as landfill closes
- Loss of tax base through annexations
- Increasing cost of road maintenance
- Increasing cost of recovery from extreme weather events
- Declining population resulting in higher per capita taxes
- Compromising the viability of farming businesses as taxes increase or services decline

### **Opportunities:**

- Modest industrial development around existing gravel mining operations and the Comus Junction rail site
- Development of several housing clusters on marginally productive land
- The increasing development and success of small farms (15 to 50 acres) and Community Supported Agriculture.

**In discussing how we might take advantage of these opportunities the Board identified several goals:**

1. Maintain a rural lifestyle,
2. Support agriculture as the core business
3. Diversify the tax base
4. Modest population growth – from 1819 currently to about 2000

**While discussions focused on the long-term, the motivation for addressing these issues now had its roots in relatively recent events. These included:**

- Northfield's decision to break the Waterford annexation agreement which had been in place since the early 1980s and seemed to be functioning well.

June 12, 2019

- Northfield's annexation of 528 acres from Greenvale Township in 2009 with no plan for use of the land.
- Northfield's 2010 proposed annexation of the Gill & Prawer properties, 250 acres in Bridgewater, despite the proposal being clearly incompatible with the annexation agreement.
- A December 2017 meeting of officials from Dundas and Rice County with the developer of the Wolf Creek Auto Club in which Dundas officials indicated that providing city services to the Club would entail, among other things, annexing the land on which the club was to be located. The annexation would have to run through Bridgewater Township.
- The expiration of Bridgewater's annexation agreement with Northfield in December 2019.

**Looking at the long-term challenges and opportunities in the context of these recent events the Board concluded:**

- Northfield's propensity to annex land depends more on the motivations of the Council and Administration at the time rather than on a long-term planning process or genuine development prospects.
- Annexation agreements have generally worked well but they are inherently weak from the Township's point of view and enforcement is expensive.
- Rice County's zoning ordinances, which must be designed to deal with issues in the 14 townships within the County, limit the ability of Bridgewater Township to take advantage of some long-term opportunities since township ordinances must be at least as restrictive as the County's.

**The Board's discussion progressed from "analysis of the situation" to "what can we do?" Options discussed were:**

- Attempt to get legislation passed that would create a hybrid of a city and a township giving some of the protections of incorporation while recognizing the rural setting with agriculture (food production) as the primary purpose rather than high density development.
- Create annexation agreements that deal more effectively with financial and enforcement issues.
- Work with Rice County on some changes to zoning ordinances and the County's Comprehensive Plan and on individual projects as they arise.
- **Incorporate – gain more control over the future development of Bridgewater.**

After some exploration of each of these options, the Supervisors concluded that the most favored option, creating a hybrid city/township, was unrealistic so it was dropped from consideration. The Supervisors are pursuing the other three options in parallel. Incorporation would be the most significant change for the Township and thus has required the most research and engagement with the community.

**On June 12 the Bridgewater Board voted to develop an application for incorporation.**

**In September 2019 the Board expects to decide whether to submit the application for incorporation.**