

Annexation necessary for vitality and future of City of Sheboygan

By David Biebel, Director of Public Works

The City of Sheboygan is over 150 years old. Over its history, opportunities for growth and expansion have been presented in the form of an annexation. Annexation is the term used to describe a change in the community's boundary that typically includes expansion of incorporated (City) land from a neighboring unincorporated (Town) land, resulting in changing the boundaries. The City of Sheboygan has 388 annexations in its history.

Growth and expansion of Cities is not only necessary but essential to the overall health of a community. David Rusk, author of Cities without Suburbs states : " when a city stops growing, it starts shrinking. Bad state laws can hobble cities. Neighbors can trap cities. Old cities are complacent, young cities are ambitious."

The City of Sheboygan is a perfect model of this. For example, let's consider just the past 20 year history of the City of Sheboygan and the Town of Sheboygan with regard to growth and population. In 1990, the City of Sheboygan had a census population of 49,587, in 2000 the population was 50,792 and as the most recent census figure in 2010 the City of Sheboygan's population was 49,288 and in 2016 according to the State of Wisconsin's Department of Administration the City of Sheboygan has a population of 48,653. Since the 1970's census Sheboygan has been around 48,000 to 49,000.

Now consider the Town of Sheboygan over this same time period. In 1990, the Town of Sheboygan's population was 3,866. In 2000, the population grew to 5,874, and again the most recent 2010 census was 7,271 and in 2016, according to the State of Wisconsin's Department of Administration, the Town of Sheboygan has a population of 7,435.

The Town of Sheboygan has almost doubled in population in 20 years and has had some major commercial development as well, adding to their overall tax base.

All the while the City is constrained by its neighbors, not being able to expand, has lost population and further burdening the remaining tax base.

Even our neighbors to the south: Town of Wilson has grown 14.5% in population since 1990.

Annexations are fundamental and critical for cities to thrive. Without annexations, cities need some form of regionalization and shared revenue agreements in order to be successful. Neighboring townships thrive because of their close proximity to the city. Town residents enjoy a rural setting but convenience of city, for example, many use city parks, library, drop-off site and other services without having the burden to share in the overall costs. Is this fair or being a good neighbor?

The annexation opportunity our city faces is not about being a good neighbor.

The annexation opportunity our city faces is not about a golf course.

The annexation opportunity our city faces is not about the environment.

The annexation opportunity our city faces is not about the Kohler Company.

No, these are not the issues.

The issue the city faces is about the future of the City of Sheboygan.

Not just the next five or 10 years but 50, 100, 150 years from today – city officials will look upon this decision.

Sheboygan's population has been stagnant for decade while surrounding townships continue to grow. If the City is to continue to progress and grow, annexations will be necessary. Without annexation the City will become entrapped and choked off from opportunities.

Because of the annexation law requiring property owners to petition annexation, opportunities as great as the Kohler petition don't come around too often. To put this annexation in perspective on its importance to the City of Sheboygan – it will be the largest annexation of land for the City of Sheboygan since 1959.

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