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Credit River Township – or will it be a city?

- A semi-rural township in Scott County is pondering whether to incorporate to protect itself in the future.

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The semi-rural township that is Lakeville's neighbor to the west is thinking of declaring itself a city.

Residents of Credit River Township, dotted with million-dollar country mansions with easy access to freeway commutes, gathered in large numbers for an open house late Wednesday to review the results of a study that warns: "Keeping the status quo is not a viable option."

Residents and their elected leaders hasten to make clear that there's a difference between incorporating as a city and wishing to become city-like.

"People moved out here to live in a rural setting," said Leroy Schommer, chairman of the township board. "They'd like to keep the township intact."

But a number of forces are threatening to yield a situation in which "we do nothing but get picked apart," he said, "putting a burden on the remainder of the township. Incorporation seems to make the most sense."

Michael Sobota, the county official who oversees its planning process, praised the town board for its "bold move to open all this up, knowing they can't ignore the issues."

Typically in the past, townships have gradually been annexed by nearby cities as

denser suburban development spreads. But occasionally a township such as Grant, in Washington County, decides it wishes to remain in control of its own destiny and incorporates as a full-fledged city.

One trigger point for Credit River, the township's consultants warn, is the existence of large numbers of aging home sites with septic tanks, which pose an environmental risk to nearby wetlands. That will lead to pressure to bring in municipal water and sewer at a humongous cost.

Becoming a city changes things in various ways, adding costs but also forms of aid. The purpose of the study was to weigh the pros and cons and come up with a bottom-line estimate. The result: the status quo is the costliest; becoming a city is the least expensive.

In addition to written questionnaires this week at the event, the township is encouraging residents to read the relevant materials online (www.creditriver-mn.gov) and submit online responses. In July, the town board will digest those responses and by September it hopes to choose its preference.

Beverly Smith, a 15-year resident, expressed a common view after touring the exhibits, maps and graphs.

"I'd like to keep things as they are," she said. "But I'm hearing that we can't — that things can't stay as they are and they have to change. I would vote for incorporation. Apparently if we did lose pieces of ourselves, Savage would just take our best parts."

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