

Docket #13 AP-1 – Written Comment

My name is Allen Jones, a resident of Caro for over 40 years, and for several years I was the chairperson of the Caro Village to City citizens committee. We promoted the separation of the village from the townships of Indianfields and Almer. We were successful in that and the City Charter was completed on August 9, 2009. I also served as the vice-chairman of the Charter Writing Committee. I have an intimate knowledge of the history of the process.

Part IV of the Indianfields Township application for annexation says “The annexation is requested so that the public cemetery may be located in the City of Caro and so that the City of Caro may thereafter own, operate and control that cemetery as provided by MC L 117.14”

I am confused as to why the township now feels it is in the best interest of another governmental entity to assume their obligation. During the Cityhood campaign the township residents accused our committee of “land grabbing”. Our committee submitted a boundary proposal to the Boundary Commission, which included only the current village “footprint”. The Boundary Commissions made some changes to either “straighten out” some boundaries (i.e., Gilford road north side, Mertz road west side and Van Geisen, south side) or eliminate “islands”. The Cityhood committee did all we could do to not be accused of land grabbing.

At that time the township made no efforts to include the Indianfields Township Cemetery in the new city at the time of the boundary determination. In fact, the Indianfields Township board used the ownership of the cemetery as a tactic to discourage village residents from voting for Cityhood. They came out very early saying the burial cost for City residents was going to be significantly higher than Township residents. This was a transparent attempt to dissuade Caro residents from approving cityhood. Currently the rates for non-township residents (i.e. City residents) is a minimum of 3 times higher than pre-Cityhood and rates for certain infant services are as much as 5 times higher. Almer Township is a similar situation relative to the relationship with the City of Caro. However they have chosen to maintain the same rate available for City residents as for their township residents. If Indianfields has wanted to promote a cooperative agreement, and one that would make them competitive with Almer Township rates, they would offer the same rate to city residents as to township residents.

My understanding is that there were several meetings to discuss the disposition of formerly jointly owned assets. It is my understanding that in none of those meetings or subsequent meetings did the township volunteer the Indianfields Township Cemetery for annexation.

In 2007, during the Cityhood campaign, I personally conducting a study of Township Cemeteries around the State of Michigan, found it the Indianfields Township

Cemetery was in fact one of the highest cost operating cemeteries in the state. What was discovered is that they had excessive personnel cost and equipment cost. Further, it became apparent that the cemetery staff was responsible for duties other than the cemetery, including maintaining the township park. In addition, for several years, no cash was being deposited into the township general fund for cash sales. Several things, all now public knowledge came to light in the last few years. First, the head sexton of the cemetery was fired and criminal charges were filed against him by the township and his wife, also an employee with the township was released from her employment. The township made some cost reductions in their cemetery operations, but ridding themselves of this cemetery is by no stretch of the imagination a good-will gesture by the Indianfields Township towards the City but rather their effort to saddle another governmental agency with the problem they have created.

After reading the Questionnaire for Annexation completed by the township clerk, I'm even more confused than before. It appears that the township is primarily interested in receiving city services and feels annexation would not be necessary if these services were provided. It is my understanding that Indianfields Township apparently has not needed City services in the recent past, because they have not been using City water, which is now, and has been, available to them, nor have they accessed sewer services, which is available by agreement. I am not aware of the city plowing driveway or roads located on private property for anyone. Finally, the Questionnaire for Annexation seems to identify the road in front of the Indianfields Cemetery as a hindrance to getting county police protection. That road is a State of Michigan Highway (M24) so this statement by them does not seem to make sense. Also, the county has services 24/7 and serves the rest of the township so I don't know why they wouldn't serve the cemetery. Finally, I'm confused why it is such a "critical" issue now and has not been in the past.

I have no vested interested, either personal or business, in this issue except to take exception with the efforts of one governmental agency trying to renege on their signed dispersion of assets agreement and try to dump their problem on another agency and saying it is in the City's best interest. We (the city) separated from the Township so we could govern without their interference. I strongly oppose the township's attempt to locate the cemetery in the City of Caro. The services they seek are available without annexation. If the City of Caro needs a cemetery, it should be the City residents who make that decision.