

Merger

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approaching his would-be partners.

"It's just not a neighborly thing to do," Aubinger said. "We wouldn't even seriously consider it."

Or as Howard village trustee George Speaker put it: "We want to be our own people."

Schmitt is setting his sights on a long-term campaign to build support for regionalism over many years. Announcing a goal of consolidating by the year 2025, he has offered the rallying cry, "Let's unify by 2025."

The mayor is modeling his effort after a consolidation implemented 10 years ago in Louisville, Ky., where the city and county government merged while smaller towns were still allowed to operate. Advocates in Louisville pushed the idea for more than three decades before voters approved the merger in a public referendum.

Former Louisville Mayor Jerry Abramson,

now the state's lieutenant governor, said the merger not only tripled Louisville's population to 750,000, it eliminated duplication of services and promoted an environment of regional cooperation.

"We could begin to make decisions as a community," Abramson said. "We speak with one voice."

A turning point in the debate occurred when Kentucky Fried Chicken's parent company thought it was building new corporate headquarters in Louisville, only to discover after construction had started that its site was outside the city limits.

Schmitt raised similar concerns last year when he objected to neighboring municipalities using Green Bay mailing addresses, and competing for economic development by portraying themselves as part of Green Bay. After the U.S. Postal Service denied Schmitt's request to reconfigure the address system, the mayor said he would pursue a different solution.

His vision for consolidation calls for combining all areas with Green Bay

mailing addresses, including large portions of Allouez, Ashwaubenon, Howard and Bellevue, as well as sections of Hobart, Suamico, De Pere, Humboldt, Ledgeview and others. The combined population would be 183,871 — compared with the city's current 104,057.

Schmitt said he will empanel a task force later this year to begin studying the idea. The task force will include regional representation and will be asked to examine the concept in detail, he said.

"There's a lot of work to be done," he said. "But I think if we have the same goal, there's nothing that can stop us."

Acknowledging that many residents feel strongly about where they live, the mayor said he would not propose any arrangement that would eliminate a community's identity. He added: "You're not going to lose anything with this."

Schmitt harkened back to the 1964 merger of Green Bay with the town of Preble as a precedent. He also pointed to the recent combination of Green Bay and Allouez's

fire departments, which formed the Green Bay Metro Fire Department effective last year.

Allouez village trustee Ray Kopish agreed that the fire department consolidation has been a success. He voiced little support, however, for a complete merger of the two communities.

"I would be open to seeing what is being suggested," he said, "but I would not be leaning toward saying, 'This is a great idea.'"

Bellevue village trustee Kevin Brennan predicted that residents of his community would want no part of merging with Green Bay. Although cooperation exists through tourism promotion and other activities, Brennan said sharing a police department, for example, would be much more complicated. He also said Bellevue has established its own identity.

"I take a lot of pride in my community," he said. "I have no interest in being an extension of Green Bay."

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