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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:

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TRUSTEES VOTE NOT TO ENDORSE MERGER

The Washington Township Board of Trustees voted unanimously not to endorse a merger between the City of Centerville and Washington Township at their Monday, July 7, regular meeting.

In the same motion, township trustees acknowledged receipt of an electronic version of the final University of Toledo report, commissioned by the city and township to look at the consequences of merging functions.

The motion states: "Given the information in this report, the information in the Steen Study, and feedback from residents, the board does not endorse a merger for the Washington Township community with the city of Centerville. Ultimately the decision is up to the residents of both the incorporated and unincorporated jurisdictions. The board will make every effort to keep the township's residents informed on this issue via the *Township Quarterly*, the township web site, and at township trustee meetings."

Trustee President Joyce Young preceded the motion with an apology to the Centerville-Washington Park District, which was included in the study against the wishes of its board. "We were surprised and disappointed to see that the Centerville Washington Park District was included in this report. We would like to clarify that Washington Township, in keeping with the wishes expressed by the park district board, requested that the park district not be included. It has been our intent all along to fund a study that only includes the city and the township," Young said.

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UT Report/Washington Township

The Centerville-Washington Park District announced at the March 31 public presentation of the UT draft report that it wished to be removed from the study and since then has reiterated its opinion in letters to the city and township.

The final report will be posted this week on the township's web site, washingontwp.org. The posted document will track the changes made after the March 31 draft report so that citizens can see how the university has modified the report since that date. Washington Township will continue to work with the University of Toledo to discuss issues within the report.

"Our review shows no additional facts since the March 31 draft that would provide reason to recommend a merger to Washington Township residents," Young said.

The ultimate choice of merger is up to residents, she added, noting that a citizen group called Washington Township Forever has formed to support and maintain Washington Township as its own political entity. "This group provides information. It provides a forum for discussing merger with other residents," said Young, adding that members maintain a web site: washingontownshipforever.org.

"As I've said before, it's going to be up to the residents of the city and the township to decide whether they want a merger or if they prefer the choice of two governments that cooperate and coordinate in order to provide quality services," she said.

When the University of Toledo draft report was presented March 31, Dr. Hugh Hinton, associate professor of public administration who conducted the study, noted that:

- Merging the city, township and park district would raise the overall cost of services. The cost could be offset by adding an earned income tax and through some continued reliance on property tax.
- Costs would rise because the per capita cost of services for townships is "always" lower than cities. Townships on a per capita basis provide services for less than cities.
- The quality of government services probably would not be affected by merger.
- Merger has advantages and disadvantages. There are a number of alternatives to a merger, and there is no immediate pressure to make an irreversible decision.

The UT study cites three cases in which Montgomery County townships and cities have merged. The study points out that in at least two of those three mergers, communities underestimated the cost of merger or overestimated revenue, or both. The township followed up on the case studies and learned that the three merged communities – which included six cities and townships – have on average raised their income tax and property tax.

For instance, with the Clayton-Randolph Township merger, residents of Randolph Township now pay a 1.5% income tax where previously they had none and their property tax has gone up a little more than 2 mills. Residents of Clayton have saved .5 mills in property tax, but now pay a 1.5% income tax when previously they had none.

The township also commissioned a financial study by Steen & Company which looked at city and township assets and liabilities and compared the per capita costs of the city and township to similar communities. Washington Township's per capita spending was the lowest of the peer communities surveyed, according to the Steen study.

Trustees believe that the best public process includes complete information. Washington Township's website includes both financial studies and answers questions about merger. Check for updates by clicking on the "Financial Studies" link on the township website at washingtontwp.org. Residents also are invited to contact Washington Township at 433-0152 for information.

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