

Forest Park, Morrow, Lake City eye new designation

by [Bill Baldowski](#) Neighbor Newspapers

October 16, 2013 01:16 PM

[slideshow](#)

It looks as though Forest Park, Morrow and Lake City have adopted the motto of the “Three Musketeers” of Alexander Dumas’ 1844 novel of the same name, “one for all and all for one.”

Joel Lanken, city manager of Lake City, said these three Clayton municipalities have partnered and are preparing a resolution to take to their respective city councils with regard to each city being recognized as part of this tri-city opportunity zone by the federal Department of Community Affairs.

If passed by each city council and then officially recognized as an opportunity zone by the department, businesses in each city would gain federal tax credits of up to \$3,500 for each new employee they hire, a program that would continue for five years.

According to Lanken, an Oct. 2 meeting, held at the Morrow Center and involving elected officials and city employees of each municipality had department officials explain to city leaders the opportunity zone program and its advantages.

Not only did the officials discuss the advantages of being recognized as an opportunity zone but what it would mean to the cities involved with regard to decreased unemployment in the area, which would likely reduce foreclosures and attract new residents.

This information meeting followed similar ones held three months earlier, in which department officials addressed the city councils of each municipality involved to give them a brief presentation of how an opportunity zone works.

A key to the success of the program is having each city council not only approve being part of the opportunity zone area but agree to develop a working partnership to maintain the opportunity zone designation.

Lake City Mayor Willie Oswalt praised Lanken, Morrow City Manager Jeff Eady and Forest Park City Manager Frank Brandon for their efforts in developing a close partnership with regard to the program.

“Whether it is private business, city government or any type of partnership, when people not only get together but can agree to work together for a distinct purpose, that is when true progress is made,” Oswalt said. “I commend these three city managers for agreeing to sit down together

and discuss how this opportunity zone program could help each of us.”

Describing it as an economic development partnership, Lancken said, with the opportunity zone designation, “what happens in Forest Park, Morrow or Lake City would be good for all three cities.”

Although the concept of three adjoining cities applying to be jointly considered part of an opportunity zone was new to the department, Lancken said their officials “ran the numbers” and determined the joint Lake City, Morrow and Forest Park area did indeed qualify for the opportunity zone designation.

“Not only did our joint area qualify but the Department of Community Affairs pledged their support to assist us in this effort,” he said.

Oswalt said he is anticipating more employment in the tri-city area once the word of the federal tax credits to businesses hiring more employees becomes widely known.