If the “C” word has you concerned, don’t be. Consolidation is the big buzz word lately, and for good reason. As a component of the Economic Vitality Incentive Program (EVIP), proof of a municipality’s consolidation of services is providing additional revenue sharing for Iron County’s cities and townships.

You’ve heard a lot about consolidation lately in Iron River and Caspian. You’ve heard about it in the townships, and even in our school districts.

Iron County has prime opportunity to consolidate a variety of services and, though you may not realize it, already has. When Iron River, Stambaugh and Mineral Hills formally consolidated about 10 years ago, some duplication of services and administration were reduced. The West Iron County Sewer Authority, the West Iron District Library, and going back further, the West Iron County School District are all instances of good consolidation efforts.

Crystal Falls has cooperated with Crystal Falls Township in the areas of fire protection and water, and will continue to look for opportunities to combine services and save money.

EVIP rewards communities (and school districts) in three areas. The first, by showing accountability and transparency to the public. This is where you have probably heard the term “dashboard” used. It’s a way for citizens to view and understand local finances. The second involves cooperation, collaboration and consolidation. That’s where most of our municipalities are currently at, and that’s where there are concerns about how much consolidation is required.

It’s a component that had the Caspian City Commission concerned at its last meeting. A grant was awarded to Gaastra and Caspian to be used to study areas of consolidation, not total consolidation of two communities. Commissioners wanted actual figures presented to show specific areas of savings.

The grant will provide funding to do just that, and also provides the means to present information to the public; conduct public hearings for input, and then, if approved, create a new government structure.

The consolidation of Iron River, Stambaugh and Mineral Hills was actually a pilot program 10 years ago, and quite possibly paved the way for the consolidation component of EVIP.

Now, Iron River is looking at further opportunities to consolidate services and save money by perhaps creating a west side water authority and even a county-wide assessor.

No one community wishes to lose its identity, as was a concern with consolidation 10 years ago. Do we want to see a “Castra,” or “Gaspian”—no. That won’t happen. But if services are streamlined and co-opted, our communities could see a bit more revenue coming in to help rebuild and maintain infrastructure and provide better service. That’s the incentive.

--Marian Volek