



## Study leans against Lake Placid dissolution

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— LAKE PLACID — A study of local governments in Lake Placid recommends further consolidation of town and village services but advises against outright dissolution of the village. The Rochester-based Center for Governmental Research examined shared-services opportunities between the Town of North Elba and Village of Lake Placid in a study that began in 2007. Project Director Charles Zettek told the Village Board and Town Council recently that they had already reached about 80 percent of their potential for consolidation. “Compared to the rest of the state, you’re much farther ahead,” he said.

### DISSOLUTION

The 41-page report looked at ways the two governments could share resources in road maintenance, water and sewer, policing and courts. In his report, Zettek said he was asked to examine whether full dissolution of the village would save taxpayers money. Zettek told the municipalities that dissolution saves village taxpayers money but shifts more of the burden on town taxpayers. The report noted that two previous efforts to dissolve the village had failed. “The strategy of consolidating services on a function-by-function basis has clearly been more successful,” Zettek wrote.

### OPINIONS VARIED

Both the village mayor and town supervisor said their boards and employees have achieved a strong working relationship. Village Mayor Jamie Rogers told the Press-Republican that the dissolution debate is at least 40 years old, and he’s more interested in concentrating on specific ways to consolidate and save money. “Dissolution actually is not a very uniting process,” Rogers said. “It divides a lot of the community and very, very rarely does it ever pass. Communities do not like losing their identity.” North Elba Town Supervisor Roby Politi — himself a former mayor — said he favors a single form of government but that the decision to dissolve would be up to village trustees and voters. “I think we’re moving in the direction of dissolution,” he told the Press-Republican. “And I think a lot of the people in the community feel that it’s in the best interest of the community. Not necessarily from a cost-savings standpoint but from a governmental-efficiency standpoint.” Elected officials also questioned the fate of the community’s identity. Politi suggested the Town of North Elba would be renamed the Town of Lake Placid should the village dissolve.

### VILLAGE POLICE

Under the dissolution scenario, the most pressing question would be the fate of the Lake Placid Village Police. Zettek warned that ceding the \$1.4 million department to the town wouldn’t be simple. Questions about increasing staffing levels should the department have to take over more of the town — which extends into the Village of Saranac Lake — would have to be figured out in advance. Trustees suggested that a police district could mirror Lake Placid’s fire district, which extends to Ray Brook. Whatever the case, creating a police district would require intervention from Albany. “You’d need special state legislation,” Zettek said, “but it would allow you to expand the areas within which police could provide service and would spread those costs amongst a larger population.”

## ORDA PAYMENTS

The report examined how best to equalize the rates for municipal services. Village taxes often rise quicker than town because of limited area for new development.

The report noted that sewer and water rates are one of the few ways that villages are able to raise revenue from surrounding areas.

One scenario suggested by the report would be to shift more costs to the biggest user: the State Olympic Regional Development Authority.

The report noted that ORDA draws about 1.89 million gallons a year, more than twice as much as the next largest user.

Under that scenario, the report calculated a 16-percent drop in water rates for all residential users in the community.

Commercial users would rise by 5 percent, except for ORDA, which would see rates climb by 25 percent.

A similar formula for sewer rates would see a 24-percent drop for residential users, a 1-percent change for businesses and 14-percent climb for ORDA.

The report notes that each extra percentage point for water raises \$10,000. The community could adjust residential rates to help offset the extra costs to ORDA.

## SHARED SERVICES

The report praised the village and town for their close working arrangements. But it cautioned that many of the arrangements have not been agreed to in writing and said both put themselves at risk with mere “handshake” agreements.

The report also urged that the village and town work toward combining their public works and highway crews. The municipalities had tried more than a year ago to operate both departments under one superintendent, but that arrangement didn’t work out.

The report urged the two governments to encourage close cooperation and estimated that between one and three positions could be eliminated between the two departments through attrition if they are combined.

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