

**NEWS****Study: Orleans-run assessing may save nearly \$150K**[Print Page](#)By Tom Rivers [trivers@batavianews.com](mailto:trivers@batavianews.com)

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ALBION -- A study of assessing services in Orleans County shows a county-wide system, replacing one run individually by the 10 towns, would save local taxpayers about \$150,000 a year.

There are currently 11 full-time-equivalent employees working in assessing at the town and county level. Running a county-wide system could be done with eight employees, and the state would offer incentives for a "Coordinated Assessing Program" and annual reassessments, according to a study presented Wednesday to county legislators.

Four of the 10 towns already have CAPs for assessing. The towns of Yates and Shelby work together with assessing, while the towns of Albion and Gaines have hired the county for the service. The state offers a one-time incentive of \$7 per parcel for the CAPs.

The other six towns run their own systems, although they follow the same schedule, such as a reassessment of properties every three years.

There are 20,421 total parcels in the county, ranging from 1,249 in Gaines to 3,148 in Ridgeway. The International Association of Assessing Officers recommends one full-time assessing employee for every 2,000 parcels, said Scott Sittig, a senior research associate for the Center for Governmental Research in Rochester.

The 10 towns and county last year spent \$435,000 for assessing services. With a county-run model, the personnel and equipment costs would total \$395,000, a net decrease of \$40,000.

However, the state provides a \$5 incentive per parcel for every reassessment. If the county did new assessments every year, Orleans would receive about \$102,000 in new state aid, making a total net savings of \$142,000 with the county-run system. That \$102,000 would only be new revenue in the years the towns don't do reassessments, which were last done in 2007.

Besides the cost savings, Sittig said a county-run system would have standardized quality and professionalism, and one central database allowing assessors greater flexibility without constraint of municipal boundaries.

The one big drawback, Sittig told legislators, is the town assessors fear residents would lose "the personal touch," by having a centralized assessing system.

The county would likely hire many of the town assessors in the county-run system, Sittig said. The county also could consider having mobile units in different parts of the county. But the biggest change for many residents would be calling a county office instead of a town office for a question about exemptions or property valuations.

There are two ways to do the county-wide system. One requires a public referendum to put the county in charge of assessment. The other would operate as a CAP, with the towns retaining assessment responsibilities. In that model, the towns contract with the county for the service, but the towns still keep jurisdiction over assessment.

If not all towns are in favor of a county-run system, towns could form CAPs with neighboring municipalities, in a similar model such as the Yates-Shelby or the Gaines-Albion arrangements. The towns would still receive the \$7 CAP incentive from the state.

Or the towns, in another option, could keep their assessing units, and contract with the county for some assessing services, such as processing exemption requests. If the county did that clerical function, the town

assessor would have more time for property valuations, Sittig said.

The county received a \$25,000 state grant to have CGR complete the study. The county also was approved for another \$25,000 state grant to help implement a county-wide assessing system, if the towns and county opt to proceed.

CGR presented the data for the first time this week to legislators and town officials. Legislators on Wednesday didn't say whether they are inclined to have the county take over assessing.

"These are just options," said Dawn Allen, the county's director of real property tax services.

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