

Our view: Time right for merger in Whitestown

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AT ISSUE: N.Y. Mills police chief vacancy can be catalyst for one town force

A decision by New York Mills village leaders to fill its vacant police chief position on an interim, part-time basis should be the first step in an effort to consolidate the five municipal police agencies in the town of Whitestown.

A consolidated town force is among the considerations, says Mayor Robert Maciol, noting that there have been several meetings among leaders of Whitestown and its four villages. In addition to New York Mills, those villages include Yorkville, Oriskany and Whitesboro. Each village operates its own police force, and so does the town.

A study by the Center for Governmental Research in Rochester determined that combining the five departments would be the most complex action of its kind in state history, but it could lower costs significantly. That report, "Consolidating Police Services in Whitestown, New York: Options for the Future" suggested three models for consolidating, the most basic of which would lower net operating costs by approximately 14 percent, or more than \$220,000.

PUBLIC SAFETY In the town of Whitestown, five police departments serve fewer than 20,000 residents. A study by the Center for Governmental Research in Rochester determined that combining the five departments would be the most complex action of its kind in state history, but it could lower costs significantly.
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Maciol agreed such a consolidation would be an enormous undertaking — and he's right. As he rightly points out, in other consolidations it's usually two departments merging, not five. In addition to the legal technicalities involved, parochialism is a problem.

But residents need to move beyond municipal borders and identity fears and accept the reality that it just isn't practical — or affordable — to maintain five structured police departments for fewer than 20,000 people.

Taxpayers are the ones who balance the bottom line — a challenge that a faltering economy has made even more difficult for struggling families and people on fixed incomes.

Government must find ways to lower costs and remain effective. New York Mills leaders and those in the other Whitestown municipalities are poised to set the example by consolidating their police agencies. Taxpayers should demand that they do.