

Debating dissolution of a village requires time for study

Charles Zettek Jr. • Guest essayist • March 20,
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The results of village elections on March 16 cast a ray of hope that perhaps New Yorkers are finally willing to take responsibility for deciding the future of local governments across the state.

In five villages, from Port Henry in the east to Randolph in the southwest, voters went to the polls to decide whether or not to dissolve their village and merge with the town. Four villages — Seneca Falls, Perrysburg, East Randolph and Randolph — chose to dissolve, while voters in Port Henry elected to keep their village government.

In addition, voters in the village of Saugerties agreed to dissolve their police department and consolidate with the town police department, and village of Medina voters chose to abolish their court and merge with the town courts.

We are pleased that the Center for Governmental Research helped develop the dissolution plans for three of these communities. Our role was to work with citizen committees to collect facts and identify the costs and benefits of dissolving each village.

This did not mean that these dissolution and consolidation votes were devoid of emotion. On the contrary, votes about changing local government

necessarily entail using both your heart and your head.

To address these concerns, the citizen committees presented findings to the public well in advance of the votes, to allow time for each community to discuss the impact of dissolution.

Regardless of whether you are for or against dissolution and consolidation of local governments, most people understand that it is important to preserve the integrity of the process.

Fear and innuendo need to be balanced by facts and reasoned projections. If communities follow an open and honest process, and if community leaders assume their proper role, which is to guide the community through a civil debate, then voters will do what is right.

Regardless of the outcome of the vote, it is important to recognize the value of going through the process. Even though the vote to dissolve failed in his village, the Port Henry mayor said that the dissolution study was valuable because it helped his community look at new ways to share services and save money.

Locally, it appears that the village of Brockport is about to proceed with a dissolution process. It will be important to apply the lessons learned in these latest dissolution votes.

Informing voters by providing a fair and balanced presentation of the facts and options, and then empowering them to vote for the future of their community, is democracy at its best.

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