

Potsdam Dissolution Will Be Up To Voters

By [LARRY ROBINSON](#)

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POTSDAM - When all of the facts outlining the pros and cons of dissolving village government are known, each resident will then have to stand alone in the voting booth and make their own personal judgment on what is best for the community, according to Charles M. Zettek Jr., of the Center for Governmental Research.

Mr. Zettek, who serves as the vice president and director of government management services for the Rochester-based consulting firm, attended a public forum on potentially dissolving the village of Potsdam at the Potsdam High School auditorium Wednesday night. He said he has taken part in more than a dozen dissolution studies in villages across the state, and that in the end, regardless of community demographics or finances, the choice is always the same.

"It is going to be a judgment call on the part of every resident who goes in to vote," Mr. Zettek said. "It is a judgment call about what you think the future is going to be, and are the folks I am going to elect in the future going to be able to represent my interests or not."

About 50 people attended the community's first major forum on the dissolution question, where they were given an abbreviated version of a 100 page document known as the What Exists Report, put together by a 15-member Dissolution Study Committee formed last year. The group is being aided by CGR, which was hired by the village at a cost of \$50,000 to study the dissolution question.

Approximately 20 of those who attended Wednesday's meeting were either members of the dissolution committee itself, or elected and appointed town and village officials.

There were only a few questions and comments from those in attendance, with much of the audience give-and-take focusing on whether there would be any future guarantees that the town council would truly look out for the interests of the those living in the town's center should the village dissolve.

Mr. Zettek said there were none.

"The question that comes up all of the time in village dissolution questions, is what is the guarantee I have? The big G-word. What guarantees do I have that the town government in the future is going to provide the level of services that I am presently getting with the village," Mr. Zettek said. "You can not guarantee that, but you can't guarantee that the village board is going to deliver the services you want, you can't guarantee the town board is going to deliver the services you want, there are no guarantees in life here."

Dissolution Committee Chairman Timothy M. Connolly presented highlights from the recently completed "What Exisits Report," calling the presentation a mere crib sheet of information contained in the complete 100-page document.

As part of the report, Mr. Connolly pointed out that 61 percent of the town population lives within the village limits and that village properly accounts for approximately 37 percent of the taxable assessed value of the town. He said the combined tax levies for both the village and town stands at approximately \$4.1 million.

The village's biggest expense by far is its police department, with annual wages and benefits for its 18-member force totaling \$1.48 million. There are another \$219,000 in operating expenses associated with the department and \$307,000 in annual costs for 20 retirees and two surviving spouses.

Mr. Zettek told those in attendance that if the village dissolves, the town government is legally required to provide all of the same services village residents are receiving now - with the exception of maintaining a police force.

"It is required to provide fire services, it is required to provide general administrative services, it is required to provide code services. The only obligation the town does not have to provide, as a unique service, is police. Towns are not required to provide police services unless they provide it for everyone in town," Mr. Zettek said. "Other than that, the types of services that are provided by the town would be what is provided for village residents right now."

Added Mr. Zettek, "The level and the quality and the amount (of the services provided) is one of the things that you will have to watch as the report comes out."

Mr. Zettek said the next dissolution report is due out in June and will look at specific options for what would happen if dissolution does occur. He said typically public interest in the dissolution process increases as more details about taxes, and how services would be administered begin to unfold.

To read the village's entire What Exists Report go to www.cgr.org/potsdam