



Town residents promised say in split

POTSDAM DISSOLUTION: Supervisor says meetings will be held on options for those facing higher taxes

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POTSDAM — The town supervisor is pledging town residents will have an opportunity to have their voices heard if village residents vote in November to dissolve the village of Potsdam.

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Only village residents will be eligible to cast votes on the dissolution issue, according to a state law that isn't sitting well with town taxpayers who could face higher taxes if the village is dissolved.

Town Supervisor Marie C. Regan said if village residents vote for dissolution, town officials will hold multiple meetings and open discussions to give taxpayers a chance to weigh in on whether recommended expanded town services are put in place.

Ms. Regan said that while the committee's recommendations will be considered, the Town Council has the final say when deciding what services would be best.

"The board will ultimately look at options based upon input from the entire town," she said. "They will take into consideration the needs of the whole community."

In its most recent draft, the dissolution committee recommended that services enjoyed by village of Potsdam residents — including police and fire protection, brush pickup and sidewalk snow removal — be extended townwide.

The dissolution committee found that town taxpayers outside village of Potsdam limits would see their tax bills more than double if its recommendations for new or expanded townwide services are put into place.

The situation isn't as clear in the village of Norwood, parts of which are in the town of Potsdam and others in the town of Norfolk. The committee found Norwood taxpayers in the town of Potsdam

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would see their tax rate rise to more than \$20 per \$1,000 of assessed property value. The tax rate includes village of Norwood and town of Potsdam taxes, but not St. Lawrence County or Norwood-Norfolk Central School District taxes.

While that tax rate — \$20.85 per \$1,000 of assessed value, according to the committee, compared with the current \$16.34 per \$1,000 — would be the highest in St. Lawrence County, it could fall if the village of Norwood opts to eliminate duplicate services. The village could dissolve its police department and eliminate brush pickup, since the town of Potsdam would provide those services.

But that could lead to village of Norwood residents in the town of Norfolk losing services; town of Potsdam police protection and brush pickup, for example, wouldn't extend to those parts of Norwood.

The increase in tax rate is more pronounced in the town of Potsdam, according to the committee. The tax rate would rise from \$3.20 per \$1,000 to \$8.24 per \$1,000. Village residents would see their tax rates drop from \$17.67 per \$1,000 to \$10.50 per \$1,000.

The rate discrepancy is a result of water, sewer and light districts that would have to be set up in place of village boundaries.

The potential tax increases are hypothetical and won't be set in stone until the issue of town services is finalized. Many town residents have expressed concerns about a tax increase for services they deem unnecessary, Ms. Regan said.

"They are being asked to assume the cost of services that are good but that they have done without all these years," she said. "They say that while these may be necessary in the village, we don't need them here."

Dissolution Committee Chairman Timothy M. Connolly said that reducing or eliminating any one service wouldn't make a significant impact on savings. It would take reductions in multiple services for taxpayers to see a difference.

"When we're talking about an amount of money of this size, reducing or cutting any one efficiency is just a drop in the bucket," Mr. Connolly said. "We have to find a lot of little leaks and plug them if we want to save money."

Cost savings are achieved primarily through work force reductions, according to Jaime Saunders, project manager for the Center for Governmental Research, the Ithaca firm working with local officials on the dissolution study.

"It's not so much the service that is expensive, it's the people that perform that service," Ms. Saunders said. "So if some of those positions were eliminated, that would end up in savings."

The draft report of the committee, however, recommends that all village employees be retained by

the town. That recommendation is not binding.

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