

## Community comes out to hear Rye Town dissolution update



Written by PAIGE RENTZ

Thursday, 19 January 2012 16:24

As the four governments comprising the Town of Rye move closer toward a plan for town dissolution, its unique geography makes the process more complicated than most.

Spread across the towns of Mamaroneck and Rye, the Village of Mamaroneck creates additional challenges and questions to answer in the study, said project manager Joe Stefko of The Center for Governmental Research (CGR). In addition to the comparatively simple matter of creating coterminous town/villages from the neighboring villages of Rye Brook and Port Chester, the matter of what to do with Rye Neck, the part of the Village of Mamaroneck lying within the Town of Rye, is a study unto itself.

The dissolution of the Town of Rye could eventually affect not only the three villages contained therein, but also the Town of Mamaroneck and Village of Larchmont, since whatever the options for Rye Neck, any restructuring would almost surely necessitate the Town of Mamaroneck either absorbing Rye Neck or losing its portion of the Village of Mamaroneck.

Any option involving a structural change to the Village of Mamaroneck would have to be approved by voters from both towns. If the ultimate goal is to dissolve the Town of Rye, then two seemingly unrelated villages in two separate towns will ultimately wind up depending on each other at the end of the process.

“The voters in the Village of Larchmont can affect Port Chester’s ability whether or not to become a coterminous town/village,” said Port Chester Mayor Dennis Pilla (D). “So we better keep them informed, right?”

When his firm analyzes options in a standard town/village study, said Stefko, they typically come down with one number at the bottom. “I don’t know that this kind of structure lends itself to that sort of linear analysis,” he said, explaining that the project team will conduct a separate analysis of Rye Neck options. “That lends itself to clarity.”

Since the first public hearing in September, the consultants have compiled data regarding the budgets, services and basic structures of the four involved governments to provide a basis of comparison for the next phase of the study.

Ana Liss, a research associate for the project, said that after Thursday night’s public meeting, CGR would begin the third phase of the project, analyzing the impacts of dissolution and producing a menu of options for the steering committee to evaluate. The team will also be looking for areas that offer opportunities for increased sharing of services, despite any actions on restructuring the government. According to the project timeline, CGR will have completed its analysis of options and impacts of dissolving the town upon the three villages by March, and will begin developing a Rye Town dissolution plan with a draft report on its findings expected in April or May.

Paul Ryan, former supervisor and councilman in the Town of Mamaroneck, noted a further complication for the project team to take into account moving forward – that of who has the right to tax. When the town and village of Mamaroneck

enter into service-sharing arrangements as they did with the creation of the town ambulance district during his tenure, the Town of Mamaroneck cannot tax residents of Rye Neck to pay for services it provides them. So the municipality sends a bill to the village to pay per capita to cover the cost of Rye Neck's portion of the service. "The bad part of that," said Ryan, "is that all the residents paid the bill. Village of Mamaroneck residents in the Town of Mamaroneck were double-taxed."

According to Mamaroneck Village Mayor Norman Rosenblum (R), when the Village of Mamaroneck was first approached to join the study, the Town of Mamaroneck was also invited but chose not to participate. But Stefko said that as the study gets into the options phase, there is already a tendency to expand participants and analyze service sharing options that could apply to other municipalities as well as those that are parties to the study, something Larchmont Mayor Josh Mandell (D) said his village would welcome.

With the complicated governmental structure in mind, Mamaroneck Village Trustee John Hofstetter (D) said that at the end of the process, "there's going to have to be something in it for everybody. Some municipalities might want to be coterminous towns/villages, some municipalities might want to dissolve themselves completely, some municipalities might want to be absorbed by other municipalities," he said. "The only way it becomes practical is if there's actual financial savings, and looking at it as a resident of the Town of Mamaroneck and the Village of Mamaroneck, that's what I want to see."

But Mandell cautioned the steering committee about that view. He pointed to the issue of revaluation, which is widely regarded as a process that won't make everyone winners in the end. "But we're doing it because it's making things more fair," he said. "There might be one loser in this huge equation, this Gordian knot. You may end up with one guy getting the short end of the string, there's no doubt about that. You have to just be aware of that right up front and then consider everything very fairly."

However, after the governmental entities decide on a plan to move forward with, the ultimate decision to adopt it lies in the hands of the taxpayers. Hofstetter's assessment may well ring true with voters: "If their taxes are not going to be affected in one way or the other, or could be negatively affected, they aren't going to vote for it."