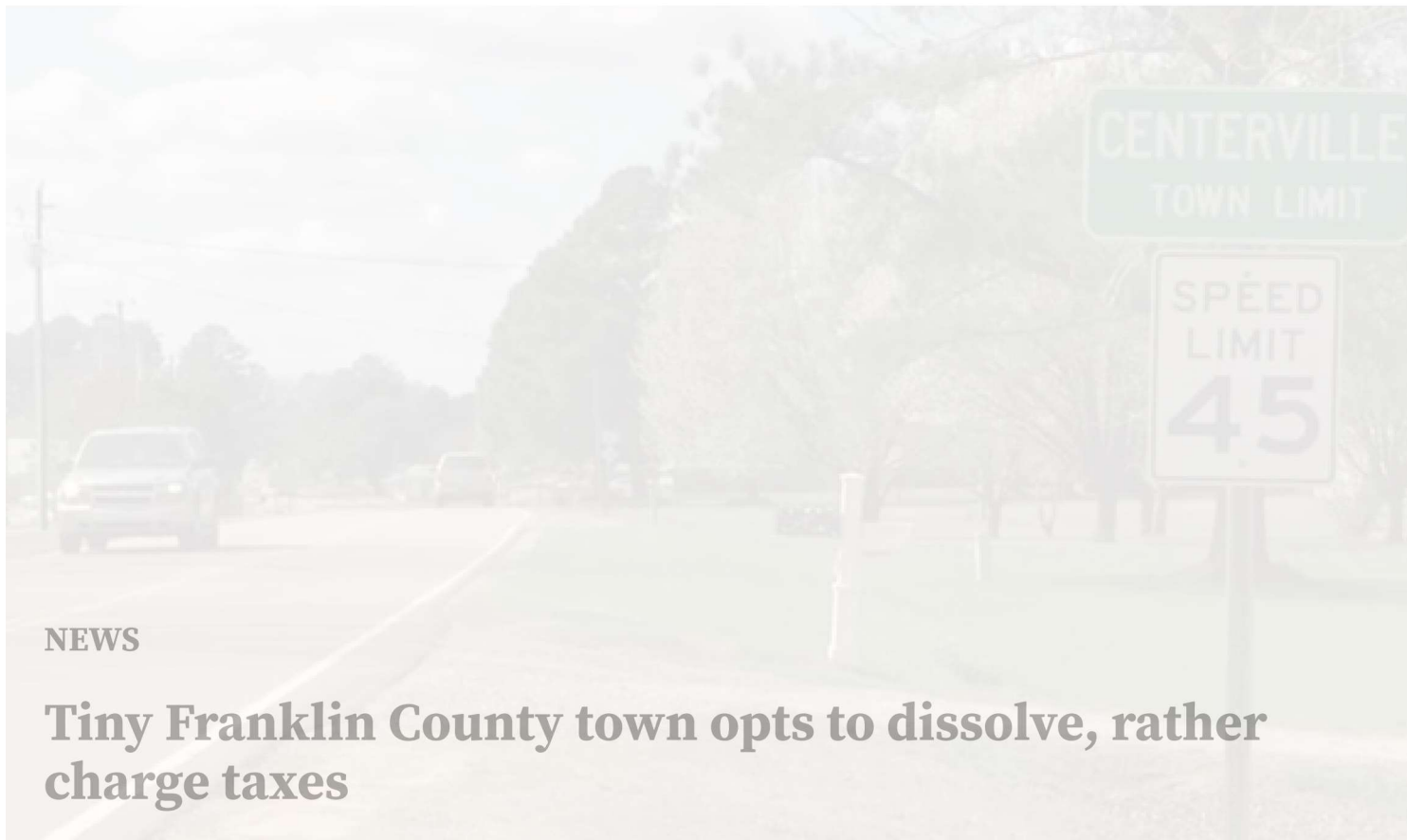


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NEWS

Tiny Franklin County town opts to dissolve, rather charge taxes

by: Ted Strong
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CENTERVILLE, N.C. (WNCN) – The mayor and council of a tiny Franklin County town want to turn off the town’s streetlights – and its future as a town.

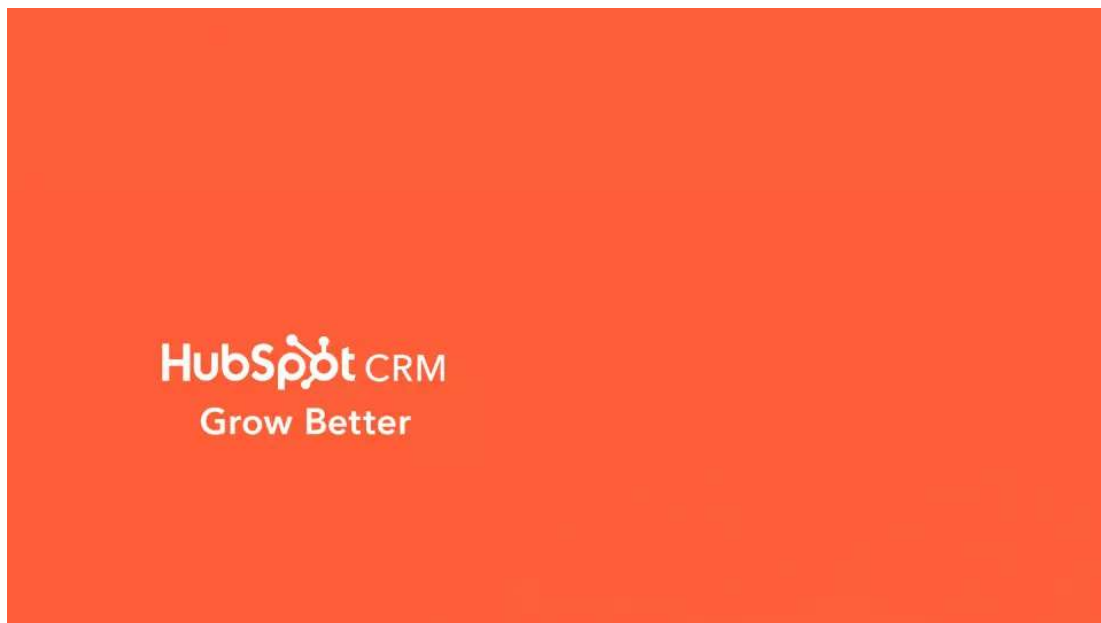
Centerville’s elected officials asked the state legislature to allow the town to repeal its charter and unincorporate. Fewer than 90 people live in the town, which incorporated in 1965. Council member Amy Denton said the decision is designed to save Centerville’s citizens money, as the town can no longer afford to continue to operate.

“We’re sad that we’ve had to come to this decision but it’s the most viable option I think that our town could come up with,” Denton said.

“None of us wanted it to be this way, but we know it’s the best option.”

Denton said the town’s yearly budget is usually \$5,000 to \$6,000, depending on whether or not it’s an election year, and the town’s charter requires voting for mayor and council members every two years. The town spends about \$200 a month for its 21 streetlights, and about a third of its overall budget goes to an annual audit which reviews the rest of the budget.

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“Funding is getting low. The reserve funding that many years ago, had been built up because of the amount of funding we were getting from the state of North Carolina through taxes and so forth had been building up,” Denton said.

“It was sitting there in a reserve fund to use for any type of expense the town wished, but we’ve been having to dip into that every two years or so just to meet an annual budget. We still have this funding from the state, but the amount that we receive has become less and less. The funding continues to be depleted over the years where it’s just not enough now for us to maintain the community in the form of a governmental town.”

The mayor and council met held public meetings in August with representatives from the League of Municipalities. Denton said the consultants recommended Centerville end its status as an incorporated town.

Town leaders considered imposing property taxes of 10 or 25 cents per \$100, which could have kept the lights on. However, the League of Municipalities representatives said such a tax comes with the expectation of increased services, and the generated revenue would not be enough to provide such as things as municipal water or sewer.

The council sent a survey to every property owner, asking if they preferred a property tax or dissolution as a town. While some were opposed to repealing the town’s charter, there was no support for a property tax.

“We as a town council decided in January that we would perhaps repeal our charter since they did not want it,” Denton said.

“We’re still going to be a community called Centerville. That’s not going to change. We will still be the same people. Our residents are not moving. Our businesses are not closing, we can assure you that,” she said.

“It’s simply going to be no longer an incorporation with the state government of North Carolina.”

But some locals say they worry about the town’s future – and feel.

Frank Albano owns an antique shop at the town’s main intersection. There’s also a Dollar General, a couple of convenience stores, a restaurant, and a physician’s office. Albano said he thinks the community will go away.

“It’ll be a breakdown, not as tight I don’t think. Not as much talking,” Albano said.

“I think it could have been gone about a different way. I think what it is is what it is now.”

He wondered if a community barbecue or other fundraiser could serve as a solution, or requiring inexpensively priced tickets to the town’s annual New Year’s parade. Denton said parade tickets would require the town to spend more money to cover insurance costs and other fees – but added that the parade would continue.

She said the only noticeable change with unincorporation would be the lights. Those could also come back on with some individual assistance.

“Any resident nearest to a street light by them may want to acquire that particular light,” Denton said.

“Perhaps acquiring a street light, which cost \$9 to \$10 per month, would be cheaper than a tax rate if we had decided to tax our residents.”

The Centerville council plans for the volunteer fire department to receive any money left in the town’s reserves after it pays its remaining bills. That transfer of funds is part of a North Carolina Senate bill to repeal the town charter, filed on behalf of the town council by State Senator Chad Barefoot.

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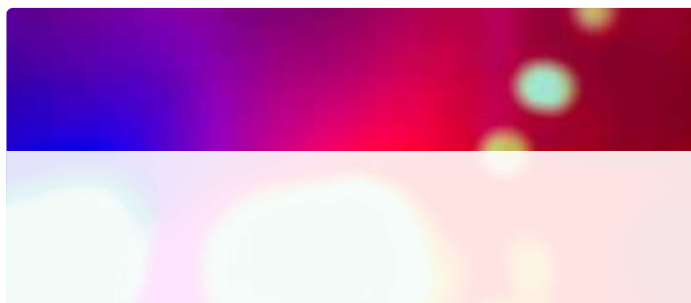
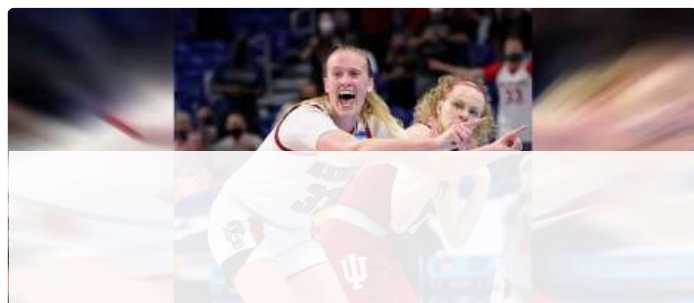
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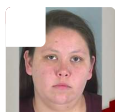
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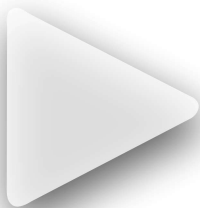
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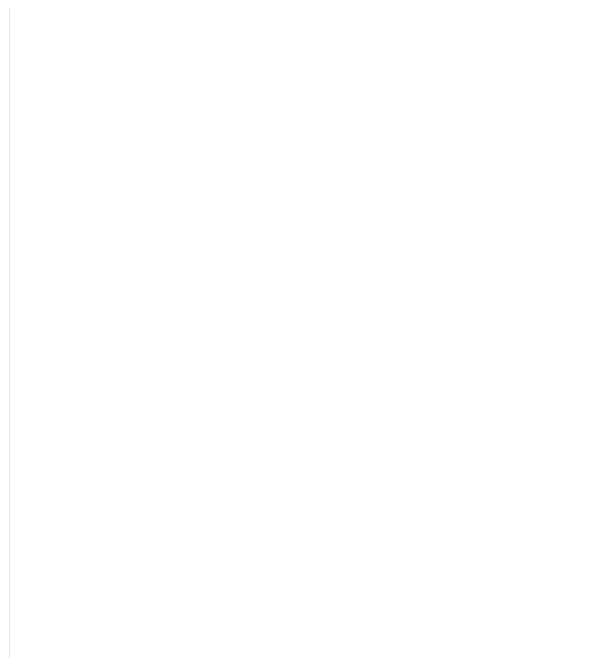
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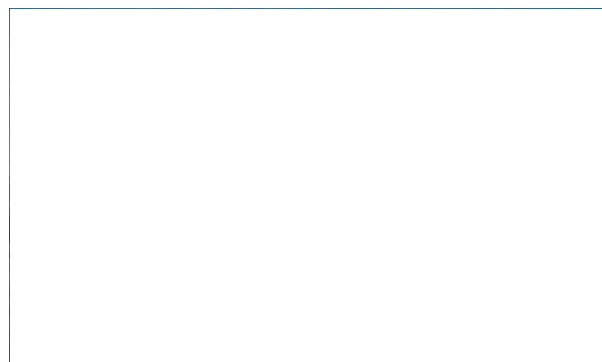
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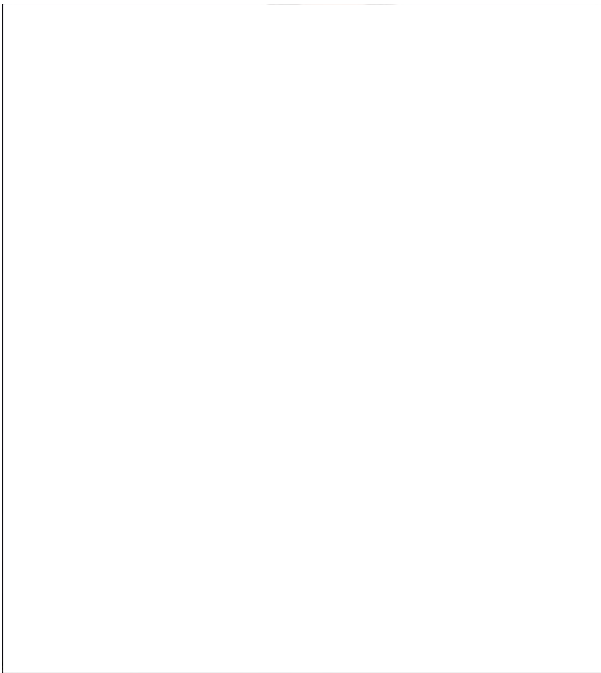


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