

## LONG ISLAND / SUFFOLK

# Mastic Beach locks up for the last time as village dissolves



Mastic Beach residents voted to dissolve as a village on Nov. 16, 2016.  
Credit: Randee Daddona

**By Deon J. Hampton**

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Mastic Beach Village has reached the end.

The doors to Village Hall were locked for the final time Friday, bringing a quiet end to the South Shore municipality that pulled away from Brookhaven Town seven years ago to try to control its own fate.

"Mastic Beach has a troubled past, but it's going to be corrected. It was a learning experience; I don't think it was a mistake," said Village Mayor Robert Miller, who, before being elected, led the dissolution effort to rejoin Brookhaven. "I think we have a bright future going forward."

Miller met with town officials for about an hour Friday morning to transfer the village finances. He walked out of Village Hall with former mayors Bill Biondi and Maura Sperry, and locked the door at 11:54 a.m.

"I think its best days are still ahead of it. I believe that to be true," Sperry said of the village.

Biondi cautioned that people in Mastic Beach need "to learn to work together."

"Regardless of what organization you belong to, Mastic Beach will never be the same as it was back in the day if we continue to fight and hate each other," Biondi said.

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The South Shore community voted to incorporate in 2010 with hopes of being a tax-neutral village, ready to step up code enforcement efforts and reduce the number of absentee landlords and hundreds of abandoned homes.

“I think they broke away because they felt ignored. I think there was a strong desire in that community to stand out from the rest of Brookhaven,” Town Supervisor Edward P. Romaine said. “I feel bad in a sense that there was so much acrimony in the village that eventually it didn’t succeed.”

What followed the incorporation vote were years of political infighting, overspending and what some in the community called over-aggressive code enforcement.

Earlier this year, the village agreed to pay six black residents and two landlords a total of \$387,500 after allegations of housing discrimination violations and forcing renters from their homes.

Last year’s 1,922 to 1,215 vote to disincorporate nearly mirrored the split in the Aug. 30, 2010, vote to incorporate: 1,797 to 1,385.

Mastic Beach is the first Long Island village to disband since Pine Valley chose to do so in 1991.

On Monday Mastic Beach becomes a special tax district within the town, meaning whatever debt has accumulated since incorporating will be paid by its residents, rather than all Brookhaven Town residents.

“I feel at this point we’re going back to a better standing government to take us away from all the nonsense that was going on,” Miller said. “We’re still going to need civic leaders and activists to bring the issues forward to Brookhaven.”

The village had its successes.

Officials created residential, downtown and waterfront districts and demolished about 15 vacant homes.

But problems started early for the new village with inaugural Mayor Paul Breschard quitting halfway through his first term, citing health concerns he said were aggravated by the stress of working with village trustees. Breschard died in early October 2016.

In its short history, the village had four mayors, six treasurers, five village attorneys and three village clerks.

Village leaders said former trustee Gary Stiriz left for Florida in 2015 during the height of winter, neglecting his responsibilities to supervise plowing streets after a series of snowstorms.

Former trustee Anne Snyder abruptly quit the board in February after disputes with Sperry. Snyder once accused Sperry, a former friend and campaign running mate, of using a village-issued Home Depot credit card to spend \$19.73 on powdered doughnuts, candy, gum and Sprite.

Sperry herself once called the village a “disaster” when describing its state after five years of incorporation.

The village finances ultimately led to the dissolution effort.

Mastic Beach in 2016 overspent on a road paving project by \$400,000, leading to what would have been a 400 percent tax increase had the village not been dissolved, state officials have said.

Moody's Investors Service in June 2016 downgraded the village's municipal bonds six levels to noninvestment grade, citing financial instability, a declining tax base and operating at a deficit for three straight years.

Village officials said they had to find a new insurance carrier last year after being dropped by New York Municipal Insurance Reciprocal after several housing discrimination lawsuits and a sexual harassment lawsuit were filed. The discrimination cases were settled out of court. The outcome of the harassment case was not disclosed.

Mastic Beach residents may still get what they wanted from incorporation: increased code enforcement. Romaine said his first order of business will be to get rid of zombie houses in the community, pave roads and crack down on the landlords who aren't maintaining their properties.

“I'm looking forward to leading them back to the town,” Romaine said.

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