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EDITOR'S PICK

A quiet ending: Village of Salem to finish dissolution at end of the month

Kathleen Moore

Mar 27, 2016



Main Street in the village of Salem is seen in 2014.

Post-Star file photo

Kathleen Moore

S ALEM | Goodbye, Salem.

Thursday is the village's last day, before it officially dissolves into the town of Salem.

It will close down quietly, without a ceremony to mark its passing. And the date may go unnoticed by many.

When village tax bills were sent out last year, residents complained to the village clerk, demanding to know why they were still being taxed.

They thought the village had long ago dissolved, Village Clerk Rebecca Brown said.

Residents passed a petition for dissolving the village in 2014, turning it in on April 2.

On Aug. 5, 2014, residents voted overwhelmingly in favor of ending the village. A referendum on the topic passed by a vote of 192 to 49.

The turnout was especially large in comparison to the most recent mayoral election. Just 89 voters chose the mayor, while 241 voted on the dissolution.

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Given that the vote was 20 months ago, it's understandable that many thought the village was long gone.

But Thursday is officially the day.

Starting this June, village residents won't get a village tax bill — saving each household \$500 to \$1,000.

The town tax bill was flat this year, which also confused some residents who had expected a big decrease. That will happen next year, when the town budget will include a “transfer of governance credit.”

“We should see a significant savings when that happens,” said Salem Town Supervisor Seth Pitts.

Other than that, virtually the only change village residents will notice is the lack of a village office.

It will close after Brown finishes the financial accounts, probably in May.

The fact that not much is changing shows that the village was ready for dissolution, said town and village historian Al Cormier.

“We no longer have a police department. The code enforcer, that's with the county now,” he said. “I've seen more and more of the village responsibility handed off to other governments. There wasn't much left for the village to do.”

So, while he's sad to see the village go, he said there's not going to be much to miss.

Pitts said a lack of good service from village officials was at the root of the push to get rid of the village government.

“People said, ‘What are we getting for our tax dollars?’ ” he said. “People don't know who to call, or they get an answering machine, and people don't get back to you. It's all about service.”

But Brown, who will lose her job with the dissolution, said there were better options.

“I don’t think it was necessary. If they were dissatisfied with the village board, they could’ve worked a little harder and voted them out,” she said.

The village mayor, Sonia Trulli, has already moved out. She left for Texas, choosing not to wait until the village dissolution. The rest of the village board has continued to work, meeting with the town board to finalize the finicky details of accounts, paperwork and other business required to finish the dissolution.

Pitts is all too aware that other villagers — including some in Argyle and Greenwich — are watching.

“Everybody’s watching to see what happens. Then they’ll try it,” he predicted.

As the village comes to end, two of the biggest public institutions in the village will expand.

The Salem Volunteer Fire Department is moving to a new building this summer, which will allow them to house the trucks that didn’t fit in their village firehouse. For years, the department rented another garage from the village — at what they termed a “hefty” rent — to house two of their trucks.

Next week, a crane will move their fire bell from the firehouse to the new building on South Main Street.

The library is also on the verge of expansion. When the village office closes, the library board will be able to use that space for other purposes. The library trust owns the entire building.

Dissolution paperwork involving the library was complex and took months to resolve, partly because the library charter was held by the village. But for the average resident, nothing will change.

“Things should be business as usual for the general public,” Director Susan Getty said.

But she added that getting to that point, for all village services, was not easy.

“It’s been a confusing process and a learning experience,” she said.

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What's next?

- Village residents won't get a village tax bill in June.
- Those who have streetlights will become members of a lighting district, which must raise \$15,000 in taxes each year. That's a new tax for those residents.
- The water district rates will also be assessed to village residents.
- Any leftover funds from the village coffers will go to paying down the \$1.3 million debt for water infrastructure. The village has about \$100,000 in surplus right now, but will pay a few more bills before closing down.

Timeline

1761 — Pioneers Joshua Conkey and James Turner of Pelham, Massachusetts prospect for a settlement.

1764 — Presbyterian families led by Conkey and Turner from New England are the first permanent settlers on Turner’s Patent.

1766 — The Rev. Thomas Clark and his Associate Presbyterian Congregation, having emigrated from Ireland, arrive and call the settlement New Perth.

1774 — The New York Provincial Legislature officially designated the new township as New Perth.

1775 — Salem Rangers led by Captain John Barnes enter the Revolutionary War by helping to capture Skenesborough (now Whitehall).

1777 — Fort Salem, hastily built out of the two Presbyterian Churches, is burned by Tories and Indians when the fort and town are abandoned in the wake of Burgoyne’s Army.

1779 — Salem is designated as the county seat.

1788 — New Perth is renamed Salem by an act of the New York Legislature on March 7.

1803 — The village of Salem is incorporated on April 4.

1840 — Two fires during the year destroy at least 20 buildings in the village center.

1852 — The Rutland and Washington Railroad complete the line from Troy to Rutland, Vermont. Salem is the railroad center for the line with a round house.

1862 — The 123rd NYSV regiment is organized in Salem upon President Lincoln's call for 300,000 more volunteers and serves until the end of the war.

1869 — A new brick Washington County Courthouse is built in Salem.

1890 — Proudfit Hall is built.

1976 — Fire destroys the upper levels of the Proudfit Village Municipal building. The first floor is rebuilt.

1982 — Grand Jury sessions at the Salem County Courthouse end. All court cases revert to Fort Edward.

2003 — The Washington County Sheriff's office and jail moves out of Salem to Fort Edward.

2003 — The Bicentennial celebration of the village of Salem and the Volunteer Fire Department is held.

2014 — Residents vote to dissolve the village into the town of Salem.

2016 — The village of Salem dissolves March 31.

By Kathleen Moore

reporter - Health care, Moreau, Queensbury, South Glens Falls
