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## Chaumont votes to keep village government, mayor hopes for new leadership moving forward

By ALEX GAULT  
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East Main Street in the village of Chaumont last fall. Watertown Daily Times

CHAUMONT — The village will not be dissolving its government.

By a vote of 136 to 119, village voters rejected the measure to dissolve the village government during a special election held Tuesday, alongside the general election. The plan would have turned the village into a hamlet, which is a community with no government still marked by a name. Almost

all services provided by the village would have been transferred to the town of Lyme, which surrounds it.

Two people voted by absentee ballot, and one ballot was still unreturned by Wednesday, but that will not change the outcome of the election.

Village Mayor Valerie E. Rust said she was surprised by the outcome.

“Personally, I did not think that was the way we were going to go,” she said. “I truly thought that it was going to be in favor of dissolution.”

The mayor said the village government had, from the start, always kept the village’s residents in mind, and this result indicates they want the village to keep working for them. She said the planning process for dissolution was not a wasted effort, and the village will look for other ways to reduce the tax burden on its residents.

The dissolution would have led to an estimated \$2.54 reduction per \$1,000 of assessed property value in taxes on village residents. That tax cut would have been achieved by combining services like plowing and paving with the town of Lyme, eliminating certain service districts and cutting staff and administrative costs.

The dissolution plan the village commissioned also presented options for cost reduction if the dissolution were ultimately rejected.

“What we will try to do is, we will take advantage of that dissolution study that we all went through, and try to see if we can glean anything from that to possibly do some more shared services (with the town),” she said. “Something to see if we can consolidate in some areas, where we can save money for the village taxpayer.”

The village had some trouble getting the dissolution question onto the ballot this year. They initially planned to include the measure on the general election ballots this year, but the state Legislature changed the deadline for ballot measures to be submitted, and the village was not aware.

By the time their measure was ready for the ballot, they were a month late. Instead of canceling, the village took on the administration of the election itself, printing and counting their own ballots. Voters who were eligible to vote in the referendum were given two ballots when they went to vote,

and turned their ballots in to separate boxes to be counted.

Mrs. Rust's term as mayor was to end in Nov. 2021, and the village would have dissolved Dec. 31, 2021. She said though she was expecting the village to dissolve, she hasn't been planning to run for office again.

"At this point, I don't want to run again," she said. "But I don't like the thought of leaving our village high and dry ..."

She said between herself and the four village trustees, the village has not seen new leadership in many years.

"We've been on the board so long, it's time for other people to step up to take our place," she said.

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## Alex Gault

I write about north country politics, Jefferson County and the northern shoreline towns of Lyme, Cape Vincent, Clayton and Alexandria Bay