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NEWS

Brockport voters shoot down dissolution

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The second time was not the charm for forces in the village of Brockport who were hopeful residents there would decide to lower taxes by dissolving village government

Voters nixed a plan to do just that by a vote of 832 to 617 on Tuesday.

"I'm relieved, vindicated, I feel good," said Mayor Margay Blackman. "We were optimistic, but we were concerned about how great the margin would be. We weren't certain and it was a tough campaign."

Back in 2010, when residents had their first shot at forcing dissolution in the village, the vote was 959 nays to 662 yeas.

Rhett King, a proponent of the dissolution, was disappointed by Tuesday's results. He said village government — which has a high property tax rate of \$11.88 per \$1,000 of assessed value — had failed to lower the tax burden since the last referendum, and he didn't hold out much hope officials would listen now to the more than 600 dissolution supporters still reflected in the polls.

"Unlike what's been said that this is a group of landlords who have brought this thing, 600 voters is not an insignificant number," he said. Still, he said he was glad to have been behind giving people the opportunity to consider dissolution.

"It's never for nothing, people have been asking for this vote for a long time, and they got to vote," he said. "The conversation needs to continue."

He would not say if he would begin another effort to get dissolution back on the ballot. Under state law, if a dissolution referendum fails, another referendum may not be initiated until four years have passed.

Blackman said she and village officials will now be able to turn their focus away from dissolution and back to doing the people's business.

"We've got stuff to do," she said. "Innovative, interesting stuff and I'm looking forward to getting back to that."

A state push for local government consolidations ramped up in 2008 under Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo. He advocates for eliminating and combining some of the thousands of different government entities — towns, villages, fire districts and school districts — that each collect taxes from New Yorkers. He says with the state's notoriously high property taxes frequently cited as a reason for economic stagnation and the loss of residents to states where costs are lower, it makes sense to find cost savings through shared services, consolidation and dissolution.

According to the Empire Center for New York State Policy, at least 10 villages governments have dissolved in the past five years, including Seneca Falls in Seneca County.

In 2015, voters in Medina, Orleans County rejected dissolution, while voters in Macedon, Wayne County, Hermon, St. Lawrence County, and Port Henry, Essex County, were among those approving dissolution.

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Brockport residents face big decision