


# OBSERVER

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## **Sinclairville residents to vote on dissolution**

SINCLAIRVILLE — The future of the village is in the hands of its residents.



Aug. 13, the residents will be asked if they want to keep or dissolve the village as a municipality. Last week, an informational meeting took place at Park United Methodist Church in Sinclairville, where Wade Beltramo of the New York State Conference of Mayors and Municipal Officials and Dr. Kent Gardner of the Center of Governmental Research gave presentations on the upcoming vote.

The official date of the dissolution vote in the village was noted as August 13 by Beltramo in his presentation. A dissolution, as defined in Beltramo's slides, is the termination of the existence of a government entity, and can

only be initiated by a governing body's resolution or an electorate initiative, such as the petition circulated in Sinclairville.

*"There are lots of reasons why communities dissolve. One is cost savings," said Gardner of the reasoning behind the petition. "There are cost savings from dissolving the village. Taxes will go down some degree, how much they will go down is what we're going to try and figure out between now and the vote. There is no question that some cost will be eliminated by dissolving the village."*

In regards to the voting process itself, only village of Sinclairville residents are able to vote on the Aug. 13 referendum. If the vote to dissolve fails, there will be a four-year moratorium put in place preventing another vote. If the vote passes, then a dissolution plan must be developed by the village board in conjunction with the associated town governments.

Developing a dissolution plan requires the board to meet within 30 days of the vote and begin the plan to dissolve. The board gets 180 days to prepare a plan, which Beltramo advises should be used to its fullest.

*"The village of Van Etten dissolved last year and they did not have all their ducks in a row," Beltramo said, citing an example. "They did not dispose of all their properties, so they have a whole slew of issues now because they don't have a village to address them, because they rushed through the process."*

Once a dissolution plan is proposed, a public hearing must be held 35-90 days after the board approves the plan. The board may amend the plan after the public hearing, but the board must approve the plan's final version within 60 days of the final hearing on the proposed plan.

The plan will go into effect unless a petition is filed within 45 days of the final hearing to hold a second vote. The petition must have a 25% vote in order to be valid and will initiate a second vote on the dissolution plan.

In developing a dissolution plan, Beltramo's presentation listed a number of items to address, including: the village's territorial boundaries, fiscal estimate of dissolution cost, village assets, any agreements entered into with the towns in which the village is situated in order to carry out the dissolution, means in which municipal services will continue to be provided, disposal of village assets, local laws and the effective date of the dissolution.

*"Nobody has to live here anymore, nobody has to live anywhere anymore," Beltramo noted. "You have to create a community where people want to live. Dissolving a village doesn't create that community. A community where you can't get people to serve, or can't finance the services the community is providing...you've got to think real long and hard about that."*

One of the key items in a dissolution plan mentioned was the transference or elimination of positions of public employees. *"One of the assumptions, by and large, is that we're not going to discontinue services,"* said Gardner of the issue *"If you want to discontinue a service, discontinue the service. It's not something that you should be thinking about in your context of wanting to dissolve or not."*

A consolidation of the village was determined unlikely to occur because of systematic obstacles such as the coordination of multiple interest groups and leveling up efficiencies — where unless efficiencies are sufficient, someone's taxes are likely to increase and they would therefore be unlikely to vote against their own best interest.

*“Consolidation is not really used because you can barely get one voter group to agree to anything, let alone two or three,”* Beltramo noted at the mention of consolidation.

Concern over how a potential dissolution would affect school taxes was brought up, and quickly addressed. *“This doesn’t include your school or county property taxes, and the lion’s share of those taxes are going to be impacted zero by this vote,”* Beltramo said of the concerns. *“Just keep that in mind when people keep talking about taxes going down 15-20%. That’s only of the village and town percentage. It’s not your total tax bill.”*

One of both Beltramo and Gardner’s key points was that dissolution of a village is a town issue, despite the fact the town doesn’t get a vote in the matter. The town determines how services are going to be provided should the village dissolve and New York State town law imposes the town tax which determines the tax savings for village residents. *“You’re not a large place; maybe there just isn’t a need for two forms of government,”* said Gardner.

In regards to cost savings for both the town and village, the main issue affecting savings is service continuity. Beltramo’s presentation emphasized that three things could happen to services: termination as a governmental activity, continuation that is limited to one area or district or designation as a town-wide function. Examples of government services that are town-wide include: highway maintenance, justice court and elected officials.

About an hour and a half into the two-hour meeting, some residents began taking a more hostile tone with Beltramo and Gardner, feeling as though their personal circumstances weren’t being addressed, prompting one resident to speak up in Gardner’s defense after one instance of disagreement.

*“I don’t have nothing in this fight, and I’ve been around Ken, he does his job really good,”* said the man, who identified himself as Troy. *“Tonight ain’t the night for most of these questions. He’s just trying to explain what’s going on moving forward, he’s not changing minds. ... You’ve still got to have your majority vote. Just let Ken do his job.”*

Beltramo concluded his presentation with a list of sources of cost/tax savings in dissolution, including: efficiencies/the economies of scale, the discontinuation of services, restructuring of services, shared services, elimination of elected officials, increased state aid and tax eliminations of services no longer being received.

Charlotte Town Supervisor Allen Chase also spoke at the meeting, assuring citizens that the town would provide assistance to the village of Sinclairville in the planning process, both before and after the vote. Chase also informed those in attendance that town budgets and more information on the dissolution were available on the town's website: <http://www.charlotteny.org/>.

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