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Port Henry Voters Finalize Dissolution Fate

WAMC Northeast Public Radio | By [Pat Bradley](#)

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Town Hall, Port Henry, NY

On Tuesday, residents of Port Henry in Essex County, New York approved a plan to dissolve the village by 20 votes. The latest vote is the final move that will lead to the Adirondack village disappearing from the map.

Last summer, a citizen petition was circulated calling for the dissolution of Port Henry, a village of about 1,200 on the southern shore of Lake Champlain. In October residents approved the petition. Village leaders then developed a dissolution plan, but opponents filed a petition forcing a referendum on the plan. If the plan was rejected by voters, the dissolution process would stop.

In that poll Tuesday, residents approved the dissolution plan by 20 votes. Port Henry resident Kim Gilbertson is one of those who circulated and filed the petition that forced the referendum. "We worked hard to tell people the reasons why we thought dissolution was a bad idea, that there was a better to save tax money by the coterminous route. The idea of coterminous was to form a town out of Port Henry and separate it from the Town of Moriah. I think what happened is that a lot of people, well frankly, just tired of the issue and wanted to put it to rest. Also our side, the no to dissolution side was harder to explain to people."

The original petition for dissolution is supported by Linda Smyth, who is also a village trustee. "I feel it's a change that's necessary. I feel that the double government isn't, wasn't good. I think we all need to be kind of driving forward together. And we'll get rid of the taxes, will go down. Everyone likes to mention the taxes."

Debbie Henry, a long-time resident of Port Henry, says she voted for dissolution for many reasons. "We've got an added layer of government in a very small town. Our taxes are very high and you know Port Henry at one time was a very prosperous little village and we are no longer. So we're looking at ways to attract people who want to come in and invest in property and businesses. And I feel it's one step in the right direction. I'm an old time resident. Our family goes back to the 1840's here in Port Henry and you know we saw it when things were a lot different and we don't have those days anymore. So I think it's a step towards progress."

The Town of Moriah will absorb the services now provided by the village of Port Henry. Supervisor Tom Scozzafava says he's already working with state agencies on the transition. "I have to put together a town budget. But then I also have to include in the 2017 budget the village. I have districts that need to be formed, the water, fire, I have

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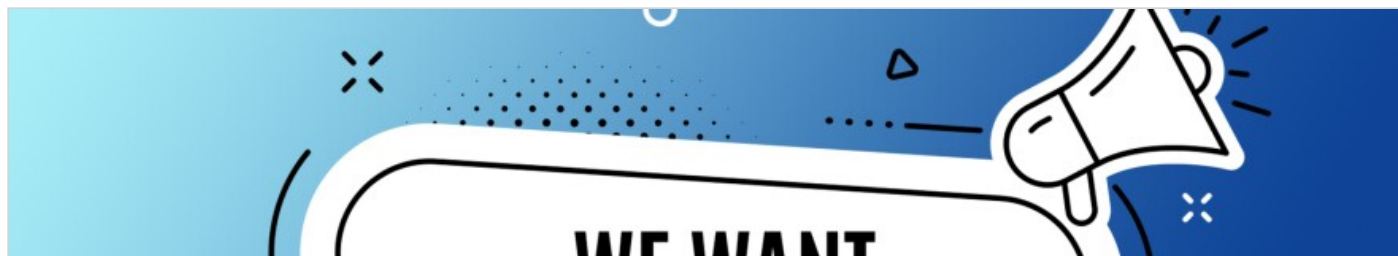
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While Scozzafava will receive help from state agencies, he plans to inform lawmakers in Albany that the process needs to be changed. “If they’re serious about consolidation of services, then they need to change the process because it is extremely difficult. It creates civil war in your community. The process is horrible, very emotional.”

Henry agrees, noting there was considerable passion on both sides and it will take time for rifts to heal in the community. “Good outcomes are going to come from this and hopefully people will come together in the future and work towards being a community. I don’t think we’re going to lose the identity of Port Henry. It’s the people that make it up not the government and people are hurt right now. This was a very passionate issue in our little community.”

The vote on the dissolution plan passed 208 to 188 and reflects a 62 percent turnout according to Supervisor Scozzafava.

Port Henry will cease to exist as of March 31, 2017.

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