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Chaumont will live on

By JAEGUN LEE
TIMES STAFF WRITER
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CHAUMONT — Everything will stay the same in Chaumont, except perhaps the favors village residents have been getting from the Lyme town government.

Voters rejected, 145-102, the proposed dissolution of the 138-year-old village into the town of Lyme Tuesday, just as they did a decade ago.

Residents voted down a similar dissolution proposal, 129-72, in March 1999.

The tally came as a surprise for Chaumont Mayor Valerie E. Rust.

“This tells me that the village residents, they want their autonomy. They just want to keep the village intact,” she said.

Residents must have determined that the service the village government performs is worth the extra cost, Mrs. Rust said, as projections showed as much as a 49 percent reduction in their tax bills upon dissolution,

“We want to make sure we don’t let them down,” she said.

Under state law, the village will not have to worry about another dissolution proposal for at least another four years, according to the village’s consultant.

“I’m still glad we did the dissolution study,” Mrs. Rust said. “But the study may have caused some tension between the town and village boards. I just want to get back to where we were.”

But Chaumont trustees may have burned more than a few bridges, with Lyme Supervisor Scott G. Aubertine suggesting Tuesday night that the Town Council may no longer want to continue the imbalanced agreement to pool equipment and manpower between the two municipalities.

“I am fearful that the town board will not renew its shared services agreement with the village,” he said.

Village officials, hoping to dissuade residents from passing the dissolution proposal, have publicly criticized town board members over the past several months despite all the assistance Lyme provides to Chaumont, Mr. Aubertine said.

The town Highway Department last year spent approximately \$23,000 to help the village out with various tasks, he said. Town tax revenue coming from Chaumont to the Highway Department was only about \$12,000.

The two entities also share Lyme’s municipal building on Route 12E.

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But Mr. Aubertine, a Chaumont resident, was more disappointed by the lost opportunities.

The absorption of Chaumont's government by the town would have allowed the town to repair village sidewalks, the municipal tennis court and Chaumont's public beach — pricey projects that the village cannot afford to undertake without a significant tax hike, Mr. Aubertine said.

Furthermore, by eliminating government duplication and with additional revenue in the form of state tax incentives for merged governments, Lyme as a whole would have net a savings of \$27,940 per year, according to the dissolution study report.

In its report, the Center for Governmental Research Inc. — a Rochester nonprofit hired by the village board — said the “new town of Lyme” was expected to receive \$30,757 in annual state incentives through New York's Citizen Empowerment Tax Credit program.

CGR's estimates showed a Chaumont homeowner with a property assessed at \$50,000 paying \$252 less in annual taxes with state incentives. Even without the state incentives, Chaumont's projected tax rate decrease would have been about 46 percent, from \$10.32 to \$5.56 per \$1,000 of assessed value, according to CGR's report.

“The projected tax savings must have not been all that important to people,” Mr. Aubertine said.

But village trustees have been skeptical of CGR's projections and said on several occasions that they do not trust the Lyme council members to follow through with the dissolution plan, although town officials were heavily involved in putting the plan together.

Chaumont has an estimated population of 625, which is 29 percent of the overall Lyme population. It was named in 1833 after its founder, James D. LeRay de Chaumont, and was formally incorporated in 1874.