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Central NY News

Camillus mayor tells village residents a dissolution vote will be on Election Day ballot

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By Catie O'Toole | cotoole@syracuse.com



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Peter Chen / The Post-

Standard
town.

Camillus Village Mayor Michael Montero gives residents at the Camillus Senior Center information regarding the decision to fold the village into the

Camillus, NY -- Camillus residents will go to the polls this fall to decide whether to dissolve their village.

A petition signed by 108 residents has triggered a referendum, Camillus Mayor Michael Montero said Thursday night.

The village clerk has determined that the petitions, filed July 18, were sufficient, village attorney Steve Primo said. Under state law, 10 percent of the village's 766 registered voters — at least 77 people — had to sign the petitions.

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The board has 30 days to schedule the public vote; it decided to wait until its next meeting to set that date.

The vote must take place 60 to 90 days after the board schedules the referendum. Montero said the board will vote to hold the referendum on the same day as the November general election, Nov. 8.

“We will adopt this resolution at our next board meeting Aug. 11 so we can coincide this vote with the election vote,” Montero said, standing on a stage in front of more than 150 people Thursday night at the Camillus Senior Center. “It will be on the ballot.”

Montero explained that village officials started looking into the possibility of dissolving last year. The village, like other municipalities, has been stripped of sales tax revenue and has seen a drop in state aid while still facing increasing costs.

At the village’s request, the Onondaga County comptroller looked into the potential savings of a village merger with the town. The study showed that village residents would pay less in taxes and see little or no change in service.

The village cut nearly \$90,000 from its current budget to offset the loss in sales tax revenue — and to avoid a large tax increase, Montero said.

Montero told the crowd that taxes would increase significantly to remain a village. The village’s \$6.60 tax rate could jump to \$10 per \$1,000 assessed value, the mayor said.

That’s also in part because the village would need to set aside money for employee retirement benefits, which it has not yet done, Montero said. The village would need to fund \$39,000 for the next budget year, he said.

Although the state Legislature approved a 2 percent property tax cap, Montero said the five-member village board could override the cap with three or more votes in favor. “If we stayed a village, that would definitely have to happen,” he said.

If the village dissolves, the town of Camillus would receive \$1 million annually, of which \$700,000 must be used for property tax relief spread townwide.

Montero said he would continue to provide residents information about what it would mean to dissolve and hold informational sessions.

He outlined for residents some changes they would see if the village dissolves:

- The village board would no longer exist; the town’s 1st Ward councilor would represent the 1,200 village residents.

- The town likely would hire the village's three highway workers, but the village's clerk, deputy clerk and code enforcement officer would lose their jobs.

Village Trustee Anne Clancy said she helped circulate the petition to find out how residents felt about the village's financial situation, which she described as "severe."

After the meeting, several residents said they wanted to get more information before making a decision on future of the village.

"I'm just hoping they get the issues solved and we don't end up voting on something we don't want," said Annie Thornton, of Elderkin Avenue.

"I want what's best for the village, but the petitioners made it sound like we were in dire straits, and they were misleading with the information they provided," said her next-door neighbor, Diane Castro. "But the petitioners didn't make it sound like there was an option to survive as a village. I signed the petition so we can look at our choices and then make an informed decision."

The village board meets again at 7 p.m. Aug. 11 at the Camillus Senior Center on First Street.

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