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Fleischmanns residents debate dissolution at village meeting

By Sarah Eames Staff Writer

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Sarah Eames | The Daily Star Pat Davis, supervisor for the town of Middletown, addresses residents of the village of Fleischmanns during a public meeting Monday to discuss the proposed dissolution of the village at Skene Memorial Library in Fleischmanns.



FLEISCHMANN'S — More than 50 village residents assembled at Skene Memorial Library Monday to hear presentations regarding the proposed dissolution of the village.

"I think it's really important to have this conversation as friends and neighbors and villagers to discuss both sides," said Bill Burns, a retired Margaretville teacher and 27-year resident of the village who facilitated the meeting.

Wade Beltramo, general counsel for the New York Conference of Mayors and Municipal Officials, presented on the process of disincorporation and discussed some of the possible outcomes of dissolving.

"Villages exist to represent the underlying community," Beltramo said, arguing that village governments are the most democratic form of government in the state, given that they are the only type of municipality that can be formed or dissolved directly by residents via petition and referendum.

Many proponents of dissolution often support the measure in order to eliminate the duplication of services or cut down on the inefficiencies of operations between the village and town governments, Beltramo said, but argued that cost savings can be achieved through means other than dissolution.

"If that's the issue, you can take it out of the village budget right now," he said.

Beltramo also discussed the availability of state aid for village disincorporation, which is delivered primarily through Aid to Municipalities funding.

Designed to incentivize the statewide reduction of local government in order to lower property taxes, the state aid for dissolution maximizes at 15% of the combined tax levy between the village and the town, Beltramo said, but no amount is guaranteed year-to-year.

"Does it make sense to dissolve the village without the aid?" he asked.

Many residents in attendance shared concerns about the services currently provided by the village but which the town has no obligation to continue, including lighting, fire protection, parks maintenance, municipal water and sewer services, as well as the village library, museum and other general services.

"Village dissolution is a town issue," Beltramo said. "The villages where I've seen this work very well are where the towns take the lead."

If the village is dissolved, the town would provide street maintenance services, but not snow removal or sidewalk maintenance, according to Middletown supervisor Pat Davis. In order to guarantee the same level of services that village residents already receive, Davis argued their best option would be to incorporate special districts.

Special districts are initiated by the town government on behalf of the constituents requesting the services, Davis explained. The matter would be put to a vote, and if approved, only the residents receiving the services would be billed for them.

"Only the people that are lighted by the light will pay for it," Burns explained.

The cost savings of dissolving the village and eliminating its direct services would likely break even with the cost of funding special districts to provide the same services, Davis said, calling the matter a wash-out.

"I don't want to live in a situation with risk," said village resident Marilyn Reingold. "Right now we know what we're dealing with."

"We will no longer have a liberty to decide what happens," said village resident Linda Seaton.

"You are paying for those services now in your taxes," Davis said. "We can't give you those services at the same union rate."

A referendum on the matter will be held from noon to 9 p.m. Friday, Dec. 20, at the Skene Memorial Library.

Sarah Eames, staff writer, can be reached at seames@thedailystar.com or 607-441-7213.



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