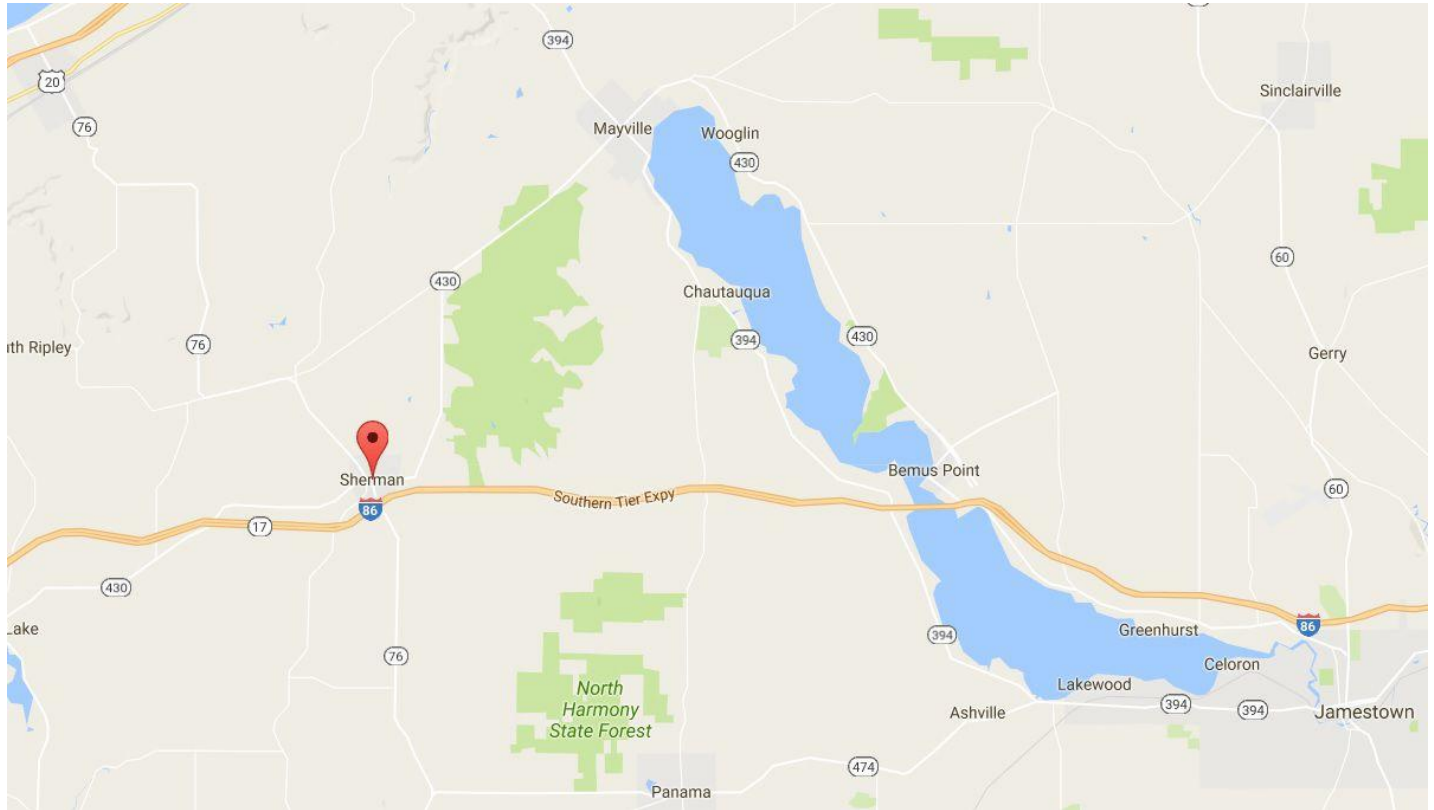


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Tiny Chautauqua County village narrowly votes to remain intact

By Harold McNeil

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By the slimmest of margins, the tiny Village of Sherman in Chautauqua County will remain its own municipal entity following the final tally of a voter referendum on dissolving the village.

The Chautauqua County Board of Elections on Tuesday certified the results of the Dec. 20 referendum after opening absentee ballots from the dissolution vote. In the final tally, village residents voted 117 to 115 in favor of maintaining village government. A total of 472 village residents were registered to vote in the

referendum, with nearly half or 232 of them turning out to vote. The vote on Dec. 20 was 114 to 112 to keep the village intact. Three absentee ballots counted Tuesday favored dissolving the village, three were received opposed to that.

The narrow victory came as a relief to John R. Patterson, mayor of the village of 732 residents that is located about 75 miles southwest of Buffalo.

"I was surprised that the vote was that close, but I'm glad that this dissolution vote failed," Patterson said Tuesday.

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Residents of the Erie County **Village of Depew are scheduled to vote Jan. 17** on whether to eliminate their village government and merge into the towns of Cheektowaga and Lancaster.

The push to dissolve Sherman's village government was initiated by Village Trustee Donna Higginbotham, aided by her husband, James, who sits on the Sherman Town Board. The aim of the initiative, which was begun about four years ago, was to save village taxpayers money by merging the village and town governments. Donna Higginbotham said a study commissioned by the Village Board said the merger would have resulted in a 43 percent savings in property taxes for village residents.

Though she expressed disappointment in the outcome of the vote, Higginbotham said she could only speculate as why the referendum narrowly failed.

"I know that there were several fliers that were put out with some misinformation that, I think, caused a lot of people that were going to vote for (dissolution) to change their minds," she said.

Patterson said many in the village were skeptical about the results of the study. Meanwhile, he said, village finances are in a healthy state.

"Since I've been mayor the last eight years, we've increased our revenues and CDs in the bank. We have more equipment. We finally got our employees a medical plan, which they never had before," Patterson said.

There are only four employees on the village payroll, including the mayor, village clerk/treasurer, streets and water superintendent and the village's code enforcement officer.

"In eight years, we've had two small tax increases, which were well under the state tax cap," said Patterson. "I can't see how we could possibly have been dissolved and taken over by the town and run any more efficiently than we are now. I think we're running the village in a very efficient and conscientious manner."

Sherman residents must wait four years before another vote can be taken, said Donna Higginbotham.