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Government and Politics

Tuesday, July 28, 2015

The tiny town that time, and elections, forgot may go

Limaville -- with its now 94 voters -- has one of just a dozen issues on the ballot



M.L. Schultze

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by WKSU's M.L. SCHULTZE



Limaville Mayor Mark Johnston. appointed in March when the former mayor quit in midmeeting, makes a phone call to try to roust a quorum for the July trustee's meeting. To his right is Jodi Bauhof, who quit as clerk in December but is still keeping the books.

Courtesy of M.L. SCHULTZE Download (WKSU Only)

Next Tuesday, the tiny village of Limaville, up near the Portage-Stark county line, will decide whether to end its nearly 200 years of existence. It's an unusual process - only a handful of villages in the state have done this over the last decade. But Limaville's different in a lot of ways - as WKSU's M.L. Schultze reports.

Voting hours are next Tuesday from 6:30 a.m. to 7:30 p.m. at Limaville's lone polling spot: the village hall/Turning Point Baptist Church. Ninety-four people in the village are registered to vote.

LISTEN: Limaville's past and future

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Limaville has 151 people, a village hall that's more often a church -- and no elected elected officials.

It has elected positions -- mayor, council, clerk treasurer. But every one of those is filled by appointees. And though even the Stark County Board of Elections isn't sure, all or nearly all of those are appointees of appointees. It's been that way for more than a decade.

That makes it hard to come up with a quorum for village meetings - like the one in July, when acting Mayor Mark Johnston had to put out a last-minute phone call.

"Hello, are you able to come to the meeting. ... Meeting's tonight and I only have two members here and I need a third. Alrighty. Thank you, bye. He'll be here in a minute," said the man who was

appointed mayor in March. He chuckled. "Good thing they don't live very far away, huh?"

Actually, nobody in Limaville lives very far. It's only about a quartermile square.

Keeps trying to quit

The clerk-treasurer, Jodi Bauhof, says she doesn't really know how long she's been in office.

"I tried to quit five years ago, and it didn't work, so then I quit again in December."

But she's still keeping the books. This month, the bills include \$4 for Chase Bank, \$82.59 for each of two council members and the biggiel: \$400 for the law firm that reviewed the language for the dissolution of the village to be on next week's ballot.

On a shoestring

That kind of money doesn't come easy.



-HARTVILLI LAKE MARLBORO CANAL MINERV NAVARRE 恋 PIKE SANDY SUGAR CREEK BETHLEHEN 5 WILMOT BEACH CITY

village forgot to put its operating levies up for renewal in 2012 – cutting its roughly \$25,000 budget in half for more than a year. A local bank donated \$2,500 to keep the street lights on, and

village officials gave up their \$15-a-meeting paychecks for a while.

But Gene Carlisle – whose father and grandfather were both mayors -- says things like snow plowing and pot-hole repair have never recovered.

"The ones that are on council, I won't say they all are, but they'll even tell you their self they're seat warmers."

So one of just a dozen issues in the entire state on the ballot next Tuesday will be the dissolution of Limaville, which has been around since 1838.

The result is far from a given.

A civics lesson



For Joyce Austin, Limaville is home -- and a point of pride. Her first husband had just gotten his doctorate back in 1963 when they came to Kent to teach - and spotted an ad for a farmhouse built back in 1840.

They meticulously restored it. He became a mayor. She joined council.

She remembers the days when Limaville had the energy to build the village hall and community center. She doesn't want to see it subsumed by Lexington Township, a stretch of mostly farms and reservoirs and roughly 55-hundred people.

So, "I put into every home this open envelope with voter registration information, application for absentee ballot and a little cover letter."

Fifty-seven homes in all.

Her message?

"For this village to make its own decisions, it's an American freedom."

She acknowledges, though, that the village has fallen short when it comes to some of that freedom: representative government.

"It's embarrassing that they don't know how to handle a council meeting properly. And even residents have lost some respect for the council."

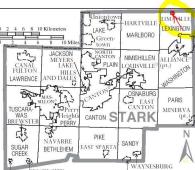
Church-village hall combo

When council does meet, it's at the community hall, which is better known these days as Turning Point Baptist Church. In fact, the council had to

call the pastor, Ron Lanham, so it could set up for its July meeting.

Lanham moved his burgeoning church there three years ago and he loves the town.

"To me, Limaville's one of those little hidden villages that more people need to visit. It takes you back to a time and place when life was more simple."



Akron's reservoirs make the city money?

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NAACP wants Cleveland police union chief to resign from reform commission

◆Cleveland's police reform takes a crucial next step

The church covers utilities and upkeep. There was talk about selling the hall to the church outright. That stalled when Stark County Auditor Alan Harold explained that selling public property requires open bidding.

Not a club

Harold raised many of the questions about how the village has been operating after he noticed Limaville wasn't submitting its budget as required by law. He says he doesn't want to dictate the village's future but...

"With all respect to these good people who have full-time jobs and a lot of other interests, but as I had shared with them on multiple occasions, 'You're not running a club here. You have a fiduciary duty to the taxpayers to be good stewards of the dollars and to operate government in the way it should be operated."



Porter Loving is the resident who passed the petition to

get the dissolution on the ballot. He maintains the change would not cost the village its identity.

"Limaville's gonna be Limaville. The neighbors' still gonna be the neighbors ... there's nothing gonna change. Other than getting help on all the financials, all the roads, all the storm, the sewers. Everything Limaville needs, we'll get it."

But if Limaville decides next week to remain a village, it has another decision to may. The very day after this election is the

deadline for candidates to file to run for council. If anyone wants to.

Issues on Tuesday's ballots in Ohio:

Carroll	Brown Local School District	Levy	Avoid an operating deficit	Renewal	5,8
Clermont	Bethel	Levy	Police protection	Additional	8
Fairfield	Walnut Township Local School District	Levy	Emergency requirements	Additional	7
Hamilton	Mt. Healthy	Levy	Street repair & construction	Renewal	1.5
Hamilton	St. Bernard	Levy	Current expenses	Renewal	7
Holmes	Ripley	Levy	Streets, roads, & bridges	Renewal	2.5
Logan	Logan County	Levy	Maintain & operate Historical Society	Replacement	0.25
Mahoning	Canfield	Income tax	General municipal operations	Additional	N/A
Montgomery	Germantown	Levy	Streets, roads, & bridges	Additional	4
Sandusky	Gibsonburg Exempted Village School District	Levy	General permanent improvements	Additional	2
Stark	Limaville	Initiative & Referendum	Surrender cornorate nowers	N/A	N/A
Wayne	Central Fire District	Levy	Fire & EMS	Replacement	3.5

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