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Randolph and East Randolph 'Overwhelming' vote calls for dissolution of villages

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Randolph and East Randolph villages dissolve



The Villages of Randolph and East Randolph will now share services.

RANDOLPH - Democracy is often defined as "power in the hands of the people." Every citizen has the opportunity to speak their mind by going to the ballot box. Last week, the villagers of Randolph and East Randolph spoke - and they did so in overwhelming fashion.

On March 16, the future of the two villages was on the ballot, and it was left to the voters to decide whether to keep the Villages of Randolph and East Randolph separate entities from the Town of Randolph or to dissolve them. In East Randolph, the dissolution won by a 57-11 margin; in Randolph

it was 125-13.

"I was surprised it was that overwhelming," East Randolph mayor Howard VanRensselaer said about the vote. "I should have guessed it because nobody was talking about it. The vote was so supportive, I couldn't believe it was that good. It was much better than I had expected it to be."

"Thirteen villages had tried (dissolution) and only three had passed, and I was wondering how we would make out," Daniel MacLaughlin, mayor of Randolph, said. "We did a lot of public forums and people got the hint - we were going to save money."

The cost of running a town versus running two villages and a town was the driving force behind the dissolution. Both VanRensselaer and MacLaughlin said people won't notice a difference in their everyday lives except when it comes time to pay taxes.

In fact, most of the services between the town and village have already been combined. The dissolution process has been a long time in the making - over a decade - and the vote held last week was just another step in the procedure.

"We have been working toward the consolidation of service with East Randolph since 1999," Lori Milliman, the town clerk, explained. "Little by little we have been working to dissolve services and combine them over the past 11 years."

Therefore, in many ways, certain aspects of the relationship between the town and village will not change. For example, according to the dissolution propositions, the Town of Randolph will assume the present fire district which was established with Randolph and East Randolph already.

What the vote did do is give the green light for town and village officials to continue the dissolution process. The changes that will be made, however, won't be made immediately, as the villages don't officially dissolve until Dec. 31, 2011.

Between now and then, officials will need to turn village buildings, properties, deeds and equipment from the village to the town or sell them. Consolidating services will save money, and MacLaughlin said that's what people realized when they voted.

"I think with the money crunch the way it is right now, people are just wondering how they are going to save money and consolidating is how they are going to do that," he said.

Also, the village boards will dissolve at the end of 2011. The village election - which was scheduled in March 2011 for the position of mayor and trustee in each village - will not occur. Instead, any board members that are holding office at the end of the 2010-2011 fiscal year will remain in office until Dec. 31, 2011.

"It's kind of tough knowing you're the last elected village mayor, but I think it's for the good of the community," MacLaughlin said.

The loss of village identity was what MacLaughlin said he was worried about when it came time to vote. Consolidation would save money, but it would also strip the "village" title off welcome signs.

"I don't think people will realize anything with this consolation," he said. "They can always say they are from the Town or Village of Randolph. They can still say that, or now they'll say they are from the Hamlet of Randolph or East Randolph."

The Randolph Web site includes links with complete documentation of the dissolution plans for each village. They are available at www.RandolphNY.org.

Looking back at over 100 years in the villages' histories

RANDOLPH - Although the idea had been tossed around and even implemented in some ways over the past decade, the votes cast last week make it official - the Villages of Randolph and East Randolph will not exist on Jan. 1, 2012.

In an overwhelming decision, villagers of each municipality created change and made a historic decision. Much like the incorporation dates of the villages are forever etched in history, so will 2011, the final year of existence for the two villages.

Mayor Howard VanRensselaer of East Randolph and Daniel MacLaughlin of Randolph have both agreed that residents will not see much change in their everyday lives. It's the identity of the village - something that many residents have lived with their entire lives - that was presumably one of the main reasons some people voted against the dissolution.

The two villages have been stories in the making for nearly two centuries. According to town historian Diana Mackey, the first settler in Village of Randolph was Edmund Fuller in 1820.

"The original beginnings of the village were in what is now the extreme western part of the village," Mackey explained. "However, the site was too low, subject to flooding and unsuited for as the town center. As a result, the business center of the village was moved to its present location about 1835."

In 1825, the Helmes Family was the first to settle in what is now East Randolph. Mackey said the village owes its existence primarily to the excellent water power which provided many opportunities for milling.

Only a handful of decades after they were first settled, the two villages were incorporated - the Village of Randolph was incorporated on May 21, 1867 and the Village of East Randolph was incorporated in 1881.

Before the villages were incorporated, they operated as hamlets - much like they will be in less than two years. Although Mackey said there does not seem to be any actual documentation of why the Village of Randolph and East Randolph chose to be separate entities, a little research helps shed

light on the story.

Like the present day decision to dissolve the villages, the decision to incorporate them had to do with government. Because the Town of Randolph has always been primarily an agricultural town, regulations and ordinances that would be passed for the entire town may not have been in the best interest of those on Main Street, Mackey said.

“What may be a good solution for a farm area may not have been a correct solution for a larger municipal area,” she said, adding that once incorporated, villages are able to have more local control and minimize town and state intervention into municipal affairs.

Each village had its own respective landmarks during the 19th century. The Village of Randolph became home to the Randolph Academy and Female Seminary, which was renamed the Chamberlain Institute and Ladies’ College in 1869 after a generous endowment by prominent Randolph resident Benjamin Chamberlain. Declining enrollment and multiple fires closed the institute in 1901, but not before reopening around 1904 and operating as the Chamberlain Military Institute for boys until 1915.

The Village of East Randolph became home to the Western New York Home for Homeless and Dependent Children in 1878. By 1923, the home consisted of many parts, including a school building, the Dusenbury Memorial Infirmary, the Wheeler Memorial building for industrial and recreational activities and a farm which provided work for older boys and supplied dairy products for the home. By the early 1960s, the old buildings had been torn down and the present facilities built.

Mackey said there was “a friendly rivalry” between the two villages as they prospered. Residents of both villages and the town had a wide variety of businesses and services to choose from, including jewelers, dry goods stores, hotels, attorneys, physicians and photographers.

“As the years passed, most of the businesses closed or moved elsewhere as did many of the professionals,” Mackey said. “Where we once had two bustling, energetic villages, we now have two villages who have slowed their paces.”

And as paces have slowed, the residents have spoken to dissolve the villages and operate under the government of the town, something that hasn’t been done since the mid-19th century.

“It is to be hoped that with the dissolution of Randolph and East Randolph as villages, the Town of Randolph can revitalize and perhaps regain some of its past energy and enthusiasm,” Mackey said. “Without three municipalities duplicating efforts the Town of Randolph can return to the business of prospering.”