

## LONG ISLAND / SUFFOLK

# Mastic Beach residents vote to disband village



Protesters turned out as residents went to the polls on Wednesday, Nov. 16, 2016, to vote on whether Mastic Beach should remain a village or rejoin Brookhaven Town as an unincorporated community. Credit: Randee Daddona

**By Deon J. Hampton**

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Voters in Mastic Beach Village, in a 1,922 to 1,215 vote, decided Wednesday night to become the first Long Island village since Pine Valley in 1991 to disband.

Mayor Maura Sperry said it's time for the community to come together and heal.

"We're all going to be neighbors tomorrow," she said. "We have a whole lot more that unites us than divides us."

Trustee Anne Synder declined to comment.

Trustee Joseph Johnson, who was in favor of remaining as a village, said: “It was a huge turnout. The residents have spoken. I’m only one vote.”

The jurisdiction would now return to the Town of Brookhaven.

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Those who favored remaining an incorporated village said they felt it was the best way to solve their problems.

Those who wanted to return to Brookhaven Town said the financial challenges and the village’s current austerity budget limited its ability to improve.

The village of approximately 15,000 residents was formed in August 2010, with supporters of incorporation citing concerns about the prevalence of abandoned homes and the need to keep taxes low.

Late in the afternoon, Barbara Scalafani, 49, said she voted to keep the village.

“I believe in this,” she said, adding that she wants to help the village rise above its issues.

Another resident, Patricia Conover, 54, said she also voted to keep the village. “My passion is to keep the village,” she said.

There were others Wednesday who came to the polls who said they wanted to see Mastic Beach disbanded.

“Brookhaven did a good job before,” said Sandra Vissichelli, 52. She added she wasn’t sure why the village incorporated six years ago. She said “there’s been fights and problems internally” on the village board.

Lack of services is why resident Charles Langhorne, 55, said he wanted to rejoin Brookhaven. He said village roads aren’t properly maintained.

In June, Moody’s Investors Service downgraded the village’s municipal bonds to noninvestment grade, citing financial instability, overspending by \$400,000 on a road project, a declining tax base and operating at a deficit for three straight years.

In April, the board voted on a tax-neutral \$3.89 million budget against Sperry's advice. She argued for a 125 percent spending increase that she said would support services. Staff layoffs were announced in May.

Hoping to turn around village finances, trustees Johnson and Snyder supported efforts to raise \$100,000 in revenue by imposing franchise fees on local businesses, but none were collected. They also sought to raise money through aggressive code enforcement on homeowners.

The village deficit, projected in June at \$400,000, ends at \$11,000 now.

Last week, before a gathering of village residents at William Floyd High School, an Albany-based consulting group hired by the municipality said village taxes could rise by up to 208 percent if Mastic Beach residents choose to remain incorporated and provided a basic level of services.

Supporters of the village characterized that potential increase as inaccurate.

The group based its conclusion after a review of village finances, audits and interviews with officials.

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