



Don't give up on dissolution

Daily Messenger

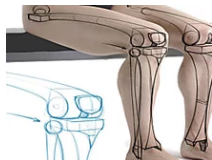
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Macedon, N.Y. — Given the recent history of failure when it comes to doing away with local layers of government, it should come as no surprise that voters in the village of Macedon last week rejected a proposal to dissolve their municipality.

It does, however, come as a disappointment — and not just for the 228 residents who voted for dissolution. (They were outvoted by 257 neighbors who wanted to keep the village.)

Had Macedon taken the bold but obvious step of discarding an unnecessary layer of government, it would have set an example for fellow overburdened taxpayers in other redundant municipalities.

And an example is sorely needed. Here in Ontario County, with our population of about 104,000, we have 16 towns, eight villages and two cities, not to mention the county government and nine school districts (eight other surrounding school districts include a small portion of the county). Clearly, some consolidation is in order.

But it has not been forthcoming. The potential for tax savings and a simplified system of governance is evidently no match for a sense of identity.

Thus it is that voters in the village of Naples, with its population of fewer than 1,100, have twice vetoed recent dissolution proposals. Thus it is that an idea to merge the towns of Richmond and Canadice was dismissed in 1998 by the Town Board of Canadice (population 1,846). Thus it is that, when a 2005 survey disclosed a swell of support for exploring the idea of merging the villages of Manchester and Shortsville, the matter was not pursued.

The only successful municipal merger in local memory is the 1990 consolidation of the villages of East Bloomfield and Holcomb into the village of Bloomfield (population about 1,250).

Tradition is part of the problem when it comes to dissolving or merging town or village. So are elected officials who, whether out of a sense of genuine concern for their community or simple turf concerns, routinely run defense against such efforts.

When talk of merging Manchester and Shortsville came up, Shortsville Mayor Robert Woodhams' response was: "They're two separate villages — that's my opinion." Case closed.

Macedon Mayor James Hoteling has been similarly uninterested in such talk. He has, in fact, been downright obstructionist.

- Village officials were first asked to put a dissolution measure to a vote in 2002. A committee determined after a six-month study that doing away with village government would mean a financial savings for residents. Instead of scheduling a vote, the village mailed out an informal survey on dissolution — complete with a "fact sheet" that was designed to sway the vote. On the basis of this survey, they decided a vote wasn't needed.

- When a group called One Macedon petitioned the village in 2006 for a study, a public hearing and a vote on dissolution, Hoteling and Village Board members and their attorney determined at least 69 of the 360 signatures were invalid. That dropped the number of "valid" signatures to just below the 296 needed — one third of the village's registered voters — to force the Village Board to carry out the requests.

- When a Dissolution Committee issued a report prior to last week's vote that found doing away with the village would mean an average \$204 savings for a village resident with a home assessed at \$100,000, the report was mailed to village voters with a Hoteling-penned cover letter disputing the findings. "It's our opinion," he said in defending the letter. "I think we're entitled to our opinions — unless someone has taken that freedom away."

He was being serious.

We urge One Macedon to return after the necessary two-year waiting period and again campaign for one government in Macedon. Macedon village taxpayers are no less burdened than homeowners throughout the region who pay town, village, county, school and special-district taxes. But there is clearly momentum in Macedon.

And it will be needed. Voters last week also returned Hoteling to office for another four years.

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