

**NEWS**

# Van Etten's dissolution may start a trend in Chemung County, legislator predicts

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Van Etten may be the first Chemung County village to dissolve, but it may not be the last.

In a unanimous vote Monday night, the Van Etten village board approved a dissolution plan that will eliminate all vestiges of the municipality by year's end.

Barring a last-minute reprieve — village residents can petition for a second vote on the dissolution within the next 45 days, but that is now doubtful, village residents said — the 147-year-old municipality will fade into history.

In the end, the appeal of lower taxes — projected at 11 percent for village residents and 4 percent for town residents — proved too inviting to pass up.

Tax payments to the Chemung County and the Spencer-Van Etten School district are unaffected by the local municipal consolidation.

Now, Chemung County Legislator Brian Hyland, R-6th District, expects other small Chemung County villages to follow Van Etten's lead, or at least explore the possibility.

"This was a learning experience," he said following Monday's hour-long meeting at a village hall that will soon be transferred to the Town of Van Etten.

With other villages facing the same dilemma as Van Etten — declining tax base and rising revenues — the lure of cutting bureaucratic layers and potential for tax savings in a high cost state may be too inviting, he said.

Since 2008, residents of 28 villages in New York have voted against dissolving, while 19 voted to abolish their village governments, according to records from the New York State Conference of Mayors. The Erie County village of Depew defeated a dissolution move last

year by a resounding margin. So far, Seneca Falls has been the largest New York village to dissolve.

Much like other municipal consolidation debates around the state, emotions of both sides have run high since the move to abolish the village began last year.

Mayor Jake Briggs, in his third year as mayor, said seeing the village die is regrettable. He still attributes last year's 103-76 vote to approve dissolution to a disinformation campaign by supporters, but he's resigned to living by the will of the voters.

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At recent meetings, a large majority of those attending supported the move, and encouraged the village board to expedite the action.

The Village of Van Etten, with a population of 600, a 2016-17 budget of \$204,000 and less than one square mile in area, will be folded into the Town of Van Etten with a population of 1,500, a 2016-2017 budget of \$1.2 million and 42 square miles in area.

Van Etten is 17 miles southwest of Ithaca, on the northeastern boundary of Chemung County.

At least a portion of the property tax savings to both town and village taxpayers will accrue from a \$92,000 annual state incentive to encourage municipalities across the state to eliminate layers of government, particularly villages.

Van Etten's fire department has already been shuttered, with coverage taken over by the Community Fire and Rescue Department, which already covered the larger Van Etten community. The village's water system will be transferred to the town as well as responsibilities for refuse collection.

The town board has started the process of incorporating the village's operations into the larger municipality. Village assets are expected to be sold after the village folds on December 31.