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VE Villagers Vote for Dissolution

By Jaime Cone
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(Photo: Jaime Cone)

In a vote of 103 to 76, the residents of Van Etten voted Dec. 11 in favor of a referendum to dissolve the Village of Van Etten and make the Village part of Van Etten Town.

The referendum was the result of a petition signed by 139 Village residents. The Village of Van Etten Trustees are now tasked with developing a plan for dissolution, and once the plan is complete there will be another vote by the Village residents to approve the plan. Both the Village trustees and the Van Etten Town Council members have said that the boards will work together to facilitate a smooth transition.

If the villagers vote down the plan then the residents of Van Etten Village must wait a minimum of four years before they can submit another petition to dissolve the Village.

According to Paul Bishop, of CGR, the independent consulting firm that Van Etten Village hired to conduct a study regarding dissolution of the Village, it's likely that dissolution would lead to the shutdown of Van Etten Village Fire Department.

Community Fire and Rescue, which was formed in 2011 and has a contract with Van Etten Town to cover all of Van Etten except the Village, would likely take on the responsibility of covering the Village as well, as it has about twice as many members and newer equipment than the Village Fire Department.

If the plan for dissolution is voted through the Village Board of Trustees will eventually dissolve, and the town supervisor (currently George Keturi) will become the head elected official for the area that was formerly the village as well as the Town. The time between the vote and actual dissolution is usually more than a year, Bishop said.

The CGR study found that Van Etten residents would see an estimated \$284 reduction in their local government services tax bill for a \$90,000 (median value) home if the village dissolved.

Though there was a public presentation of the CGR study Oct. 25, Bishop and village and town officials have all acknowledged that the process for carrying out the study went more quickly than it might have if the village was not instructed by law to hold the vote within three months of the day the petition was submitted.

Village Mayor Jake Briggs has publicly said relatively little about the referendum, though he has stated that he is not in favor of it and that he hoped Village residents would see through the motives of those who spoke in favor of it. He characterized a pamphlet that was mailed to all Village residents as well as statements made by Supervisor George Keturi at a recent question and answer forum as "propaganda" and "lies."

Briggs opted not to participate in the forum, which was held Dec. 4 ; he said he knew he would come off as angry if he responded to what he said were outright lies told by Keturi at that event and that he thought it best to stay silent.