

Consolidation Proposal:
**What It Means to You and the
Village of Pawling**





Dear Village of Pawling Residents:

Your Village of Pawling Board of Trustees shares your great pride in our community's character, history and beauty. We take our role in guiding the Village's future very seriously and believe open communication is imperative during this critical time for our Village.

A petition to consolidate the Village and Town has been initiated by the people behind PawlingTaxCut.org and One Pawling. They are groups that routinely oppose the Town and Village, while hiding their identity behind social media. Many people who signed the petition thought that they were signing for a study to be performed rather than forcing a yes or no consolidation vote. A public referendum will be held on November 30, 2020 forcing a vote for consolidation. The petition requires a referendum compelling the Village and Town to complete a study on this issue in a very short time period and spend significant taxpayer dollars to do so.

For the reasons set forth below, the Board of Trustees of the Village of Pawling strongly opposes consolidation with the Town and urges all Village residents to vote against it in the upcoming special election.

The Village Board understands that consolidation will cost considerable taxpayer money, perhaps in excess of \$100,000 based on other New York municipalities that have undergone similar efforts. Contrary to what many residents who signed the petition were told, no funding from New York State is available to the Village or Town to study how the consolidation could be structured. Given the State's budget crisis, it is unlikely that this will change in the foreseeable future.

What is certain is that consolidation costs will be substantial. These factors could lead to significant tax increases that could likely offset any tax benefits associated with consolidation.

Also, consolidation will result in Village residents losing direct control over Village issues such as garbage pickup, sidewalks, lighting, policing, parking, sewer, water and zoning. In addition, expenditures for these services are likely to increase because the new entity will need to form new municipal-service districts to provide some or all of these services.

Below are some important implications of what might lay ahead, and what they mean to you and your tax dollars. Your Village Board is committed to providing updates as developments occur. Thank you for contributing your voice as the Village of Pawling's future is determined. We hope you will vote no for consolidation.

Sincerely,

Mayor Robert Liffland and the Village of Pawling Board of Trustees



What is required for consolidation to occur?

For the consolidation of Pawling governments to move forward, two things must transpire: A majority of Village voters has to approve the consolidation in a special Village election, and a majority of Town voters has to approve the consolidation in a special Town election.

What's the timing of this?

The referendum will be held November 30, 2020.

Will there be any action taken prior to the vote on consolidation?

Yes, a study will be done, and numerous areas will require complex review. The Town and Village intend to work collaboratively, and with experienced consultants, to have this study performed as cost-effectively as possible. This is particularly important because New York State funding is not currently available.

What happens if voters in the Village or voters in the Town reject consolidation?

If that happens, then no new petition for consolidation can be brought for at least four years.

What happens if voters in the Village and voters in the Town approve consolidation?

Both governments are required to develop a plan to become a single entity.

The Village Board has many concerns that would need to be considered and then re-evaluated as part of this plan.

These include:

- A plan to provide services in the newly created municipality. These include street maintenance; refuse disposal; community beautification; code enforcement; sidewalks; street lights; sewer; water; continuation of laws; police protection; transfer of employees; transfer of debt; and transfer of contracts, among others.
- The formation of new districts will be required for services such as garbage, street maintenance, public lighting, and even leaf pickup.
- Services now being shared (please see the section titled, "Aren't taxpayer dollars already being saved through shared services?").
- Zoning and planning considerations within the Village and Town.
- Deciding if the consolidated entity will be a Village or Town.
- How the consolidation will be paid for and how taxes may be affected.
- Under a consolidated structure, the governing body will have far more extensive responsibilities than now assigned to Village and Town officials and employees. After a consolidation, such increased responsibilities and duties will require increased compensation – thus reducing, and perhaps eliminating, potential savings from eliminating positions.
- Existing bonds and other debt may have to be restructured.

Whether the consolidation goes forward or not, the only certainty about this process is that it will cost a lot of money, some or all of which will be borne by taxpayers.



Aren't taxpayer dollars already being saved through shared services?

Yes. Your Village, to use tax dollars as efficiently as possible, has shared a variety of services with the Town for several years. These services include:

- Equipment and labor
- The Recreation Department
- The Assessor's Office
- The Transfer Station
- Fuel and Services
- The Village water system
- The sewer district
- Winter sand and salt

Your Village Board is committed to exploring new opportunities for shared services with the Town to further reduce costs without a consolidation. These efforts can be undertaken in a targeted, cost-effective way. By contrast, a consolidation would mean eliminating the Village entirely, as well as the ability of an independent Village Board of Trustees to restructure levels of government services and protect the interests of Village residents.

Furthermore, the Village Mayor and Town Supervisor participate in the Dutchess County Shared Services Property Tax Plan, an initiative by Dutchess County Executive Marc Molinaro. This helps residents pay less taxes by identifying and implementing opportunities for shared services countywide.

Wasn't consolidation considered before – and rejected?

The Village and the Town have each explored combining the Village and the Town in some form in the past and determined, every time, that it would not be in the best interests of the taxpayers of either the Village or Town to do so.

Moreover, the vast majority of Villages and Towns in New York State have not pursued consolidation. There are more than 500 villages statewide. Since the Government Reorganization and Citizens Empowerment Act was passed in 2009, only 24 villages have dissolved – and there has never been a consolidation of a Village and a Town. Most villages that dissolved were small, provided few discrete services and had few municipal-service districts. By contrast, the Village of Pawling has numerous districts and provides specific services to Village residents. The consolidations of these will be complex and costly.

Will the Village lose its voice?

If consolidation occurs, Village residents will no longer have a direct say in Village issues. For example, decisions about current Village services such as garbage pickup would be in the hands of a Board that could be comprised of residents who do not live in the current Village. They may not give such decisions the same care and attention that Village Trustees would, and the decisions might not be in the best interests of Village residents. Your current Village of Pawling Board deeply values giving each Village resident a voice in, and ownership of, the future of our Village. This would not necessarily occur after consolidation.

Will taxpayers foot the bill for consolidation?

Yes. As noted, planning for this consolidation will be extremely expensive and there is currently no state funding available. The exact price tag is impossible to calculate because there is no way to predict possible costs of administrative and legal work and the almost-inevitable disputes that will arise in connection with consolidation. This includes reorganizing services, transitioning employees and assets, creating new municipal-service districts, forming a new government, and eliminating, amending or reenacting local laws that now govern within the Town and Village.

What happens after the consolidation plan is finalized?

After all planning is complete and a plan is put in place, 25 percent of voters in either the Village or the Town would have the right to petition for another special election. If voters in either the Village or Town reject the plan, the consolidation will not go through – and the money spent on these efforts will have been wasted.

