

LOCAL

What would consolidating Pawling mean? Interim report released

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Published 6:01 a.m. ET Nov. 20, 2020

Consolidation for the village and town of Pawling could lead to more money spent than saved.

An interim report released by the Laberge group, a grant and funding firm that works on consolidation efforts, found the process could result in annual tax savings for residents, depending on what sort of grants and state assistance is approved, but could also lead to a tax increase for town residents. And in either situation, the short-term cost of consolidating would be in the hundreds of thousands.

A vote will be held to determine the future of the two municipalities on Nov. 30. If it goes through, Ben Syden, vice president of LaBerge, said Pawling would be the first village and town consolidation in the state.

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The report projects the shift in services would lead to \$53,000 saved annually. But, the transition costs of the consolidation to land between \$365,000 to \$585,000. These costs are not considered in the annual savings projections.

"We've developed plans for dissolution, we've implemented dissolutions... the costs are way above what you ever think, with the legal shenanigans and additional pieces," Syden said during a presentation to the town and village Wednesday. "There are fees no one ever thinks about when developing these projects."

While there are grants available and the state's Citizens Empowerment Tax Credit, which could cover a portion of the consolidation, Syden warned the state reduced the tax credit by

20% in the 2020 budget, and said it is unclear if a tax credit will be available for residents due to fiscal impacts of the pandemic.

Without tax credit reductions, village residents would see a 29.1% reduction in taxes, while town residents would see a 12.4% increase in taxes. With the entire tax credit, village residents would see a 36.4% reduction and town residents would see a 6.3% reduction.

Town Supervisor James Schmitt said while he sees pros and cons to the consolidation, without the guarantee of a tax credit he finds it difficult to support the consolidation.

"I think it's going to be different for every resident. The village could see the most savings, but they will also see a loss of their identity, having their own planning board, their own zoning board, and their own mayor," Schmitt said. "For town residents you have to be careful because we only see a savings on the town side if this tax credit comes through. If the tax credit doesn't come through, our taxes go up. So, why would we want to do that?"

Schmitt noted he would like to continue to push for more shared services and collaboration with the village regardless of the results of the vote.

The firm created the site labergegroup.com/pawling to keep residents informed and updated on the process. The report can be found on this site.

Village Mayor Rob Liffland spoke against the consolidation during the presentation Wednesday night.

"I hope that people vote no," Liffland said. "I hope that people understand what they will give up if they dissolve the village."

On Nov. 30, village residents can vote at Village Hall on Memorial Avenue between noon and 9 p.m. Town residents can vote at Lathrop Auditorium on Lakeside Drive between noon and 7 p.m.

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