

Corinth Shared Services/Dissolution Feasibility Study Public Meeting

October 26, 2009

7 pm, Corinth Fire House

Committee Members Present: Renee Baker, Ed Byrnes, Jeff Collura, Melanie Denno, Julius Enekes, Kevin Granger, Tim Hanchett, Jim Hopkins, Tim Murphy (Chairman), Dick Lucia, Scott Sprague

Others: Shawn Eggleston, Rose Farr and Art Lozier

Consulting Team Members: Dr. Joseph Stefko and David Liebschutz (CGR)

The meeting was called to order by Mr. Murphy at 7:00 pm, and he asked that any members of the public sign their names when they spoke, so that it could be on record. Chair Murphy introduced Dr. Joseph Stefko from the Center for Governmental Research (CGR).

Dr. Stefko told the public about CGR. He said it was founded in 1915 by George Eastman as a municipal research bureau but has evolved into a full service advisory firm for local governments. Dr. Stefko told the public that his associate, David Liebschutz, would go through their approach to this particular study and the options they have been asked to look at. Dr. Stefko told the public that CGR approached each study in a neutral way without any preconceived notions about what should or shouldn't be done. Dr. Stefko said that this is a community decision, and CGR's role is to help insure that every citizen, both in the Town and Village, is fully informed to make an informed decision about the next steps. Dr. Stefko said that this is the first of four public meetings to be held during the study process and that this was an introductory meeting to get the public's feedback on important issues and what is working or not working in the Village and Town.

Mr. Liebschutz told the public that the purpose of the study was to provide Village residents with data necessary to determine the most efficient and effective way to provide services to the community. He said that the options under consideration are shared services, consolidating some services and/or departments or alternatives to consolidate the Village and the Town. He explained what each option was.

Mr. Liebschutz told the public that this study is being financed by a grant through New York State Local Government Efficiency Grant. He said the first step is to form a committee which has already been done; second step is to hire an independent consultant (CGR and Camoin Associates); and the last requirement was to do research and present alternatives that addresses the cost paid by the taxpayers and services delivered.

He gave the audience some basic demographic facts about the Town and Village: over the course of the last twenty years, the Village has decreased in population by about 12%, while the Town outside of the Village has increased by approximately 25%. The Village has lost a major industry and has had a decline in its tax base.

Mr. Liebschutz then went on to say that the Village and Town budgets together equal approximately \$7.6 million. The Village has three main funds with the largest being the General Fund. However, they do have approximately \$700,000.00 in the Water and Sewer Funds. He said Public Safety, Highway and Sewer and Water are the largest three expenses of the Village. Mr. Liebschutz then went over the number of employees that the Village now has on its payroll.

He spoke about all the different shared services models that could be done either by the Village, Town or other entities (such as Saratoga County). He told the public that they would be doing an in-depth review of the budgets over the next few months to see what currently exists. He said that they would be looking at the overlaying of services and where more shared services could potentially happen. They are then going to look at what impact the dissolution would have on the Village and on the Town.

Mr. Liebschutz told the public that the consultants will inform the public about what they have learned at two public meetings in February. He said the meeting in April would be the summary of their findings.

Dr. Stefko told the public that all the committee meetings are also open to the public. Mr. Liebschutz told the public that they could email their questions or stop in the Village Hall and give their questions to Nicole Colson, Clerk-Treasurer, and she would see that the questions were given to the proper people.

PUBLIC COMMENTS

Jim Murray, Sr. - Village Resident

Mr. Murray felt that there was “too much government” for the number of people in the Village. Services such as fire protection and police services need to be more fairly charged (he said the Village residents are paying substantially more for fire protection than the town residents). He said he is concerned with duplication of services and overtime at the Department of Public Works. He suggested two ten hour a day shifts during the summer – one Monday through Thursday and the other Tuesday through Friday which would eliminate a lot of overtime. Mr. Murray said he felt that the survival of the Town and Village would be to have one government; to eliminate duplication of services and create more shared services.

Mitchell Saunders -- Village Resident/Town Board Member

Mr. Saunders said that he wanted to thank the Mayor for forming this committee and thanked the people for agreeing to be on the committee. Mr. Saunders said that in 2010 the Village, Town and School budgets saw an increase in spending while the tax base declined. In addition, Mr. Saunders said that if Governor Paterson is able to implement mid-year budget cuts, the Corinth

School District will see a \$361,000 decrease in funds this year. Mr. Saunders quoted from several sources about how the cost of local governments in New York State has increased in the past few years. He said that in 2005 and 2008 there were surveys done that showed overwhelming support for the dissolution of the Village. Mr. Saunders quoted Mike Diskin, former Mayor of the Village of Ticonderoga as follows:

While the experience enjoyed in Ticonderoga has proved to be beneficial, it would be unwise to assume that this same scenario could take place in other villages around New York State, I truly believe it should be the duty of every good local official to seek the best for his or her community. It should be the right of every taxpayer to have services provided in the most cost-efficient manner they can be delivered. Obviously, there has to be a decision concerning what level of service a community wants and at what cost. Dissolution is only one way to become more cost-effective. All local elected officials should seek every possible method to bring about cost savings through consolidation of services at the local levels. Whether it be cooperative agreements for delivery of services and products, or dissolving the local government, there are many ways to seek cost savings. All it takes is a willingness on the part of local officials to at least look at the ways and to overcome obstacles such as “protecting turf”, or fear of losing a base of power or authority. Our communities truly deserve better.

Mr. Saunders quoted several other sources regarding dissolution. Mr. Saunders told the public that he had a meeting with the consultants, and they asked what he personally would do if he had the opportunity and where he saw the cost savings to the community. Mr. Saunders said that the following comments were only his personal view, which he developed during four years of studying this option. Mr. Saunders said that he feels the biggest cost in both governments is the DPW because it spends almost one million dollars. He said the next cost to be looked at is administration, and he said he sees no job cuts in the Village or Town DPW. However, when the consolidation happens all those individuals have to be merged into one department. He said we also need to recognize that the Village has been mandated by the State to put in a new filtration system, and the water treatment system has to be maintained as well as the infrastructure to deliver that water and sewage. Mr. Saunders said that there would have to be a Water Department manager, and three or four employees dedicated with a job description solely to maintain that system even after consolidation. Mr. Saunders said that the Town alone budgets \$214,000 to cover overtime for maintenance of the roads. Mr. Saunders said that, as far as administration goes, all offices should be elected. He said with the consolidation the caseload would increase so no one would lose their job. Mr. Saunders then spoke about the emergency services. He said that the Town and Village now pay approximately \$100,000 for the Emergency Squad; \$300,000 for the paramedics and \$300,000 for the County Sheriff. Mr. Saunders said that every Town and Village taxpayer already pays County taxes to provide police services. Mr. Saunders said that he feels the greatest assets that we have in this area is the Corinth Central School System. He said that people come to this area due to the school system. Mr. Saunders said last year the school budget had to eliminate some jobs and he said he felt that, once we start chipping away at the school, this area will lose its greatest asset.

Robert Hudak – Village Resident

Mr. Hudak said he had a question about the purpose of the study. It was his understanding that the study was to prepare a dissolution study. Dr. Stefko from CGR clarified this. He said that a dissolution plan assumes that a village board had already voted to move forward and craft a plan to dissolve that would be put before the voters on a specific date. Dr. Stefko said that this is not what CGR and Camoin are being asked to do. He said that in this case the consultants are being asked to study all the implications of what a dissolution or other shared services would look like. He said that the Village Board has not decided on a course of action at this point in time. CGR's preference is to always do a dissolution feasibility study because it is more objective and doesn't prejudge that the dissolution is necessarily the best route to go. In other words, it approaches the process from a more independent perspective. Mr. Hudak asked if after the study was done, and it was found that a dissolution plan should be done, would the village have to hire someone else to do the plan? Dr. Stefko told Mr. Hudak that although it might require another consultant to complete the plan, most of the necessary groundwork would be done through the CGR feasibility study. Mr. Hudak said that Village citizens wanted a dissolution plan and that the Village Board should have asked that a dissolution plan be completed. Mr. Hudak said he felt the Village Board was forcing a petition to be signed, so that the matter can go to a vote and that is unfortunate. Mr. Hudak said that there will be a vote on this no matter what the study says. Dr. Stefko said that what they are doing is important to be done before the vote can be taken. Mr. Hudak said that it is the vote of the Village residents not the community as a whole. Mr. Hudak said that the Village's spending was the 7th highest in the region; 119th in the state and 34th highest debt per capita out of 338 Villages in New York.

Louise Carney –Town Resident

Louise Carney said that she is speaking because the Town residents will have no vote on this so she felt she needed to speak. She said that people who built in the Town built there on purpose and chose not to have lights, water, garbage pick up, etc. She said her biggest concern is that if the consolidation takes place the amounts paid for the water, sewer, lights, garbage pick-up, etc. on the bills of the former Village residents would be charged to Town residents. She said especially the debts of the Village should stay with former Village residents and not be put on Town residents.

Joseph Duguay –Village Resident

Joseph Duguay said that the village residents do pay Town and County taxes even though they reside in the Village. He said that he recently learned that the Town pays their attorney \$20,000 per year and the Village pays theirs \$60,000. He also said when the Village had an issue, that was not the expertise of their attorney, such as eminent domain in regard to the International Paper company, the Village had to hire another attorney and paid \$160,000. He said he wants dissolution of the village.

Chair Murphy asked for any final comments. Hearing none, the meeting was adjourned at 8:00 PM.