

Options for Police Protection

Presented by the Sub-Committee on Public Safety on behalf of the Seneca Falls Dissolution Study Committee

August 18, 2009

The options that are articulated in this document comprise a summary of what was presented to the Seneca Falls Town Council on August 18, 2009. The purpose of this presentation was to ascertain which option the Town Council would be willing to support. The options are a compilation of the work done by the sub-committee on public safety on behalf of the Seneca Falls Dissolution Study Committee. All options are still being studied as the committee seeks to determine the best alternative in the event that the residents of the Village of Seneca Falls vote to dissolve the Village.

All information, including references to dollar estimates and tax impacts are subject to change as the sub-committee learns new facts.

The baseline for comparison of options is the current cost for police protection in the Village of Seneca Falls. According to the 2009-10 Village budget, Village residents are paying \$1.336 million dollars for police protection services. This translates into a property tax impact of \$6.42/\$1000. The cost includes all fringe benefits and insurance associated with the Village Police Department.

If Village residents vote to dissolve the Village in March, 2010, the current Village police department would dissolve with the Village. The actual dissolution would not become effective until December 31, 2011. The four options presented are based upon dissolution of the Village.

Option 1: Do Nothing

The dissolution plan put forth by the committee could make no provision for police services after the Village dissolves. Under this scenario, the County Sheriff, by New York State (NYS) statute, would become responsible for providing police protection to the Village of Seneca Falls. Currently, they provide police protection to the Town Outside of Village and that would continue.

The Sheriff was asked to produce an estimate of what manpower he would request from the County Board of Supervisors to fulfill this obligation. The plan he produced included adding 10 Sheriff Deputies and 1 Sergeant to his current staff. The preliminary thought is that these added personnel would cover 2 additional patrols in the northern end of the county, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week, 365 days per year. As the population center for the added responsibility is the Village of Seneca Falls, the Sheriff would attempt to give priority for one of the added patrols to matters within the Village. This, however, would not guarantee the same level of service currently offered by the Village Police Department.

The cost to add these personnel, benefits, equipment and other administrative items totals \$1.194 million dollars in year one¹. In year two, the cost decreases to \$850,000 largely because one-time equipment purchases will have been made in year one. As this cost would be added to the Seneca County tax levy, there would be a probable increase in the County tax rate of \$.76/\$1000 in year one. In year two, the county tax for this added service would drop to \$.54/\$1000. Village tax payers would save their current cost for police protection - \$6.42/\$1000. Thus, the net cost impact to Village tax payers would be a tax reduction of \$5.66/\$1000 in year one, and \$5.88/\$1000 in year two. All county tax payers would see the increase in their county taxes (\$.76/\$1000 Yr. 1 & \$.54/\$1000 Yr. 2).

Pros

- This option represents the most cost savings to Village tax payers
- The Sheriff would consider opening a sub-station in the Village of Seneca Falls
- The Sheriff Department has other resources that are available and could be brought to bear in serving the Town of Seneca Falls (E.g. more deputies, more detectives)

Cons

- The Village would lose control over its police protection
- There may be a loss in the quality of life in the Village
- There is no assurance that the County Board of Supervisors would approve the Sheriff request for manpower
- There would likely be a decrease in response time

Unknown

- What would happen to school crossing guards?

Option 2 – Special Police District

The dissolution plan could suggest the creation of a special improvement district for providing police services. The boundaries for the improvement district would likely mirror the current Village of Seneca Falls. The district would likely be staffed by the current Village Police Department personnel at the current level of manpower and total cost (\$6.42/\$1000 for residents in the district). Authority for the district would be the responsibility of the Town Council.²

The process for creating a special improvement police district would begin with a request to the local representatives of the NYS Senate and Assembly, likely concurrently. Their offices would draft a resolution for the formation of the district that would then be sent back to the Town

¹ The Sheriff presented his estimates in 2009 dollars for an accurate comparison with the current Village Budget.

² At the original presentation there was thought that a police board of commissioners would be necessary to oversee the police district. New information has revealed a board of commissioners is likely not necessary in the formation of an improvement district. The Town Council may assume responsibility.

Council for approval. The Town Council would adopt the resolution authorizing the formation of the district. Once approved, the legislature would also require a home rule ruling from the Town Council for the district to be established. The bill would then go before both houses of the legislature for approval. If both the Assembly and the Senate approve the bill, the Governor would have to sign it to become law.

Pros

- The formation of the district would minimize the cost shift to Town Outside of Village tax payers
- The district would allow for a continuation of local control over police services in the Village of Seneca Falls
- There would be more assurance of a continuation in the current level of services than under other options
- There would be no likely reason for any change in existing personnel

Cons

- The outcome of creating the district is uncertain
 - The process of working through the NYS Legislature is daunting
 - There has been only one police district created in NYS in the last 90 years
- There is no savings for Village tax payers

Option 3 – Townwide Police Department

The dissolution plan could suggest the formation of a townwide police department. In order to determine the costs associated with this option, the public safety sub-committee asked the current Village Chief of Police to offer a plan for providing townwide coverage using or expanding the current Village police department.

The plan that was submitted included minor increases in ancillary costs, but did not increase the overall level of personnel of the current police department. The plan calls for a continuation of current services with existing personnel assuming responsibility for all areas of the Town. The major assumption in the plan is that the County Sheriff and State Police would still respond to calls inside the Town as they currently do, thus minimizing the impact of Village personnel to respond to all areas of the Town. Details surrounding the policy for distributing calls would have to be negotiated. In addition, the plan does not guarantee the same level of service as is currently provided by the Village police department. The plan would assure that any service is provided equivalently to all town residents.

Based upon the assumptions in the plan for townwide coverage, the cost for this option totaled \$1.352 million or \$3.58/\$1000 for all Town residents³. Village tax payers would save \$2.84/\$1000 by adopting this plan.

³ This does not account for any revenue that might be applied to offset this cost.

Pros

- Town residents would maintain local control of their police protection service
- There is a cost savings to Village tax payers
- There would likely be continuity in personnel and types of services provided
- There may be a faster response time for calls in the current Town Outside of Village

Cons

- There would be a cost shift for the service to Town Outside of Village residents
- The call distribution policy would have to be negotiated and could impact the workload of the current Village personnel
- The current department will be busier
- There may be a loss of coverage or a change in the level of service that can be provided
- There might be a slower response time in the Village

Option 4 – Enhanced Services Contract with the County Sheriff

The dissolution plan could suggest that the Town of Seneca Falls enter into an “enhanced services contract” with the County Sheriff. The contract would provide special/unique coverage by the County Sheriff within the Town of Seneca Falls for an agreed upon level of coverage and corresponding cost. The cost would be borne by all Town tax payers and paid to the County to underwrite the cost of the added service at the County level.

The public safety sub-committee asked the County Sheriff to provide a plan that would add two county sheriff deputy patrols to the Town of Seneca Falls around the clock. The plan that was provided offers this level of coverage by adding 10 sheriff deputies and one sergeant. This is the same level of staffing offered in Option One – “Do Nothing”. The primary difference between the two options is that in this option, the additional patrols would be dedicated to the Town of Seneca Falls rather than simply the “northern end” of the County. In addition, since the cost would be borne by Town tax payers, the contract could be negotiated with a higher likelihood of approval by the County Board of Supervisors. It is important to note that the Sheriff does not guarantee the same level of service for non-emergency calls as is currently provided by the Village police department. However, manpower under this model would closely approximate the current manpower in the Village police department.

The cost for this option mirrors Option One. In year one, the cost is projected to be \$1.194 million and in year two the cost is \$850,000 for the same reasons as mentioned in Option One. The tax impact is different, however. In year one, town tax payers would pay a \$3.17/\$1000 property tax and in year two that would drop to \$2.25/\$1000 to cover the cost of this contract⁴. Village tax payers would see a net reduction in their current tax rate of \$3.26/\$1000 in year one and \$4.17/\$1000 in year two.

⁴ This does not account for any revenue that might be applied to offset this cost.

Pros

- There is tax savings for Village residents
 - More than under Options Two & Three, but less than Option 1
- The Town would have access to other resources within the Sheriff Department (E.g. detectives, administrative support)
- The plan is a close approximation of manpower to the current Village police department

Cons

- There would possibly be a loss of service (depending somewhat on who the Sheriff hired to fill the new positions – Civil Service Law would apply)
- There would be a cost shift to Town Outside of Village tax payers
- There may be a loss of some control over police services as the contract would have to be approved by the County Board of Supervisors
 - There would be more control than would be realized in Option 1