

Village of Medina Dissolution.

In an effort dispel rumors, misunderstandings, and misconceptions concerning the possible dissolution of the Village of Medina, the following article is offered to explain the possible results. There are many issues that must be taken into account should the village dissolve. Many of them will be guided by State law. Should anyone have questions and wish to verify any of this information, they may contact the New York Department of State, New York State Attorney General's Office, and the Office of the New York State Comptroller. They are the main sources of information and answers for questions.

To begin, the decision to dissolve is a matter for village residents. Should this issue be brought to a referendum, only the village residents are allowed to vote. Ridgeway and Shelby residents living outside the village are not eligible. Should the village residents decide not to dissolve, this issue may not be brought up for at least four years. The reason for this is unclear, however, it may be that this time period acts as a "cooling off" period. Next, should the village decide to dissolve, Ridgeway and Shelby have eighteen (18) months to decide how this will happen. Separation of assets, services and decisions about personnel must be made during this time. The Village may submit a dissolution plan to the Towns, however, the Towns are under no obligation to follow it.

Next, below is an explanation of how different departments and services will be affected should the Village decide to dissolve.

Police Department. If the village dissolves, there would no longer be a Police Department. Also, any contracts dealing with the department would be dissolved along with any union. The reason for this is that, according to the Attorney General's Office, there are no longer two-parties to the contract. If the residents wish to keep the Police Department, a solution for this would be to establish a Special Police District in what was the former village. This would be paid for by the residents of the former village as a tax levy. Another solution would be to ask the Sheriff's Department to establish a sub-station in the former village. Checking with the Sheriff's Department, a sub-station is feasible, however, the level of service and protection would not be the same. Lastly, another option would be to establish a county-wide police department. This would have to be agreed to by all municipalities in the county, especially the other villages that have a police department (Albion, Holley) because their departments would merge into the county. An advantage of this is that the officers would now have county-wide jurisdiction. The main disadvantage is that the Sheriff's Department would cease to exist. A county-wide police department is not a new idea. Suffolk County has had a county-police department for over 40 years.

Fire Department. Because the Fire Department serves only the village, it will not be taken over by the Towns. Also, any contracts for services, such as union contracts, are voided and the union bargaining unit is dissolved. The reason for this is because, if the Village dissolves, there are no longer two-parties to the contract. Should village residents wish to keep the Fire Department, a Special Fire District must be established, much like the Towns. Also, to pay for and support this service, only residents of the former village will be charged for it as part of the tax levy.

Ambulance Service. The Ambulance Service will work much the same as the Fire Department. It will not be taken over by the Towns and any contracts are voided because there are no longer two-parties to the contract. Also, the union bargaining unit dissolves. Again, should the village residents wish to keep this service, it will be set up as a Special District and the residents of the former village will be charged for it as part of their tax levy. When this happens, the service area will be clearly defined. This is necessary to control costs and insure the quality of service.

Water/Sewer Service. This is a difficult area and one in which even the State does not know how to answer. The reason is that when the dissolution law was passed, it never foresaw a situation where a village straddles two towns. As an example, how do you divide water and sewer infrastructure? How do you divide assets (trucks, equipment)? Again, in order to do this, a Special District would have to be established and only residents of the former village will be charged maintenance and support. Any contracts, such as union contracts, will be dissolved as there are no longer two parties to the contract. Another possible solution for this would be to establish a Water/Sewer Authority for the former village. However, according to the Attorney General and Comptroller's offices, special legislation would be necessary from the State. Historically, this option would take a long time and have very little chance of succeeding.

Public Works. This would take in all of the other functions of the Village Department of Public Works. These areas will include, but not limited to: snow plowing, street repair, tree trimming, cemetery maintenance, sewer cleaning, decorating Main Street for holidays (Christmas, special events, etc.). As stated before, all contracts are voided, included any labor agreements (union contracts) and the bargaining unit is dissolved. The question arises again, how do you divide these services? Another Special District would have to be established in order service the former village as a whole, and the cost and support will be charged to residents by the tax levy.

Administration. This will take into account the administrative personnel currently employed by the village. Decisions will have to be made as to what personnel and services the Towns are willing to assume. Also, decisions will have to be made as to what personnel the Towns are willing to keep. There will be layoffs. This is a fact that must be faced should the village decide to dissolve. Along with this, there is the question of records. The State requires municipalities to maintain records. If the village dissolves, who will maintain the records of this split area? Ridgeway and Shelby currently face this dilemma with court records. Medina abolished its court three years ago and the Towns now must deal with the records, most of which are stored in the basement of the Village Hall.

Debt. This is a question that was raised when dissolution was first discussed and continues to be asked. What happens to any village debt should the village dissolve? According to the New York State Attorney General's Office, all debt created by the village, stays with the village. What this means is, any and all debt created by the village will stay in the former village and will be paid by the former village residents. It will not be dispersed throughout the Towns. This will be calculated in the tax levy and charged annually. It is a question of fairness. Town residents, outside the village, did not agree to create the debt, therefore, they should not be forced to pay it. This has also been decided by the courts.

What is the role of New York State in this process? New York created the process by which municipalities can dissolve, however, the final decision is up to the residents. Another question that is asked continuously is: where do we go from here? This can be answered by the following:

-Stay informed.

-Ask questions.

-Attend meetings.

-If this comes to a referendum and you live in the Village: **VOTE!**

Lastly, your questions and comments are always welcome. You may contact your Town/Village representatives through the Town/Village Halls