



# NEWS RELEASE

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## **Village Mayors Outline the Unique Role of Village Government**

(Blasdell, NY) Mayors from villages across Erie County joined representatives of the New York State Conference of Mayors at a press conference today in Blasdell to outline the unique nature of village government and to highlight the essential role that villages play in the lives of businesses and residents, both in Erie County and across the state.

“Some have recently questioned the need for village government in Erie County and we believe it is time to set the record straight,” said Peter Baynes, NYCOM Executive Director. “This misguided premise is often the result of a lack of understanding of the differences between villages and other classes of municipal government, particularly in the services they provide and their connection to their residents.”

The attached fact sheet outlines the uniqueness of village government and the ways in which villages are democratic, efficient and responsive.

“Villages are one of the most efficient forms of government as they provide essential services to their residents and, in many instances, to the residents of the towns in which they lie,” observed Baynes. “Also, unlike any other class of government in New York, the creation and dissolution of a village government is in the hands of its citizens.”

Since 2006, five villages in New York have gone through the dissolution study process, and only one actually voted to dissolve. In most instances, propositions for village dissolution are defeated because the dissolution study reveals that such action will not achieve nearly the savings originally claimed by dissolution advocates, nor will these minimal savings offset the negative effects of diminished services and loss of local control.

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“The recent suggestion that a blanket dissolution of villages in Erie County will improve the county’s quality of life is naïve and a distraction from the real challenges facing New York’s local governments and property taxpayers,” concluded Baynes. “People who really care about the future of this region, and the rest of New York, should be working with local government officials to achieve relief from the state mandates that create New York’s crushing property tax burden.”

# Village Government in New York

## Fact Sheet

### Background

- A village is a general purpose municipal government that is created by a vote of the residents of a community in order to provide an enhanced level of government services not otherwise provided by the surrounding town.
- Villages in New York range in size (from as few as 50 residents to as many as 57,000) and provide varying types and levels of services, including: police, fire, ambulance water, sewer, code enforcement, road/bridge/sidewalk maintenance and repair, parks and recreation, youth and seniors programs, libraries, justice courts, garbage collection, and public works.
- Currently, 556 communities in this state have created and retained the village form of government, serving 1.9 million of the State's nearly 19 million residents. Over the past 25 years, several villages have dissolved and new villages have incorporated, but the total number of villages has remained essentially the same. The number of villages within some of the State's most populous counties includes 64 villages in Nassau County, 31 villages in Suffolk County, 20 villages in Westchester County, and 16 villages in Erie County.
- As the total population of Erie County has declined over the past 50 years, the village share of the county's population has remained relatively constant, in the range of 9.2 percent to 9.8 percent. This suggests that people are satisfied with and attracted to the quality of life maintained in villages.

### Village Government is Democratic Self-Governance

- Unlike other classes of government whose boundaries are originally established by the State Legislature, the creation of villages occurs when a cluster of people decides it wants to secure particular public services and exercise greater local control. This pure form of self-governance allows residents to design an efficient government that provides services for which the residents are willing to pay.
- Villages are created by citizen initiative without any discretionary interference or approval from other governing bodies at the state or local levels. There is no authority for anyone but local residents to decide the question of whether to incorporate. That said, the people who want to live in a village vote to create the village. And if the village residents decide they want to dissolve, they have the power to collect signatures on a petition and cause a referendum to be held on whether to dissolve the village.
- In most instances, propositions for village dissolution are voted down because the dissolution plan reveals that village dissolution will not achieve the cost savings sufficient enough to offset the diminution in the quality of services and level of control over "village" issues. However, this lack of cost savings is frequently not realized until **after** the village dissolution study is completed. For example,
  - In 2006, the Village of Wellsville went through the dissolution process, ultimately voting down a proposition to dissolve the village.

- In 2007, the Village of Windsor voluntarily formed a committee to study dissolving the village. Although Windsor's committee found that dissolving the village would result in nominal savings for village taxpayers, it nonetheless recommended that the village not dissolve because the cost-savings were insufficient to justify the village residents' loss of local control.
- In March 2008 alone, three villages actually had dissolution propositions on their ballots. After spending months of staff time and thousands of taxpayer dollars developing dissolution plans and reports, the residents of the Villages of Macedon and Speculator rejected village dissolution, while the residents of the Village of Pike voted to dissolve the village effective December 31, 2009.

## Village Government is Efficient and Responsive Government

- Being the level of local government closest to the people, as well as created by the people (and subject to dissolution by the people), village government is inherently responsive to residents' demands for efficiency. Villages also work with other local governments – town, cities and counties – to help make them more efficient through the use of intermunicipal agreements for shared services.
- An assumption is often made that multiple levels of government must equate to duplication of services among those multiple layers. When it comes to villages, this is usually not the case. The reason for creating and maintaining a village is to provide a service that is not being provided by the surrounding town.
- The inefficiency issue that warrants examination is the *duplication of taxes*, not the duplication of services. Under New York law, village residents are required to pay town taxes for many services that they do not receive from the town. The law needs to be amended to provide that village residents need only pay town taxes for town services provided within the boundaries of the village.
- Dissolving a full service village into a low-service town will actually result in inefficiencies by forcing a town to provide services they are not used to providing. This will need to be done by either setting up numerous unaccountable special districts or providing the service town-wide, which could require additional staff and administrative inefficiencies.
- A report issued this week by government efficiency consultant Wendell Cox highlighted the fact that bigger local government does not equate to more efficient local government. As villages tend to be the smallest geographically, compared to other classes of municipal governments, local leaders respond to the demands for efficiency from their constituents that they see each day.
- Based on the most recent data available from the Office of the State Comptroller, village taxes levied in Erie County have remained constant at 3.4 percent of total property tax collections countywide between 2004 and 2007.
- Meanwhile, property taxes levied by the county government, which are largely driven by State mandates, have increased 39 percent in three years. Furthermore, county property taxes, as a percentage of all taxes collected in the county, have increased from 16 percent to 18 percent.
- Between 2004 and 2007, the \$49.6 million *increase* in county property taxes was 50 percent greater than the *total* amount of village property taxes collected in 2007 (\$33 million).

