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Consolidation draws nearer in Batavia

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BATAVIA — A consolidation of the Batavias — city and town — was unthinkable a generation ago and unlikely a decade ago. It could happen as soon as late 2009 as a result of new studies by officials of both municipalities.

A year ago, the two bodies authorized a \$100,000 study on “future shared services as well as consolidation” through an Aid to Municipalities program under the Center for Government Research.

Eliminating borders between the city and the town, which surrounds it, present benefits and liabilities to both.

The town is enjoying unprecedented business growth, with Veterans Memorial Drive now lined with 10 stores, mostly chain retailers. The largest — a Wal-Mart Supercenter, is assessed for \$9.5 million. Assessments on the other stores — including anchors Target and Lowe’s — will be tentatively set by March 1 and are expected to total about \$50 million.

The town’s population has increased to about 6,000, while the city’s has shrunk to under 16,000. Downtown Batavia — once the area’s shopping mecca — has disappeared as retailers, service business and restaurants spring up in the town.

The two already share some services, including water and emergency police/fire dispatch and assessment expenses. The city and town borders include the city’s public school system. And Batavia’s Fire Department now provides ambulance service to the town and at increased cost of \$24,000, up about \$5,000 from 2007. The contract is based on the number of calls.

Possible problems are in real property taxes, where city residents pay \$10 per \$1,000 of assessed value. Town property owners pay no property tax although they are assessed for \$654,000 in fire protection — \$2.34 per \$1,000. There are stations east and west of the city and varying fees for water and sewers in separate districts.

Budgets are increasing every year, due in part to union contracts, health care increases and inflation. The city’s

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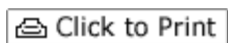
current budget is \$23.7 million, while the town's spending plan for 2009 is \$5.9 million.

There is also the governance issue. A nine-member City Council and a five-member Town Board are the elected representatives for the municipalities.

The months ahead will see extensive studies with the hope that a plan can be completed by late summer with a vote by citizens of both municipalities in November.

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