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ORCHARD PARK

Task force sees savings for taxpayers in merger

By Elmer Ploetz NEWS STAFF REPORTER

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A task force looking at government efficiency in Orchard Park says merging the village into the town would save taxpayers money.

That's what critics of the task force had predicted all along, but Donald P. Quinlan said the group's efforts have never been an attack on the village.

But elimination of one layer of government — the village — would serve taxpayers well, Quinlan said.

"The physical village will survive: The streets will still be maintained, the leaves will still be picked up, the streetlights . . . will still continue to operate," said the report.

The task force has been controversial from the start. A group of businessmen approached Supervisor Mary Travers Murphy in the wake of Kevin Gaughan's 2006 report critical of the size of government in Western New York. She encouraged the businessmen to see what they could find out about increasing efficiency in the town.

The Town Board was not enthusiastic in its response to the task force's creation, and the village government was hostile. Both entities declined to name representatives to the task force.

In a pre-election letter to the public, Village Mayor John Wilson said, "Some are seeking to abolish the Village of Orchard Park" and recommended village residents vote for Republican candidates Nan Ackerman and Ed Graber because the Democratic candidates "are too closely tied to the supervisor and her agenda to be trusted." Ackerman and Graber won.

Village Trustee Francis Hogenkamp released a chart that projected village taxpayers with properties assessed at \$110,000 and \$141,000 would pay \$25 to \$35 more per year in town and village taxes combined than the owners of similarly assessed homes outside the village would pay in town taxes.

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Quinlan, the former CEO of Graphic Controls in Buffalo, said that response tells only part of the story.

“The focus on relative assessed value only tells part of the issue,” Quinlan said. “That’s just the tip of the iceberg. There are tons of other places there would be savings and convenience. Let’s just take the gross receipts tax out.”

Quinlan said the village budget includes \$56,000 in taxes that the village is able to collect on gas and electric bills that isn’t collected in the town. Cities and villages are allowed by New York State to collect the tax.

The task force report was delivered to both village and town officials Wednesday.

Travers Murphy said she has not had a chance to thoroughly examine it yet.

“They were vilified by some public officials,” she said, “but I think the idea of the efficiency task force is a great thing — a group of citizens with a lot of brainpower and business backgrounds to make recommendations.”

Wilson also said he also has not had a chance to go over the report.

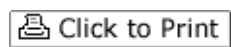
The task force also included retired manufacturing executive James Bevevino, salon owner Michael Crapsi, financial consultant and professor D. Patrick Curley, retired FBI agent-in-charge John Duffy and IBM executive Dean Kroll.

The 18-page report includes several other efficiency recommendations. Quinlan said he hopes to have it posted online.

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