

Wednesday, August 27, 2014

THE BUFFALO NEWS

CITY & REGION

Village voters reject dissolution of Wilson *222-209 referendum halts issue for 4 years*

By Teresa Sharp

NIAGARA CORRESPONDENT

on August 26, 2014 - 10:11 PM, updated August 26, 2014 at 10:45 PM

WILSON – The tiny Village of Wilson will stay intact – at least for another four years.

Residents rejected the idea of dissolution Tuesday by a vote of 222 to 209.

Mayor Bernard J. Leiker Jr., who favored holding the referendum, said, “The only thing I can say is that the community has spoken. I will support what the community wants.”

By state law, the topic of dissolution may not be revisited for four years following a vote, and longtime Wilson resident Charles F. Horton and his friends are pleased.

“We’re free for four years,” he said. “And I hope, after that, the oomph will go out of this.”

The referendum was forced when a handful of residents collected 180 signatures in May, petitioning the board to hold the vote on dissolving this village of 1,300 – more than double the number of signatures required by state law.

Horton and his friends posted 50 large yellow signs throughout the village in the days leading up to the vote, urging residents to vote “no” for dissolution.

“Number one, we’d lose our voice in government and the identification of the village,” said the former town historian. “And there is absolutely no proof that the village is in any financial straits. Why do you want to dissolve in the first place? If you’re in a humongous amount of debt and the town takes over the village, that debt doesn’t go away.”

The village has six full-time and two part-time employees, as well as an elected mayor and two trustees who receive stipends and a paid village attorney.

“We are not heavy on bureaucracy,” Horton said. “The radicals think we don’t need all of these people, but if we didn’t need them, we would have gotten rid of them long ago.

“Some say we don’t need a duplicate of boards, a duplicate of services, but it all comes down to the hours of work – the workload is still there,” he added. “But for some people, all they see are the dollar signs.”

Horton warned that the vote had already done irreparable harm.

“It’s a vicious fight down here,” he said. “People are not happy on either side of the coin. ... A huge wedge has been driven in this community between the pros and the cons, and it won’t go away after the vote.”

Wilson is one of three villages in New York that received state grants to assist in the dissolution process. The \$50,000 grant helped provide information to residents prior to Tuesday’s vote and would have supported work on the final dissolution plans.

Bloomington, Sullivan County, in the Catskills, received \$42,750 and will vote Sept. 30. Lyons, Wayne County, on the Erie Canal east of Rochester, received \$50,000 after residents voted to merge with the Town of Lyons last March.

The grants are part of Gov. Andrew M. Cuomo’s campaign to get local governments to consolidate or share services to lower costs and property taxes.