

COMMUNICATION IS KEY

A decision to explore whether to consolidate or dissolve a municipality, or to annex territory, should be explored openly and deliberately. These decisions affect the entire area, and will eventually be subject to a public vote. Therefore, it is important to keep the public involved and informed.

- Local government residents, employees, and officials should be continuously informed of what is being done, who is doing it, and the reasons for the actions.
- Meetings and hearings should be open to everyone. Informational memos and personal appearances on government access cable television channels can also assist the ongoing effort to educate everyone about the process.
- Articles in newspapers and newsletters should be frequently provided to the public throughout the process in order to keep everyone accurately informed of progress and status.
- Task forces should be established to develop plans for (and answer questions about) consolidation, dissolution, or annexation.
- Involve as many local government officials, stakeholders, and interested citizens as possible in order to increase the likelihood of success.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ASSISTANCE

The Division of Local Government Services provides training and technical assistance to local officials, including programs on municipal consolidation and shared services, and publications on village dissolution, and intermunicipal cooperation.

The Division also administers a grant program that funds municipal restructuring and shared services studies, as well as implementation efforts. Most grants require two or more municipalities as applicants as a way to encourage intermunicipal cooperation. The grants are intended to provide funding to local governments that request assistance with projects that will achieve savings or improve municipal efficiency. These objectives may be achieved through the sharing or coordination of service delivery, cooperative agreements, mergers, consolidations and dissolutions.

Please visit the Department of State website at www.dos.state.ny.us/lgss/smsi/index.html for information about grants and technical assistance opportunities. Staff is available to work with municipal leaders who are considering consolidation initiatives or shared services.

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LOCAL GOVERNMENT CONSOLIDATION, DISSOLUTION AND ANNEXATION



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Interest in municipal consolidation, dissolution, or annexation is increasing in the state. In evaluating the possibilities, a number of questions arise. While the questions may vary by municipality, they are likely to include:

- Would the combining of municipalities reduce the overall cost of providing services or improve the quality of services to the geographic area of both municipalities?
- Considering that the increasing demands for government funding of essential services have made the task of resource allocation more difficult, could the combining of municipalities help facilitate more efficient expenditure of funds?
- Since the management of local government is becoming more complex, could the combining of municipalities provide a larger leadership pool that municipalities may draw from?
- Could duplicative local efforts be reduced or eliminated by the combining of municipalities, thereby saving scarce resources, and providing services over larger regions without compromising the quality of such local services?

These various changes in governmental structure are addressed by state law. A short description of each follows. A more complete description will be contained in a publication available in the Spring of 2008.

CONSOLIDATION

Consolidation is a process whereby two or more municipalities combine to form a single municipality. The governing boards of each municipality should participate in such process, which would include public hearings and elections. Statutory authority for consolidation between adjoining towns can be found in Article 5-B of the Town Law and between adjoining villages in Article 18 of the Village Law.

DISSOLUTION

Dissolution is a process whereby a municipality ceases to exist as a government entity. The process may be initiated by the governing board or by citizen petition. The question of whether to dissolve must be placed on the ballot for voter determination at an election. Upon dissolution, the functions and services previously provided by the dissolving municipality would be either: provided by an adjoining town in the same county, provided by the town or towns in which a dissolving village is situated, or discontinued as a governmental activity. Statutory authority for dissolution procedures can be found in Article 5-A of the Town Law and Article 19 of the Village Law.

ANNEXATION

Annexation is a process whereby one municipality incorporates contiguous territory into its boundaries. Annexation involves the alteration of municipal boundaries; this process adds territory to one municipality by removing it from another. Article 17 of the General Municipal Law governs annexation procedures.

BENEFITS OF CONSOLIDATION, DISSOLUTION AND ANNEXATION

Potential benefits of consolidation, dissolution, and annexation include:

- reducing the cost of the provision of local services,
- increasing the efficiency of the delivery of services,
- qualifying for an increase in the amount of state aid received under the Aid and Incentives for Municipalities (AIM) by completing a consolidation,
- minimizing the duplicative services currently being provided by multiple layers of government,
- enhancing the coordination of local government activities, and/or
- reducing the expenditure of funds by attaining economies of scale.