

CONWAY VILLAGE FIRE DISTRICT
BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS' MEETING
Thursday, August 18, 2022, 5:00 P.M.
Fire Station Meeting Room

Meeting was called to order at 5:00 P.M.

Commissioners present: Steve Bamsey, Mike Digregorio, and Tom Bucu.

Staff present: Superintendent Bruno Vallieres, Amy Snow-Municipal Bookkeeper and Chief Solomon.

Members of the public: There were over 30 members of the public including town staff and selectmen.

The meeting began with introductions of the village staff to the public.

Mr. Bamsey (Chair) stated that the whole idea of this meeting is to share information and to get input from you the residents. We are here to discuss the future of the district and he then recapped the reasons and options for the dissolution. Increased costs being the main reason and the options are 1. Do nothing. 2. Turnover Fire & Rescue to the town. 3. Dissolve the Fire Department, Water and Sewer to the Town of Conway. 4. Privatize.

There has been a joint meeting with the North Conway Water Precinct (NCWP) commissioners, and they see no reason why the current IMA (Inter - Municipal Agreement) wouldn't transfer to the town. The sewage from the district is sent to NCWP.

We have also met with the town and are setting up a meeting with the town manager and the town engineer to start looking at a potential outline of a possible dissolution and get input from the selectman.

Mr. Bucu added that the revenues are not keeping up with the expenses and in order to keep the current high level of ambulance service we need to subsidize same, that's how all this started. He added, if this dissolution is what you the voters decide to do, then you can vote on it next March.

Q – If you vote to dissolve, how does it happen?

A – Mr. Digregorio explained that first the district vote must pass by a 2/3 majority. If that passes the town then takes over the district, however, prior to that happening the commissioners could request a Survivorship Document. This would be an agreement between the district and the selectmen's office laying out what the Fire, Water and Sewer Departments would look like after the dissolution.

Mr. Digregorio said that he has been an advocate for town wide Fire Department forever.

A lot of it does have to do with revenue but we are trying to cover shifts for the Fire Department. We have multiple holes and we're burning out staff. If we don't do anything we're still looking at 2 maybe 3 more employees to cover those holes. If we don't make some changes all that tax will be onto the district. This is why we approached the town about the Fire Department, and they came back to us with the question of, how would you feel about dissolving altogether.

Mr. Bamsey stated that the Chief has put together a presentation and he would like everyone to see it as it might help you to understand what's happening in the district.

The Chief then presented a power point presentation (See attached.). He stated that the call volume is up 29% in 15 years, and the revenue is down. Total staff is down 28%. Active call staff is down 50%. That drives the budget up. The more full-time staff we have the more expensive we are.

If we equalize The Fire and Ambulance among all the area that we cover, Fire would cost \$1.60, and ambulance would cost \$.60. Conway village currently pays a significantly larger portion of the expenses for the services.

In 2021, we billed \$703,000.00 for ambulance transport. Our number 1 payer is Medicare, we billed them \$391,438.00, they reduced the payment amount \$216,462.00 and we got paid \$165,000.

In 2021 we billed the State of New Hampshire \$77,926.00 for ambulance transport, the state reduced the payment amount by \$63,000 and paid us \$14,000.

He continued with a previous Q & A and a history of previous dissolutions in other towns.

Q – To accept the operational and financial responsibilities (of the District) that's the selectman voted on by the town, so don't they have the say, not the precinct?

A – No because basically what it says it that if the Fire District chooses to turn it over the Selectmen, then have the authority to accept it. It does not need to be a town vote.

Q – Can you clarify what responsibilities the district has in providing Fire and Ambulance and are we obligated to do so?

A – The people of Conway Village have chosen to provide these services through our charter, and they can choose not to provide these services and remove it from their charter. Mr. Bamsey: It is our understanding that the town does have an obligation to provide Fire service, the Ambulance is optional. Ambulance service is a choice by every community.

Q – What happens to the water assets if we turn them over, do they become an asset to the town and if so, if the town expands outside of the district and they must build another well, who pays for that well? Creating a committee to gather answers was suggested.

A - If the town were to expand, then yes, the people in the expansion would also be responsible for the costs. A committee is a good idea, at some point we can get names.

Q – What would happen with the betterment fees and what would happen with our taxes if all this change took place?

A – The betterment fee was created to keep the fee off the taxes or usage and to get non-profits to also pay their share. The more users the less the betterment fee. With the town taking over, the taxes would be more evenly distributed and for people in Conway Village Fire District, the short answer is yes, you would see a decrease. There are also capitol expenses. CVFD will be needing a new backhoe, the Town of Conway has all that equipment. By dissolving/merging with the Town of Conway you get economy of scale. Town equipment can be utilized by the village

The question was asked about, do all the Fire Departments have to join. East Conway is having difficulty meeting the roster for Fire and Rescue. If we turn the Fire Department over to the town they too might choose to join, which becomes another financial benefit because East Conway would also be helping to pay for Fire and Rescue. Other Fire Departments could join if they choose.

Q – Conway Village pays double for their Fire Department. We also pay a tax on the non-precinct contract.

A – Non-precinct Fire agreement is only billed on the taxes of those people that live in the non-precinct area. Conway Village residents pay more for the service than non-precinct does. Ambulance is billed on the base tax rate of the town, so every resident of town pays the tax on the ambulance contract. If you are in Conway Village you pay the base rate of the town and you're paying for the ambulance on your Conway Village taxes.

Q – If the town takes over water and sewer and they want to expand, does the town have to go to North Conway to accept the additional gallonage or is there a contract that will accept whatever comes to them?

A - Currently we have an agreement in the IMA that we can send up to 600,000 gallons daily to North Conway, we are now only sending on average 200,000 gallons a day. So, there is room for growth there. If we did get to that 600,000 decisions between the town and North Conway would have to be made.

Q – Is there an additional charge above that, until a new agreement is reached?

A – That would be a down the road negotiation.

Q – As a resident of Albany, where do we fit into all of this?

A – Albany has an ambulance contract with us, that contract will stay in place. At the end of that contract, a new contract could be negotiated if that's what the selectmen of Albany want to do.

Q – I am also from Albany, my daughter is a veteran, she has a nasty brain injury and calls the rescue a lot. If this rescue is moved somewhere else, I don't know how fast they can get to you. The people that work rescue and ambulance have been an absolute godsend. I'm real concerned about this all disappearing and maybe going to privatization.

A – As a current commissioner there is no way in the world, I would support any of this happening. We have some of the best staff people there is. When you heard the words survivor contract that our lawyers have thrown around, that's exactly what they were talking about. It is literally a document, an agreement with the selectmen on how the transfer would lay over.

Q – I've been very nervous about this meeting. And I'd also like to know on these different options what would it do to the taxes, how much farther would it go to make things equal for us in Albany?

A – The town does things differently as far as how they bill you. Right now, we negotiate a number with the Albany Selectmen. The town does it by assessed evaluation and would be the number used in their contracts. Either way the numbers are going to change.

What we would like to see is Town wide Municipal Ambulance. A private company is in it to make money. The people may not be local, and the money doesn't stay local. Our staff are part of the community. Unfortunately, taxes are probably going to go up. The driving factor of this whole piece was the costs just keep going up and our tax base stays the same. Maybe we get to the end of this journey and nothing changes. The Village District has been very clear in the type of service that they want, and we are doing our very best to honor that. The Chief alluded to the numbers in his presentation. The Chief then explained how and why the numbers can change.

Q – In April we went over the four scenarios about dissolving, no change showed an estimation of how much tax we'd pay per thousand. The second option, to turn over the Fire Department to the town and Water and Sewer stay in Conway Village, and the savings were

over 50%. It sounded like it was a very favorable way of lowering the taxes. Are those numbers still valid from April?

A – Water and Sewer don't receive any tax money from Conway Village; they are paid solely on user fees. Conway Village tax rate pays for some general district things with the Commissioners, the Fire Department, the Ambulance Service, and the Park. If the Fire Department is turned over to the town your Conway Village tax rate will encompass the Park maintenance fees, a small amount that the Commissioners need for yearly operations, and you would have a new line on your taxes that reads, Fire tax. This is the equalized value of the Fire Department based on the total valuation of the area covered divided by the budget, which is standardly how the town does things. You save more dissolving the entire district.

Q - Are we still going way out on the Kancamagus, headed toward Waterville Valley, is the mutual aid, is that covered as well?

A – We do have a contract to cover about a mile long stretch of Waterville Valley that's on the Kancamagus, and a piece of Livermore, an unincorporated township in Grafton County, that leads you to the height of the land. We cover all the way to the height of the land. Grafton County and Waterville Valley then pay us for that service.

Q – Is it a rate that's fair?

A – Yes, We bill them per call.

Q – Are you talking about maybe voting on this in March?

A – Originally that was our intention. We might push this to 2024.

Q – We have people who leave and move south for months maybe. I believe that you have to be here physically to vote on these matters. Is there any way to get an absentee ballot?

A – I checked this out with the Secretary of State and because we are Traditional Town Meeting, if you want to vote you have to be here.

Q – If I take an ambulance ride to the hospital, they ask for my Medicare insurance card and my supplemental card. Do you ask for that when you do billing?

A – Typically we get the patients insurance information from the hospital so that we're not bugging the patient for the same information. We do bill both Medicare and secondary when they have it. We receive about 30% of what we bill.

Q – The lagoon system that we recovered, can that land be sold and developed?

A – No, it's a monofil sludge facility. We have a contract with DES for 30 years. If we needed to use it in an emergency it has 4.3 million gallons of storage.

Q – On the Ambulance there are two different contracts, one with Conway Village and one with the town. And then private ambulance that covers the rest of it. Who votes on the town contract, how does that get voted on?

A – The whole town voted on both of those last spring. The board of Selectmen negotiate those contracts with the two vendors and then they go on the warrant as separate articles, both passed.

Q – If we dissolve and the ambulance goes to the town, the contract would be negotiated with the town?

A - There wouldn't be any more ambulance contract because the town would own it.

Q - How would you know what kind of service you're going to get? Would you have to go to the Selectmen to say this is what we want?

A – Exactly. The plan in our heads is, if this moves forward, currently we would maintain what we're doing till 2026. We would still cover half of the Town of Conway with the level of service that we currently provide, and Action ambulance would cover the other half of town. We proposed that for two reasons. One is there is an existing contract between the town and Action Ambulance. Second, that gives us the time to be able to put the numbers together and put together a program for the Selectmen and the taxpayers to say, this is why we think you should have municipal ambulance at such a level, this is what it costs what would you like to do.

Q – That would get voted on by the entire populous of the town, like it is now?

A – Right. If the town is running the Fire and Ambulance then it would be a budget item, so it will go through the budget process. If they privatize that has to go out as a contract and it would be warrant article, because it's a multi-year contract.

Q – And who would negotiate the level of service?

A – The Fire Chief would go to the Selectmen with his budget to be approved.

Q – But the town doesn't have to do ambulance. They have to do fire. If the Selectmen decide to do the ambulance, they don't have to do ambulance, they have to do fire?

A – I cannot envision that at all. There are a few options, one is just going to the Selectmen. Another option is writing up a survivor contract specifying the level of service, this would need to be done prior to the dissolution. The problem with that is if the district dissolves, then

one of the parties in the contract no longer exists. So, if the town doesn't honor that contract, what do you do. An individual could choose to sue the town for breach of contract, or it could go on to a warrant article stating that the Town of Conway shall provide EMT or Paramedic services and that would require passage by the town.

Q – Could that be done before you have your agreement to dissolve?

A – Absolutely, you could do it next spring. That warrant has nothing to do with us. That warrant is about what does the town want.

Q – Say the Fire and the Ambulance belong to the town, if that's the case then when a contract comes due for a private entity like Action or Brewster, by the time this contract comes due our Fire Chief would have built up our ambulance service even larger so that it would cover the entire town and we wouldn't need to have a contract with that private company anymore and it would be one ambulance service for the whole town.

A – That is absolutely a possibility. Again, that would be up to the Selectmen or the voters.

Q – Have you heard that Center Conway or Redstone are considering, as you are, to join the town?

A – Our approach today is us. If you're a resident of the other districts, talk to your Commissioners about it. If we do go forward with this dissolution, then Chief Solomon would talk with the other Fire Chiefs.

Q – If the departments were to merge would you anticipate more full-time help or can you get away with the mix that you have now?

A – I don't believe that we can avoid hiring more full-time staff. There is just not enough call staff out there and the call volume keeps going up and its predominately ambulance calls. I do think merging departments together and creating a larger pool of call staff helps enormously. Even taking one or two shifts or just answering calls.

Q – Do you think that merging and bringing water to some areas that we may be able to offset some of this housing crisis?

A – That is a definite possibility and that was a statement from the town when they came to us.

Q – Why is Conway Villages call volume so high?

A – It is a little of everything. About half residents and half tourists. More tourists, more calls

Q – If there is auto accident, is that health insurance or car insurance?

A – It is very difficult to get paid from a car accident. If the accident isn't the patient's fault, the health insurance can refuse to pay, we are not allowed to bill the other guy's auto insurance and you, the patient get stuck with the bill. So, you would have to go after the other guy for payment.

Q – Are we still responsible for the \$12 million debt?

A – We're going to be paying on that till 2036/2037. Any money that we get from the state does help toward that, but the rest of the debt is ours.

Mr. Bamsey ended the public portion of the meeting, stating that anyone wishing to be on a committee should give their name to the bookkeeper or call the office. And they thanked everyone for coming.

There was a brief recess at 6:51 P.M. The meeting resumed at 6:56 P.M.

FIRE CHIEF'S BUSINESS

The First Due contract is off to them.

The Chief is taking next week off.

SUPERINTENDANT'S BUSINESS

The focus for the past couple of weeks again, has been Farrington, Chase and Wilder. The final overlay will be done after Labor Day, so we have a bit of work to do.

Avesta housing made their water and sewer connection last week. It went well.

Mr. Bamsey asked the Chief if he had talked with them regarding the completion of the loop. Discussion ensued.

BOOKKEEPERS BUSINESS

Amy presented an abatement request for penalty fees in the amount of \$22.74. **Mr. Bamsey made a motion to approve the abatement for Memorial Hospital in the amount of \$22.74. Seconded by Mr. Bucu. Motion passed 3-0-0.**

She then explained the MS3535 form for the DRA. It tells you what your fund balance is for the end of the year. We had budgeted to use \$20,000.00 and we only used \$14,770.00.

ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS

Mr. Bamsey made a motion to ratify a., & b. Seconded by Mr. Buco.

- a. Ratify Payroll Manifest and sign checks for week ending 8/14/2022
- b. Ratify A/P Manifest dated 8/17/22 and sign checks dated 8/19/2022

Discussion: A/P total this week - \$2,578.00

Motion passed 3-0-0.

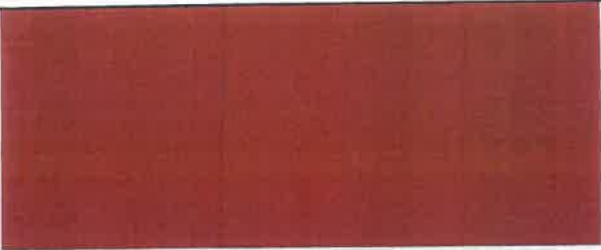
Mr. Bamsey made a motion to approve the minutes for week 8/11/2022, seconded by Mr. Digregorio. Motion passed 3-0-0.

We have a meeting with Paul D and John Eastman for September 8st, 2022 at 4:30 P.M. at the administration building.

There will be no meeting on August 25th. The next meeting will be September 1st at 5 P.M. at the Admin building.

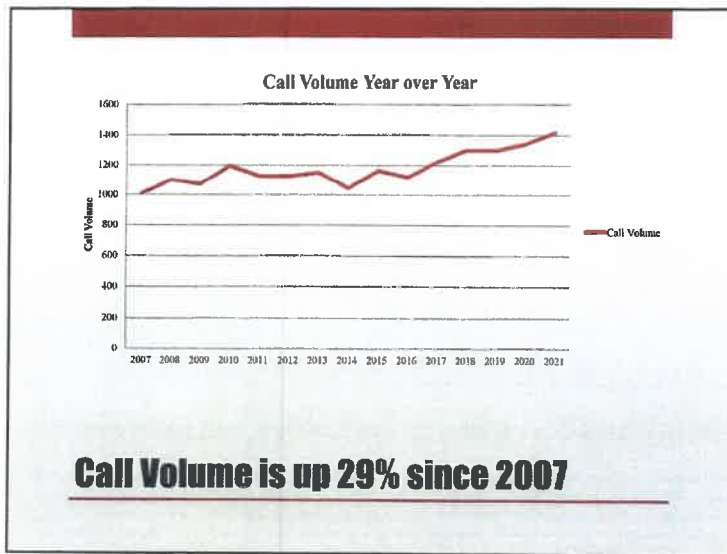
There being no further business to come before the Board, meeting was adjourned without objection at 7:20 P.M.

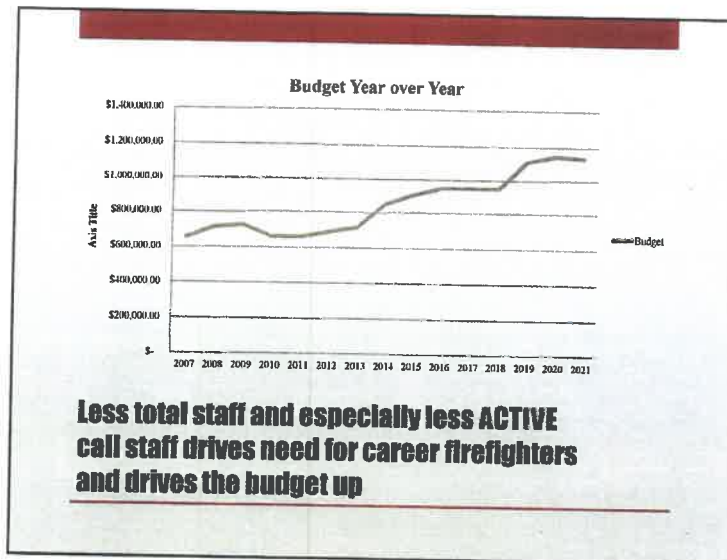
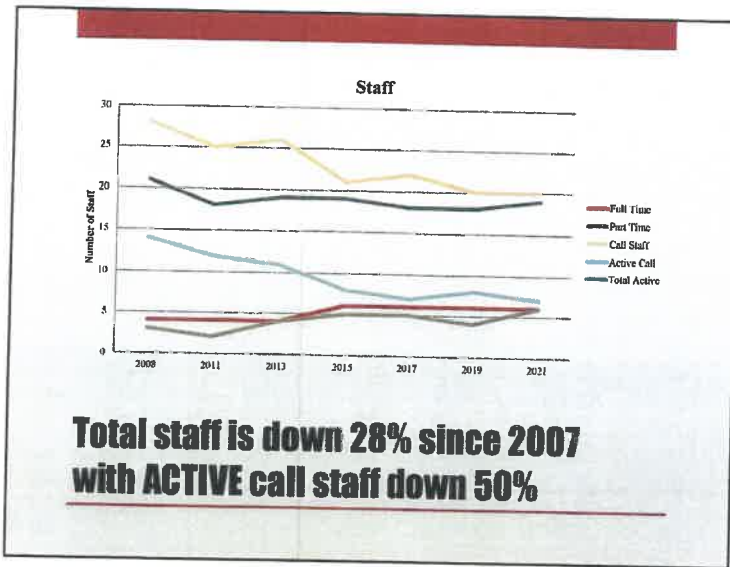
Respectfully submitted,
Lisa Chisholm, Office Assistant



Moving Fire to Town

Informational Meeting 08/18/2022





2021 Assessed Values			2023 Illustrative Budget		
Conway Village	\$	265,848,195.00	Budget	\$	826,000.00
Non-Precinct we Cover	\$	234,257,089.00	Cap Reserve	\$	180,000.00
Albany	\$	128,636,412.00	Total	\$	1,006,000.00
Center Conway	\$	269,019,160.00	Minus		
Hales	\$	74,898,800.00	Revenue	\$	1,000.00
			Net Amount	\$	1,005,000.00
				\$	649,000.00
				\$	254,000.00
				\$	395,000.00

Equalized Cost Per Thousand		
Fire	\$	1.60
Ambulance	\$	0.41

2023 Illustrative Budget

Equalized Cost Per Entity			
	Fire	Ambulance	Total
Conway Village	\$ 424,939.90	\$ 107,961.75	\$ 532,901.65
Non-Precinct we Cover	\$ 374,443.71	\$ 95,132.51	\$ 469,576.22
Albany	\$ 205,616.38	\$ 52,239.63	\$ 257,856.02
Center Conway		\$ 109,249.49	\$ 109,249.49
Hales		\$ 30,416.63	\$ 30,416.63

What Each Actually Pays			
	Over	Under	
Conway Village	\$ 886,312.00	\$ 353,410.35	
Non-Precinct we Cover	\$ 261,884.00		\$ 207,692.22
Albany	\$ 160,000.00		\$ 97,856.02
Center Conway	\$ 53,804.00		\$ 55,445.49
Hales	\$ 38,000.00	\$ 7,583.37	

Comparing equalization to existing method

Comparing Tax Rates under Current System

	Fire	Ambulance	Total
Conway Village	\$ 2.05	\$ 0.20	\$ 2.25
Non-Precinct we Cover	\$ 0.92	\$ 0.20	\$ 1.12
Albany	\$ 0.93	\$ 0.31	\$ 1.24
Center Conway		\$ 0.20	\$ 0.20
Hales		\$ 0.51	\$ 0.51

Equalized Tax Rates

	Fire	Ambulance	Total
Conway Village	\$ 1.60	\$ 0.41	\$ 2.01
Non-Precinct we Cover	\$ 1.60	\$ 0.41	\$ 2.01
Albany	\$ 1.60	\$ 0.41	\$ 2.01
Center Conway	\$ -	\$ 0.41	\$ 0.41
Hales	\$ -	\$ 0.41	\$ 0.41

What different areas pay now

- If only we could get paid for calls... like we used to.
- In 2021 we billed \$703,677.00 for transports
- We billed Medicare \$391,438.
 - They Reduced those bills by \$216,462.00
 - And then paid only \$165,746.00

Cost shifting from Federal Government

- If only we could get paid for calls... like we used to.
- In 2021 we billed \$703,677.00 for transports

- We billed Medicaid (State of NH) \$77,926.00
 - They Reduced those bills by \$63,183.00
 - And then paid only \$13,903.00

Cost shifting from State Government

- **Q** What about the Ambulance. "On this end of Town you get Paramedic Level Service. On the other end of Town you get a ride. --Janine Bean"
- **A** The plan is to make no immediate changes. At the staff level it has been suggested that we leave things as is until the end of 2026- the current contract period. That gives time to convince the Selectmen and Voters why municipal ambulance is better than private ambulance.

Questions we have been Asked

- **Q** Who would pay for the Fire Department?
- **A** We already have the system in place for this. Those being served by the Town Fire Department are taxed for it. Those who maintain independent precincts are not. Any parts of the department that serve the whole Town IE: possibly ambulance or inspections, can be taxed separately than operations. This is already done by public works vehicle maintenance.

Questions we have been Asked

- **Q** Will the Fire and Ambulance be coming from farther away, Center Conway or North Conway?
- **A** No. The plan is for the Conway Fire Department to remain in tact where it is and transfer to the Town as such.

Questions we have been Asked

- **Q** What if North Conway wants to remain separate? Do we still go forward?
- **A** The voters of the separate precincts decide their own fates. If only this Fire Department goes over to the Town, that is fine. If others want to merge with the Town Fire Department they will be welcome.

Questions we have been Asked

- **Q** This seems very complicated. Won't we need lawyers and spend a lot of money to do this?
- **A** We will and have asked specific questions of attorneys. But, its not that complicated. Its been done numerous times over the years here in NH.

Questions we have been Asked

- Tamworth- Merged 4 precincts 1948
- Goffstown- Merged 2 Village Districts 1949
- Hillsboro- Dissolved Village District 1962
- Barnstead- Merged 3 Departments 1995
- Winnesquam- Dissolved 2005
- Derry and East Derry- Merged 2005

- Many other examples- this is not uncommon.

NH Fire Districts that have merged

- 1981, Article 41: Committee to study Town Wide Fire
- 1988, Article 19: Hire a Town Fire Inspector
- 1989, Article 29, To take the assets of the fire departments if the districts turn them over
(CVFD voted in favor, NCWP voted against)
- 1989, Article 30, To form a Town Fire Commission
- 1989, Article 31, \$20,000 for that Commission

Town Votes Regarding This

- 1997, Article 15, To accept the 'operational and the financial responsibilities' of any of the five fire districts
- 2001, Article 40, To rescind the 1997 authorization. (DEFEATED overwhelmingly)
- Chapter 8 of the 2003 Town Master Plan says the Fire Departments should be merged 'at least on an administrative and fiscal basis'

Town Votes Regarding This

- Questions and Concerns are understandable and expected, but lets take the first step forward on this issue at long last.