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BATAVIA

Hearings on merger moved

By Bill Brown
GENESEE CORRESPONDENT

BATAVIA — A proposal to merge the City and Town of Batavia is not a slam-dunk.

Because of the interest, especially from town residents, some of whom fear their town will be swallowed by city operations and their cost, the hearings have been moved to the area's largest auditorium, in Batavia High School. The first hearing is at 7 p. m. Thursday and the second at 7 p. m. June 30.

"A Vision of One Batavia," drafted by a seven-member study committee, was unveiled earlier this month before the City Council and the Town Board. It was presented by the committee's consultant, the Rochester-based Center for Governmental Research, and funded by a state grant.

If approved by city and town voters in November, the more than 50-square-mile area — which includes the city of 16,000 and town of 6,000 — could be considered a larger city or a "first-class town," because of its size.

A city would have financial benefits. State per capita annual aid for Batavia is about \$1.5 million. For the town, it is \$32,000. The city receives nearly \$300,000 in gross utility taxes that are not available to town residents. The town pays \$100,000 a year in court costs; city courts are financed by the state.

Aware of town concerns about real property taxes (the town has none) and debt (the city's far outweighs the town's), the consolidation reports attempted to ease these fears.

For example:

- There would be no shifting of property tax burdens.
- City debt would be the responsibility of city residents.



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- City police and fire departments would stay as is, and the town would continue to be served by the Genesee County Sheriff's Office, as well as town and East Pembroke volunteer firefighters.

However, city and town highway functions would be merged, but water and sewer services would be unchanged.

Refuse collection remains the same. The city school district, which serves the city and towns of Batavia and Stafford, would not be affected.

Both the nine-member City Council and five-member Town Board must approve the final plan before it goes to the voters. A negative vote in either municipality would doom the proposal.

Find this article at:

<http://www.buffalonews.com/cityregion/otherwny/story/703755.html>



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