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Petition seeks dissolution of village of Sherman

By David Prenatt
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SHERMAN -- On the morning of Oct. 14, Jeanette Ramm, Sherman village clerk/treasurer, received a 33-page petition with 151 signatures calling for the dissolution and termination of the village. The contact person for the petition is Sue Oehlbeck of Prospect Street in Sherman, mother of Fire Chief Matt Oehlbeck and wife of former mayor Gerald Oehlbeck.

Sherman Mayor Colleen Meeder said the petition to dissolve the village expressed concerns about "the village's lack of support for and the mayor's control over the fire department, the question of $5,000 budgeted above the fire contract for a fire truck, and whether the village can be trusted not to take the company's investments if the village is going bankrupt or in default of debt."

Regarding the claim about the fire department, Meeder emphasized the village is the legal supporting structure and accountable for the fire department and fire company. Also, she said, village actions have been for the protection of members and the fire company.

"The village is in full support of the fire department and fire company," she said. In early June, Meeder and Deputy Mayor Ryan Sanders met with the leadership of the Sherman Fire Dept. and Stanley Hose Co. after it was discovered that the village and fire company were not in compliance with a number of state laws.

On Sept. 30, a special meeting was held with 120 people in attendance to explain New York state laws, which require a blending of the financials from the fire company and the village. Meeder noted state law requires that the fire department's financial accounts be blended with the village.

"The operations and finances will remain the same. The changes are structural, procedural and reporting, only," Meeder said. "Regardless of what happens with the village in the future, we are required to comply with the law, based on how the Sherman Fire Dept. is structured now under the law. And that means blending their financials in with our financial report within the next two months."

During the months since the village was informed of the state laws regarding the fire company and fire company in May, Meeder said she has tried to meet with Fire Chief Matt Oehlbeck several times to establish a Council of the Fire Department. However, this has not yet happened.

Regarding the claim about replacing the fire truck, Meeder said the fire company's attorney stated the village is not required to provide a fire truck, which the fire company does not plan to replace in kind.

“That is why the village donated the truck to the company,” she said. “Regarding the $5,000, the village absorbs more than $5,000 in direct and indirect fire expenses annually, above the contract.” Regarding the fiscal status of the village, Meeder said the village has no fiscal stress designation, and the village assets have grown substantially, however, are far less liquid than they used to be. The infrastructure projects undertaken by the village have had indirect costs outside the scope of the engineered projects, she said.

Meeder went on to say that, while there are situations where consolidation would make sense, there are currently no duplications of services between the village and town of Sherman. “The essential services provided by the village are not provided by the town,” she said. “Essential services will remain at the cost of the people in the village if it is dissolved.” Additionally, Meeder said, taxing districts would have to be created for streetlights, sidewalks and stormwater infrastructure, which would be collected from the people of the village on the town tax bill. “As to nonessential services, like plowing sidewalks and leaf pickup, the town would decide if those services would be kept at a cost to the people of the village or be discontinued,” she said. The dissolution petition itself will result in an expense to the village, Meeder said.

“The clerk/treasurer and village attorney are responsible to validate the dissolution petition,” she said. “Assuming so, the village will be taking on unbudgeted costs for legal, consulting, and board of election expenses in preparation for a February 2027 vote to dissolve,” she said.

Since the petition was submitted to the village, Meeder said some residents told village employees “it was easier to sign than argue” or “they felt bullied.” In contrast, Meeder said that Sue Oehlbeck told her that others “could not sign it fast enough because they have made complaints to the village and haven’t seen any response.” Meeder noted many of the complaints involve matters such as traffic speed, substance abuse and streetlight outages, which are not controlled by the village.
“For many of these complaints, the village acts as a reporter or facilitator,” she said.

Meeder emphasized when speaking to other municipalities that have been dissolved, such as Forestville and Cherry Creek, they expressed no real cost savings and the loss of services. “Towns and villages are designed for different purposes under New York State law,” she said. “Villages serve the most immediate and direct needs of the community.”