

**REPORT OF THE VILLAGE-TOWN  
MERGER STUDY COMMITTEE**

November 17, 2005

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## **Origin of Study Committee 2005**

The **selectboard** of the town suggested development of a plan to merge the village with the town, and the trustees of the village suggested that a committee of citizens be assembled to study the issue first. The merger study committee was formed and is comprised of four (4) members appointed by the selectboard and four (4) by the trustees. The committee members have agreed to function as a **non** political fact finding group, recognizing it is the province of the elected politicians to guide such change. Over the last six (6) months we have collected a sizable amount of information. We have organized this material and submitted it along with recommendations to the elected officials. What, if anything, will be done with the information will fall to the body politic.

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**Resource materials used and information gathered:** A bibliography and copies of many of our source materials are attached in the Appendix II.

**Committee members:** Tom **Hayes**, Chair; Patricia **Crocker**; Cary **Hollingsworth**; Fred Hunt; Byron **Kelly**; Peter **Saman**; L.D. Sutherland; and Gay **Travers**.

**Committee Format:** The committee met Thursday evenings at the Town Hall Conference Room, June through October 2005, from 7:00-9:00 **PM**. All meetings have been open to the public and several have been videotaped and shown on the local access Channel 8. We are grateful to all that have provided us with helpful and enlightening information.

**Committee findings:** If the political leaders of both municipalities decide to pursue a municipal merger of Woodstock town and Woodstock village, Vermont State Law requires a vote on the question within both municipalities. If either or both of the votes turn down the question, the matter is ended. If both of the votes are in the affirmative, the issue proceeds to the Vermont Legislature for action. If the Legislature approves, the merger is accomplished. We anticipate an election for all seats on the selectboard of the new composite entity would ensue. Exact procedures are available from the Vermont Secretary of State's Office and or 24 **VSA**, Chapter 39. See Appendix II and Legal and Legislative Issues section of this report.

Whether or not political leaders in either or both of the municipalities decide not to pursue a merger, our committee has found a number of areas existing in present day municipal operations that need clarification and resolution in that they impact providing **inter-governmental** public services.

With the exception of the fire department, no written records have been found by or were presented to the committee of agreements between the town and village to do with the co-provision of public services within the town or village. Documents spelling out the current practice have not been located. As a result, **jurisdictional** confusion, mistaken authority, and municipal administration by myth and legend in the absence of the documented agreements appear to prevail in several areas.

## Woodstock Village - Town Merger Study Committee

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### *History of the Village and Town*

The Woodstock town/village merger study committee has been gathering information, written and oral, about the history and present day conditions of the municipalities, individually and in association with each other. The final phase of the committee's work is preparing this report to the community. All members of the committee have contributed to this document.

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Woodstock town began as a King George Grant in the second half of the 18<sup>th</sup> century. The town is administered by five (5) elected **selectpersons**. In 1786 Woodstock was designated the Shire Town of Windsor County. By the early 19<sup>th</sup> century Woodstock had become a destination point. The village was the center of most of the activity. Visitors, and all that they required in the way of services, became a growth industry. Hotels, law offices, restaurants, all became viable enterprises. In today's terms, it would appear the coming into existence of Woodstock village as an independent municipality was the 19<sup>th</sup> century equivalent of creating a 21<sup>st</sup> century enterprise zone. In 1836 the town petitioned the Vermont Legislature to charter what was then called the North village of the town, as an independent municipality. The Legislature honored the petition and Woodstock village was born. It is administered by 5 elected trustees. The two entities have co-existed for 169 years. Because the village lies within the town, Vermont law considers village residents citizens of both communities and awards **selectboard** powers to the trustees within the village as a separate municipal entity. Although the originating documents are vague about the reasons for the chartering of the village, it appears to do with the urban/rural distinction perceived in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Scale and time notwithstanding, people living in a compact village arrangement had, in 1836, different needs and requirements of government than did the residents of the more expansive agricultural landscape. Streetlights, sidewalks, roads, marauding hogs on the green, fire protection and policing understandably held little resonance in the countryside. The town's response was that the village should govern itself. The impact of these 19<sup>th</sup> century decisions by residents of the town and village of Woodstock have proved to be viable and enduring over the subsequent century and a half plus. Unlike many Vermont villages that have fallen into irrelevance, Woodstock village has flourished and succeeded as a village, county enterprise zone, and a place people call home.

### Inter-governmental Administrative Summary

The committee understands the present inter-governmental operation to be the following:  
**Town/Village Management:** A vote by each municipality authorized employment of a paid professional manager to administer the day to day affairs of each entity. Beyond that, all we have found is how things are operating today. One person is employed, along with a staff, to proportionately manage both entities and bill each entity according to that proportion worked on their behalf. See the subsequent section of this report on fiscal matters. Thus far, the trustees and the selectboard have chosen the same person as manager of each entity, but as far as it has been determined, there is no requirement to do so, other than possibly economy of scale.

**Planning/Zoning:** A similar situation to that of the manager exists with the employment of the village/town zoning administrator/planner. Selectboard and trustees each appoint someone to the position. Thus far it has been the same person with hired staff serving both municipalities.

**Town/Village Road Maintenance:** A vote of each municipality authorized a co-maintenance program, but with no documentation of the agreement reached between the selectboard and the trustees, it is impossible to know what was intended. The village has retained jurisdiction over its road rights of ways and continues to employ a road maintenance crew and own its own equipment. The trustees and selectboard hire a road foreman jointly.

**Taxation, Property Valuation, Municipal Assets and Accounting:** Taxation and costs currently paid by the town and village for roads, bridges, and all other municipal services, as well as the system currently used to arrive at cost assessments to each, is presented in this document in the section on Fiscal Implications. Assets are carried on the books at acquisition value. Property assessments for the town and the village are under the jurisdiction of a town-wide elected board of listers.

**Bridges:** Until 1973, Vermont State Law required the selectboard of a town in which a village was located to administer the bridges even if located in the village. That law was repealed in 1973 and jurisdiction of bridges went to the trustees of villages. The Woodstock Manager presented the committee with a memo from 1990 in which he apprised the Woodstock selectboard of this repeal. Up to and including the present, the Woodstock selectboard continues to act on bridge matters within the village jurisdiction of the trustees, who, by Vermont State Statute, "...have selectboard powers within the village." See Appendix II; 24VSA, Chapter 39, Sections 1301-1321.

**Emergency Services:** In addition to the Town Fire Dept. and Village Police Dept, the town operates a 911 communication center and ambulance service from the emergency services building. These are town-wide services and are administered by the selectboard.

**Police:** The Woodstock Village Police Department is exclusively a village funded and

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operated function and is overseen by the trustees. A Chief and several officers are employed and are operated by the village at the town's emergency services building located in the village. As the result of a vote in 1981, for a period of about one (1) year, the Police Department functioned as a town-wide department, but was voted out at town meeting and policing returned to a village function. During our meetings the chief of the Village Department, who is also a member of the committee, has said a merger of the town and village is not crucial to the several possible solutions to some town citizen's request for police services. Several alternatives are available. See this report's section on Police.

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**Fire Company:** The Fire Department is the best documented town/village collaborative public service effort. It provides fire protection services for both town and village and is administered by the [selectboard](#). There is a chief, assistant chief, and many volunteer members of the department. In addition, the unincorporated hamlet of South Woodstock maintains a non-municipal, private fire department. The volunteer department responds to mutual aid calls and responds to fires within the hamlet. *See this report's section on Fire & Safety.*

**Sewer Department:** A vote to establish and build the sewer system and treatment plant was found, but no records at all to do with its construction beyond that point. About ten (10) years of trustee and selectboard records during that period also appear to be missing. Current lore regards the plant and its operation as a town function with the bulk of its utilization from the village. Minor facilities serve [Taftsville](#), South Woodstock and portions of West Woodstock and the Middle/High School. The selectboard serves as sewer commissioners. Given the ongoing situation of dual municipalities, one would expect agreements for [inter-municipal](#) rights of ways etc., but the original written agreements are just not available. Current inspection reports and the financial operation materials for the sewer system are both available. It [is-regulated](#) by the State of Vermont Environmental Board. See Appendix II for a list of materials collected.

**Water Company:** A private, independently owned and operated company, Woodstock Aqueduct Company, provides water to Woodstock Village and limited parts of the town. Its operation is overseen and permitted by the Vermont Public Service Board. It also provides, for a fee, a hydrant system within Woodstock Village for fire protection and system flushing purposes. Company representatives explained they hold private and municipal rights of ways for their distribution system. Their billing system is directly with customers and is not a municipal function. They also testified that their system was in good condition and could be updated laying new pipe and lines periodically.

**Development Review Boards;** The town and village each maintain independent Development Review Boards as provided for in Vermont State Statutes. Board members are appointed by each entity's elected officials. See this reports section on Boards and Commissions.

**Design Review Boards:** Portions of the village are designated as Design Review Districts. Five (5) residents of either the town or the village may be appointed by the

## *Woodstock Village - Town Merger Study Committee*

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trustees to serve on this board. In the town, the unincorporated hamlet of South Woodstock has portions of that area designated as a Design Review District. The [selectboard](#) appoints three (3) town residents to serve on this board.

**Planning Commission:** Consists of nine (9) members co-appointed by the trustees and selectboard without regard to their town or village residency. It appears that the commission's principal focus is updating and drafting zoning ordinances as required by law. We are unaware of any actual town or village proactive planning projects being undertaken by this group at this time. See this report's section on Boards and Commissions

**Town/Village Clerk(s):** The town clerk is elected by vote of the town and is responsible directly to the voters. The responsibilities of the office include: keeping the land and vital statistics records for the town and village; holding elections; arranging town meetings and performing marriages. The town clerk's office is located in the Town Hall and is open to the public five (5) days a week. A village clerk is elected from the floor at village meeting in March each year and keeps the minutes of that meeting and any other that might occur throughout the year.

**Town/Village Treasurer(s):** Currently one person is elected by the town and village jointly to serve in this capacity, although we have no documentation of how or why this practice came about. Again, it appears to be a matter of scale and expediency.

**Survey and Map of the Village:** The current map of the village is based on 19<sup>th</sup> century metes and bounds descriptions. The committee was advised there is no official survey map of the village. [0 c. a&#a i w](#)

**Liquor Control Officers:** Currently the town selectboard has the authority to issue liquor licenses in both the town and the village. Without documentation that explains why this authority rests with the selectboard rather than with the corresponding governing body in the village and town, and considering 24 [VSA](#), Chapter 39, Sections 1301-1321: Incorporated villages granting the same governing authority of village trustees as those of the selectboard, we cannot explain why this is the practice.

**Other Municipalities' Experiences with Merger:** We contacted several other Vermont communities that had experience with merging a town and village; both where merger was accomplished and where it was not. See this report's section on Comparative Communities and Appendix II for the Secretary of State's [website](#) comments on Vermont villages.

**Politics, Sociology and Cultural Issues:** While how the two municipalities operate is an interesting study in itself, municipal structures and actions also reflect, and to some extent reveal, the beliefs, aspirations, intentions, attitudes, commitments and expectations of the residents of each community. The committee has been asked to examine how the two communities might mesh and we would be remiss to ignore what is going on in this regard. We have observed various political and social issues within the present day

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communities and municipal governments that may serve as possible forecasting tools.

### **Political and Social Climate**

About every twenty (20) years the issue of a town-village merger seems to emerge. This time, it appears the impetus was the village trustees' establishment of a Development Review Board to help enhance the planning process in our community. Concerned about the vacuum in planning for the current and future needs of our village and town, the trustees' rationale was to give the Planning Commission the time it needed to plan and develop a vision of Woodstock's future. By transferring the Planning Commission's regulatory functions to the newly established Development Review Board, the Planning Commission could then spend its time and resources on truly planning ahead, instead of merely responding to the current applications presented before them. The selectboard agreed with the trustees' approach to addressing the planning needs in our community, and also established a town Development Review Board.

Apparently, this approach was met with some disagreement by a small, vocal group of citizens, who formed an ad hoc committee to merge the village with the town. In the meantime, the citizens of the town had become more and more aware of the lack of police coverage available to them outside of the village borders, and so, it seems with the combined publicity of this issue, along with the ad hoc group promoting merger, this latest cycle of the town/village merger push began, even spawning a second ad hoc merger study committee. Later, the trustees and selectpersons decided to appoint their own officially sanctioned merger study committee.

Interestingly, after the initial publicity stemming from the anti-DRB forces and those concerned about police coverage, the committee has been surprised at the lack of interest displayed by the community regarding the subject of a town/village merger.

For example, at a highly publicized public hearing to obtain citizens' input on the issue in September 2005, we were disappointed that only eleven (11) people attended. Two of those had a definite opinion on the subject (one for, one against). All the others came seeking more information.

However, something we did learn from the group attending was their perception of the lack of municipal services they receive (both town and village); especially in relation to the amount of taxes they pay. In addition, there was "the cart before the horse" observation by a village resident, who as a former planning commission chair from a large city, pointed out that we should have a vision of what we want our community to be and look like in 2020, before we tackle the issue of a merger.

Underscoring the lack of interest by the community on this issue, at the Annual Village Meeting in March 2005, the issue of a merger never came up. Ninety-four (94) citizens attended this meeting, which represented a fairly large audience, and when they were asked to voice any issues or concerns, merger was not even mentioned.

In the meantime, another ad hoc group,, the Innovation Group, invited a second group, the Vermont Council on Rural Development, to visit Woodstock and help in planning for our future needs. From that, yet another "steering committee" was established, to meet and define the community's nine priorities. Once again, the issue of a town/village merger, while raised by one attendee, did not warrant the attention or interest of the thirty (30) others to make the list of the nine lop issues.

While undergoing our fact-finding mission, our study committee not only learned of the community's general lack of interest regarding the issue of a town/village merger, but we also came upon a phenomenon which presented itself consistently throughout the weeks of our research.

The committee observed that the Woodstock community is basically run by various interest groups that not only have a specific agenda to forward their self interest, but then seek, and many times, succeed, in forcing these special interests upon the community at large. These groups initially take an "ad hoc" form that go off on their own and are able to accomplish their agenda without going through town or village leaders.

The study committee came to realize that Woodstock is basically run as an "adhocracy", where these "ad hoc" groups have recognized how successful this format has been in achieving their goals, and so continue to utilize it. There are many examples throughout Woodstock attesting to the success of this method of getting things done.

As long as Woodstock's leaders and its citizens accept the "adhocracy" approach to governance that circumvents elected leaders, the potential exists that small groups can advance narrow interests ahead of the larger needs of the citizenry and the ad hoc groups will be able to continue to succeed in setting their own agendas and imposing them on the community.

### **Governance: Boards and Commissions**

The village of Woodstock currently has a Design Review Board of five (5) members, a Development Review Board of seven (7) members, and an East End Study Group of seven (7) members, and shares a Planning Commission of nine (9) members with the town. The town has a Development Review Board, a South Woodstock Design Review Board and shares the Planning Commission with the village. Two other commissions established are the town Board of Sewer Commissioners that oversees the sewer system and the Conservation Commission.

Looking over the membership of these boards and commissions, it is noted that many members serve on several of the boards or commissions and/or on the Village Board of Trustees or the Town **Selectboard**. This overlap of membership should be examined for both the risk of conflict of interest in decision-making or as a sign that perhaps the boards and commissions are not involving more members of the community, or as an indication that more citizens of the community do not want to take on these responsibilities.

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Should a town-village merger occur, the effect on most boards and commissions that currently exist would be negligible. Most duties and responsibilities would remain the same and the members of the board or commission would simply report to the newly formed municipal governing body. The newly elected municipal body and the voters of the new municipality would decide any changes of responsibilities. If a merger were to occur, the Village Design Review Board and the South Woodstock Design Review Boards would continue to carry out their current charge of reviewing permit applications for the proper historical or local design elements.

During fact finding, concerns arose over an increased workload for a merged Development Review Board that would now be required to review all applications for the combined municipality. Concerns were raised whether the increased workload might delay the approval process, require more board meetings, or affect the number of citizens who would be willing to serve on these boards because of the time commitment. Thus even if the entities merged, consolidation of the boards would have to be carefully considered.

The current Planning Commission would continue its charge of rewriting bylaws, writing zoning regulations, writing the municipal (town/village) plan, consult on special projects requiring zoning expertise including all Act 250 applications and really focus on a long-term plan.

### ***Fiscal Considerations***

- The committee reviewed town-village demographics and **financials** to attempt to evaluate whether a merger had the potential for cost savings and other fiscal implications of a merger. The budgets and fiscal practices of both entities were reviewed and testimony was provided by the town/village manager and others. In an effort to **distill** and summarize all the information considered, a table was prepared and is included in this section.

According to the town/village clerk, the voter checklist indicates 2,700 voting residents; 1,900 (70%) residing in the town and 800 (30%) residing in the village. According to the U.S. Census Bureau, the resident population of the town, including the village is 3,232 of that 977 are residents of Woodstock Village.

Revenues are generally derived from property taxes, but transfers between the town and village governments, state highway funds, utilities (sewer), and fines represent some additional revenues. The intergovernmental transfers will appear as revenues in one entity and expenses to another.

The split between town and village revenues is 64% town; 36% village. Of note is the substantial value of land in current use in the town. An estimate of fair market value of that land is reported for information only,

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In general, expenses allocated to each entity roughly equal revenues derived from each entity. While this in itself is not unusual, the committee reviewed fiscal practices including how costs were allocated among government functions and learned that current procedures for allocation are based on historic practice and are not justified by tracking of employee actual time or supported by employee timesheets. The current methodology is not based on a mathematical formula or tracking activity typically used in government or business to determine or justify distribution of expenses among cost centers.

For example, the level of management allocation to the village was reported to be about 10% of the total management expense. This seemed low to the committee members. Absent a written explanation and justification for the allocation, the committee could not determine whether this was an appropriate share.

The allocation of school expenses between town and village appears out of proportion absent an allocation formula. The village, with just 30% of the resident population and just 34% of grand list, carries nearly half the burden of education expenses. State methodology for determining school taxes does not explain this discrepancy. Similar to the preceding recommendation, further review should be undertaken to assess how education and other expenses are allocated and justified between the two entities.

The absence of written procedures and policies relative to time reports, cost allocation, procurement of accounting/auditing and a variety of other services, presented a challenge in assessing whether the allocations are appropriate and whether historic practices continue to be justified over time.

The fiscal questions relative to the revenues and expense of expanding police coverage to areas outside the village are covered in a separate section of this report. A portion of the revenue stream that covers the operation of the Village Police Department is derived from parking meters and fines. The tracking and reconciliation of these funds is very weak. The current practice is to collect meter cash in bags and send it to an out of state location for counting. Several months later a receipt is received. But these receipts are not reconciled back to the date of collection and shipment. This practice not only prevents management from accurately determining cash receipts, but it is not consistent with sound accounting practice and adequate internal controls against revenue loss.

Setting aside concern around allocation methodology noted above, the available information and testimony lead the committee to conclude that there would, at this point in time, be no efficiencies or economies of scale that could be achieved in the operations of government that could be used to justify a merger.

In the course of its study the committee did identify a number of issues for further consideration.

- All accounting practices including: internal controls, cost allocation, and budgeting practices be closely reviewed in detail by governing bodies with the

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assistance of a new, independent auditor and/or a consultant who will assess both town and village fiscal practices and oversight.

- That future village and town financial reports include a consolidated summary of revenues and expenses of both entities so that the overall cost and allocations of the costs of government are visible to the citizens.
- That all members of governing boards be encouraged to attend trainings on fiscal and general municipal management offered by the Vermont League of Cities and Towns so that they have sufficient knowledge of best practices and procedures for local government to provide proper oversight of both town and village.

See tables on subsequent pages:

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My apologies, but the tables did not scan well. They deal with comparing the town and village in the following areas:

Population, voters, roads maintained, revenues, and assets – pages 12 and 13.

## Merger Initiatives in Comparative Communities

The merger committee felt an important part of our study was to identify and research other Vermont communities that had undergone the merger of their town and village governments. The committee felt it could learn as much from unsuccessful merger efforts as we could from those that succeeded.

The first step was to conduct an exhaustive internet search using a number of engines including Lexus/Nexus and Google. Excellent sources of articles on mergers were found in *The Valley News*, *Times Argus*, and *Burlington Free Press* newspapers and included stories about Bradford, Waterbury and Essex to name a few.

During this search we came across a particularly helpful document, the Northfield Community Visit Final Report which was published by the Vermont Council on Rural Development. Both the report and subsequent E-mail correspondence with the VCRD Executive Director, Paul Costello, helped us identify areas of study. We also discovered Woodstock would be the recipient of a "community visit" in September of this year and that according to Costello, merging town and village governments was frequently identified by these visits as a "priority challenge" in those other communities.

Northfield, for example, identified merger as one of its five top priority challenges and said in the report "the town and village of Northfield should merge to simplify community and municipal communications, raise the image of Northfield and promote community identity among Northfield residents as members of a unified community".

On September 19 two members of the committee attended the steering committee meeting that kicked-off the Woodstock Community visit by the Vermont Council on Rural Development. Only one member of the audience expressed interest in merging governments. It is not likely to receive much further attention during the visit and follow-up-

Following the internet search, telephone interviews with merger committee members from a number of towns including Richford, Northfield, Hardwick, and Waterbury were begun. These interviews included towns that had been both successful and unsuccessful in their merger efforts and we tried to choose communities whose situations were similar to Woodstock.

After extensive telephone interviews we asked members of three towns merger committees to testify before the committee. These towns were selected on the basis of how similar their mergers were to ours and included both successful mergers (Richford, Hardwick) and unsuccessful (Northfield).

The Executive Director of the Vermont League of Cities and Towns, Steven Jeffrey, spoke to the committee about how his organization could support the committee's efforts as well as his experiences on the Northfield Merger Committee. Paul Costello, chair of

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the Hardwick Merger Committee spoke to the committee by speakerphone. Comments of a member of the Richford merger committee were reviewed.

A number of common threads were found during our conversations and studies:

- Successful mergers identified a groundswell of public support long before the merger was taken to a vote.
- Unanimous support by the selectboard and trustees was found to be a must for a successful merger. Neutrality by the governing bodies was perceived by many voters as being against a merger.
- Mergers do not result in cost savings. Reasons for supporting mergers included making governments more efficient and less confusing, facilitating finding enough volunteers to staff town governments, making pay and benefit practices consistent for all town employees and "speaking as one"- in identifying and addressing town/village issues,
- Communication and education were critical ingredients to a successful merger. Techniques used included open forums for voters, letters with details and declaration of support from trustees and selectboard to all voters, local newspaper stories, booklets to all voters' homes with merger details and "hot lines" to call with voter questions.
- Mergers take time to bring to a vote, in some cases years between initial study and voter approval.

### ***Legal and Legislative***

Twice before, the question of merger has come up and the legislature on both occasions authorized the necessary changes to the Village Charter conditioned upon an affirmative vote in both the town and village. On each occasion one of the municipalities declined to approve the merger.

It would seem appropriate, therefore, that this time, before any effort is made to obtain the legislative approval, an appropriate resolution is approved by both sets of voters seeking legislative action to complete a merger.

Should a merger occur, personal and real property owned by the village would be transferred to the town. Some of this could be accomplished by a general bill of sale, but property with legal title, such as buildings, land and vehicles, should be individually conveyed.

Should the village determine that compensation for its assets be appropriate, the matter would have to be resolved between the two boards at that time.

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The present insurance protection for the village would be transferred to the town or appropriate substitute coverage obtained until all applicable statutes of limitation have expired.

**Contracts** with the village would be assigned to the town or renegotiated.

### ***Police Services***

Police coverage and the expense of providing it is a major concern among citizens in the context of a merger. The committee looked at historical data, current needs for policing of the village and town, the availability (or lack thereof) of police, and the types of services that various agencies could provide.

The committee recognized that the level of police services needed in the town differs from the needs of the village. Although there is a desire among some residents of the town for police response twenty-four hours a day as provided in the village, this is not the case under the current system in the town. The current system is inconsistent in responding to basic and even emergency calls. It was determined that although various police agencies (Constables, Vermont State Police, Windsor County Sheriff, and Woodstock Village Police) all have indicated a need for services in the town, no one can assure that coverage is available when needed. Currently, the village police only go in to the town for: village connected investigations, to assist other police officers in need, and to respond to an immediate emergency at the Woodstock Union High School.

Various surveys and groups have called for different types of police services (traffic, criminal, and general patrol), but the committee determined that it really comes down to the following: residents wanted to know that if and when they had any need for police, that someone would respond without delay and/or excuse.

The committee found that a real issue exists and needs to be addressed: whether to provide police services for the town. This is an issue to be addressed by the political leaders of the community and is not contingent on merger. A solution is available regardless of whether or not a merger occurs. *(Please see Appendix I prepared by an earlier ad hoc committee.)*

### ***Fire & Ambulance Services***

As the fire department and the ambulance are a function of the town, a town-village merger would not have any effect on operations.

The Woodstock Ambulance Service has one full time town employee with a title of town Ambulance Coordinator. The entire department is staffed by volunteers. The department

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has three ambulances, two that are housed at the main Station 1 on Route 4 East and one at Station 2 on Route 4 West.

The Woodstock Fire Department has been a function of the town since July of 1973. Prior to 1973, the Department was a "Village Department." The Department has five pieces of equipment. Station One on Route 4 East has one pumper, one tanker, a rescue truck, and a utility truck. Station Two on Route 4 West has one pumper.

South Woodstock has its own volunteer fire department that responds to mutual aid calls, but it is not a municipal fire department and receives no funding from municipal taxes.

### **Conclusion**

The single most important aspect of a merger, proven by past failed attempts in Woodstock and in other places throughout Vermont, is that a merger does not occur unless there is strong public support in both the town and village and unanimous endorsement by both governing bodies. The committee does not sense that the level of public interest in this issue at this time rises to the level required to achieve a merger. The cyclical question of merger again presents issues of identity, equity and accountability. That subset of the residents of the town of Woodstock who also reside in the village of Woodstock appear to identify more with village than the town and believe that non-village residents would not appreciate their concerns. Town residents, on the other hand, do not seem to differentiate as distinctly between the town and village as to their sense of place and do not believe the village's concerns would be given less attention in a merged government.

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There are no appreciable savings to be achieved through a merger, but there would be a reallocation of costs. Road maintenance, bridge repair and police coverage are the high ticket items which could be affected by a merger, although police coverage can be addressed regardless of a merger.

In the course of its study the committee learned that a number of town/village revenue and expense items are cost shared without any documented protocols. This issue would become moot in the event of a merger, but if no merger occurs it should be reviewed by the respective boards.

It is therefore the recommendation of this committee that the issues relating to governance, cost and revenue allocation and the pronounced impact of special interest groups be addressed outside the context of a merger. The issue of police protection in the town could best be resolved as a separate matter, independent of a merger, and it warrants a separate conversation among the voters and elected officials.

page 18 is the signature page, signed by:

Thomas Hayes, Chair

Patricia Crocker, Cary Hollingsworth, Fred Hunt, Byron Kelly, Peter Saman, L.D.  
Sutherland and Gay Traver.

**Woodstock Village - Town Merger Study Committee**

**APPENDIX I**

**Police Section of Ad Hoc Committee Report**

The committee met with village Police Chief Byron Kelly, Constable Paul West, Sheriff Michael Chamberlain and Lt. Ray Keefe, Commander of the Bethel State Police Barracks.

**A. Village Police**

The current village police force consists of five full time officers and several part time officers. They operate under the mandate of providing the village with police protection 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. Currently there is no acceptable working agreement for the village police to go outside of the village limits with the exception of responding to certain situations at the Woodstock Union High School. The average response time for the police to respond within the village is three minutes.

**If the village police were to respond, on an emergency basis only, to calls in the town, one scenario calls for adding 1.5 policemen and one additional cruiser for an added cost of approximately \$150,000.00.**

Currently the village police cost the village taxpayers the following:

2004-2005 Appropriation                      \$534,720

Revenue    (206,300)

**Net Cost    \$328,420**

**B. Constables**

Vermont State Law requires each town to have one constable and optionally a second constable. There is no formal police training requirement to become a constable in the town of Woodstock. Our constables are elected. Vermont law states that the constables may be appointed if the town votes to do so. Our constables currently work for an hourly wage plus mileage when called out. The hourly rate of \$18.22 was voted at 2005 town Meeting.

### C. Sheriff

The sheriff's department is required by the State to serve papers, escort prisoners and provide bailiffs for the courts. The sheriff's department works on a contract basis only for each town they serve. 80% of the revenue generated while on contract, with a given town, is returned to the town. There is no contract with the sheriff's department to serve the town of Woodstock.

### Woodstock Village - Town Merger Study Committee

The town of Bridgewater contracts with the sheriff's department to perform traffic control. According to the Bridgewater 2004 Annual Report, the actual cost of the sheriff's contract was \$93,926.50. The revenue generated by the sheriff in traffic fines was \$103,091.33, or the town of Bridgewater made \$9,164.83 by hiring the sheriff.

### D. State Police

The Bethel Station covers 23 towns and 112 miles of interstate highway. According to Lt.

Ray Keefe, Bethel Barracks Commander, he has six men on duty "on a good day". There is no one on duty from 2:00 am to 7:00 am. This includes no dispatcher in that time period.

There used to be a State Police sub-station in Woodstock but for reasons unknown to Lt. Keefe, the sub-station went by the wayside. When asked if he would like a sub-station in Woodstock, he said he would very much like the idea.

The option to contract the State Police to patrol Woodstock was investigated. The contract for 25 random hours a week would cost about \$3,800.00 per month. One can assume that about half that cost would come back in revenue.

### Possible Solutions to Add Town Wide Police Protection

I. Add 1.5 men plus a cruiser to the existing village Police force and allow the village Police to respond to emergency calls in the town. Cost:

2004-2005 Appropriation	\$534,720
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•Revenue	(206,300)
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Add 1.5 men + cruiser	150,000
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Net Cost (Assuming no extra revenue) \$478,420

Dividing the Above Net Cost by the Grand List of \$5,687,849, the town wide tax rate becomes  $\$478,420 / \$5,687,849 = \$0.084$  (Per \$100.00 of evaluation)

The average appraised value of a house plus over six acres (R2) is \$483,313. It is assumed that R2 represents an average town property. The average tax increase for the

above police protection for an R2 residence is estimated to be  $\$4833.13 \times 0.084 = \$405.98$

A second option is to drop the 24/7 requirement for seven day around the clock protection and keep the police force at its current level. This reduces the above R2 tax increase from \$405.98 to \$279.07.

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### **Woodstock Village - Town Merger Study Committee**

2. Contract with the sheriff's department to provide traffic control on an as needed basis for a specified number of hours per week. Projected cost would probably mirror Bridgewater 's experience and not end up costing the taxpayers anything.

3. Contract with the State Police for 25 random hours a week. Again, assuming that half the cost -would come back in revenue, the projected cost for this option is about 50% of \$3,800/month or \$22,800 per year. Using the same grand list figures as above, the average tax increase for an R2 residence is estimated to be  $\$4833.13 \times \$22,800/\$5,687,849 = \$19.37$

4. Upgrade the constables by voting to appoint the constables and add the requirement that they be trained police officers. Provide them with a budget and a fully equipped vehicle. This option is not meant in anyway to reflect on the fine job our current constables do with the budget and mandate they have to work with; but rather to present a possible option. Assuming that this option would cost \$100,000.00, the average tax increase for an R2 residence is estimated to be  $\$4833.13 \times \$100,000.00/\$5,687,849 = \$84.97$

*Woodstock Village - Town Merger Study Committee*

## APPENDIX II

### Reference Materials

- *History of Woodstock, 1890-1983*: Peter **S. Jennison**  
o ISBN 0-88150-004-6, Countryman Press, The **Woodstock Foundation**, 1985
- Manager's letter to prospective committee members 05/04/2005
- trustees suggested study questions for the committee
- Prospective committee members' interview statements
- Committee appointment letters 05/26/2005
- Manager's initial committee meeting letter 06/09/2005
- Zoning Map Woodstock village
- town / village Meeting Warnings - Votes
- Select board / Trustee Meetings minutes (inception to present)
- town / village Clerk's records (inception to present)
- Woodstock town Land Grant
- Woodstock village Charter
- Videotapes Merger Study Committee meetings 2005
- Minutes Merger Study Committee Meetings 2005
- Ad Hoc merger committee report 2005
- Excerpts *History of Woodstock*\_ pages 113 - 130
- *Vt. Incorporated villages: A Vanishing Institution*,^^ **Howe** 2005
- Vt. Sec. of State / Vt. Archives *villages and Cities* Paul Gillies 1981
- 24 **VSA** Municipal and County Government, Chapter **39**
- Woodstock town and village Plan 2001
- Woodstock town Zoning Ordinance 11/05/02
- Woodstock village Zoning Ordinance 01/18/1999
- Woodstock village and town Annual Reports 2003 - 2004
- town/village Grand List Materials -Tax Exempt Properties
- village Financial Statement 06/30/2004 [www.townofwoodstock.org](http://www.townofwoodstock.org)
- Materials gathered to do with merger activity in other municipalities
- Materials presented by the Manager to do with infrastructure conditions
- Photocopies town/village Vote taken, results
- town/village initial **GASB** # 34 06/30/2004
- Online profile of Woodstock town and village
- town and village residents' thoughts, stories, suggestions, insights, input