



Photo by Jake Kurtz
Village board President Judd Blau (left) and town board Chair Bob Wipperfurth confer at a Dec. 17 joint meeting of their boards at Windsor Town Hall.

Windsor sets sights on incorporation

Town supervisors say new village would not be a competitor of DeForest

By Jake Kurtz
Managing Editor

Windsor officials continue to speak favorably of the town incorporating to become a village in order to fend off future annexation attempts and are hopeful that DeForest representatives will be supportive of such an endeavor or at least remain silent if not.

That was the message expressed by multiple Windsor supervisors at a Dec. 17 joint quarterly meeting of elected officials from both communities.

Since last spring, Windsor supervisors have explored the possibility of a change in governance structure and have debated the merits of remaining a town, opting for incorporation, or pursuing a merger with DeForest.

In August, the public finance firm Ehlers was brought on board by Windsor officials to develop a report regarding the financial implications of such moves. That led to municipal financial analyst James Mann

announcing that Ehlers found little reason financially for Windsor to opt for a merger.

Among the details of the Ehlers report was that the Village of DeForest and City of Sun Prairie in the last 25 years have annexed 2,209 acres worth of ground from Windsor that today carries a valuation of approximately \$290 million.

Windsor's entire equalized value, according to the latest budget figures provided by the town, is \$614 million.

Windsor currently has boundary agreements with DeForest and Sun

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Prairie that run through 2030 and 2040, respectively, and shelter about 640 acres from annexation by either municipality.

In addition, Ehlers found that if DeForest and Windsor were to become one village, roughly \$1.5 million in expenses or levy would need to be slashed in order to "hold Windsor residents harmless" and not experience a tax hike, Mann said.

Should those necessary savings not be realized under a merger, Mann last week noted that "Windsor's tax rate would go up and DeForest's tax rate would go down."

Data from the non-partisan Wisconsin Taxpayers Alliance from 2011 shows that DeForest has a per-capita operating spending amount of \$750 while Windsor was \$380. Mann said the "majority of the spending difference has to do with policing services."

Mann also said that by Windsor becoming a stand-alone village it could control its own zoning matters rather

than "running down to Dane County."

Following Mann's presentation at the joint session, town board Chair Bob Wipperfurth said Windsor is "at a crossroads" and said the possibility of incorporation is something "Windsor needs to explore."

And if becoming a village is what the town chooses to pursue, Wipperfurth asked that DeForest officials voice support or "remain silent" and not use any oppositional lobbying efforts.

Sup. Alan Buchner said if Windsor does choose to incorporate that it "does not preclude a merger at a later date."

"Windsor has clearly chosen to move forward," Buchner continued. "Allow us the responsibilities to move forward in one direction."

Sup. Bruce Stravinski said it would be his preference that the Village Board pass a resolution formally supporting Windsor's final decision because the town has exhibited transparency throughout its governance exploration.

As expected, DeForest trustees had a variety of questions and concerns about Windsor going it alone.



Wipperfurth

the public library, senior center and fire and EMS services, and the possibility of Windsor poaching business.

"The biggest thing is those agreements," Trustee Jeff Miller remarked. "Those agreements are really important for me. A lot of hard work went into establishing those and I want to see them maintained."

Wipperfurth said the board's intent is "to keep Windsor the same as it is" today and that "we're not looking to expand if we become a village."

"We don't want to become [DeForest's] competitor," Wipperfurth said. "This is about protecting our boundaries and our heritage and we as a board believe this is what our residents want."

Wipperfurth and town

Among them was the future of existing boundary agreements and programs shared between the two communities, like

attorney Connie Anderson both said they did not see any reason why shared programs and agreements would not continue in the future.

Anderson specifically said if the "political will is there" to keep everything in place, she "will work my heart out to try to make that happen."

An interesting moment came when Stravinski explained that while some Windsor residents do identify with DeForest to a degree, there is a segment of town residents who align more with Sun Prairie. And by supporting a merger with DeForest, Stravinski said that could place a wedge within the town's population.

"I don't think that's worth the risk," Stravinski said.

Village Board President Judd Blau also asked that if DeForest officials decide not to be supportive of a Windsor incorporation, would it renew the feud of days past between the two communities?

"I would hope we don't go back to those days," said Wipperfurth, adding that "I'll do everything I can to prevent that from happening again."

According to authorities, the property owner called 911 when he was at the scene by the Dane County Medical Examiner's Office.

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