

TOWN OF WINDSOR

The change accompanying the title

By Joe Pruski

DeForest Times-Tribune

In less than one week Windsor residents will head to the polls to determine Windsor's future governmental structure.

Their charge is basic and direct: "For a village," or "Against a village." While the question may be simple, the repercussions to the answer are more nuanced.

So what does it mean to become a village? In general it means protecting Windsor's borders and thus its tax base, preserving an identity rooted in agriculture, and streamlining a zoning process made cumbersome by its unincorporated nature.

For your average Windsor resident, however, the change has been described as simply "flipping the sign from town to village."

"The hope is for the most part that it's seamless," town chairman Bob Wipperfurth said.

The biggest change will be felt in Windsor's ability to control its own zoning. Right now zoning must be

approved by the town and by Dane County, and in some cases Sun Prairie and DeForest have a say.

Under an incorporated village of Windsor, all zoning and permitting would be handled by Windsor.



Wipperfurth

"[The current structure] makes growth and development harder than it needs to be,"

Windsor planning and development coordinator Amy Anderson-Schweppe said. "[Incorporation] will make it easier on developers [from a clerical standpoint] to bring in new construction and new business."

Because of some of the extra-territorial zoning issues, Anderson-Schweppe

said, town regulations change for Windsor residents depending on where you live. She said that currently residents on one side of the town might be permitted to have backyard chickens, while other residents may not.

"The rules change depending on where you live. It's quirks like that that are hard to explain to people," Anderson-Schweppe said.

In many capacities the town of Windsor already functions as a village. It operates or contracts out its own deputies, fire and emergency service protection, and community and senior center. The town has a sanitary district and staff that handle planning and zoning, engineering, and public works.

Former town of Windsor chairman and municipal

See **VOTE**, page 6

VOTE

From page 2

attorney Alan Harvey said that logistically the town's incorporation is long overdue.

"As a village Windsor would have much more local control. It will have its own zoning and it will streamline the [current] system of having many reviews from multiple jurisdictions," Harvey said. "It makes no sense that Windsor [with its land use history] cannot make its own decisions."

The main question asked at town hall meetings and presentations has revolved around taxation. Town officials have stated that an incorporated Windsor does not mean that current level of service will automatically rise.

While there is cost associated with the actual incorporation process, changes in signage, and developing new zoning code, there will likely be no increase in taxes brought on by significant increase in expenditures.

As the town continues to develop at a steady pace, service levels will be looked at as they always were.

"I can't emphasize enough that Windsor becoming a village is taxation neutral," Harvey explained. "Spending decisions determine tax rates - not incorporation."

Most municipal services will remain intact exactly as they are today, including contracting for police

protection, remaining a member of the DeForest Area Fire & EMS, carrying on garbage and recycling programs, maintaining roads and plowing snow.

One area where change will be evident is in the governing board structure itself. The current title of town chairman would be replaced with village president, and supervisors would become trustees. The board will also have the ability to increase to seven members, if it so chooses.

Wipperfurth said that if the referendum were successful that an organizational meeting would be held in November to iron out the transition.

IF IT FAILS

While supervisors are confident that residents will approve a referendum enabling the town to incorporate as a village, it is the electorate that has the final say.

The language included in the most recent state budget that allows for municipalities like Windsor to incorporate sunsets in 2020.

Wipperfurth said that if the referendum were to be unsuccessful that the town would likely revisit the issue before the language expires.

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