



THE TOWN OF
RHINEBECK · NEW YORK
FOUNDED 1686

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Questions and Answers about Court Consolidation

What is Court Consolidation?

The Village of Rhinebeck Court would close. All court functions and the two judges, clerks, and files would be transferred across the street to the Rhinebeck Town Court.

Why this a good idea?

Right now Rhinebeck has two of everything: two courtrooms, two staffs, two separate court schedules, two separate reports to the state, two offices, and two computer systems. Putting all of Rhinebeck's courts under one roof will save money, deliver better services, and improve safety for the public and judges. In New York State, Villages are not required to have courts, whereas Towns are.

What does the Court do and would the Judges have different jobs?

The core function of the justices in both the Village and Town Courts are the same. They conduct arraignments and proceedings, preside over court and render decisions under penal, vehicular, traffic, civil and other laws.

How much money will be saved?

After totaling up revenue and expenses, court costs the Village about \$45,000 per year. That money will flow directly back to the Village after consolidation. The Town spends about \$10,000 -\$20,000 per year after revenue and expenses.

Surely there must be some new costs?

Yes, there are. After consolidation, Town Court expenses will be roughly \$26,000 as outlined by Laberge. That increase will be spread among all residents of Rhinebeck. When you look at the project for both Village and Town in total, it's a net savings.

How will service improve?

Duplication of the courts confuses the public and results in law enforcement officers working additional hours to attend hearings. Consolidation fixes those problems. Furthermore, the Town court office is not open full-time and there is limited coverage for the Village Court clerk for time off. Bringing the staffs together in one location will allow a court clerk to be available during all business hours for the public. The people who use the court, such as the County DA's Office, the DC Sheriff's prisoner transport detail, law enforcement agencies, town special prosecutor and attorneys will have one court operation to work with, not two.

How will safety be improved?

Neither of the current court rooms meet New York State recommendations for safety. In the future, either one or both courtrooms will require upgrades such as connected chairs, a secure



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entry for public, a separate and secure entry for the judges to their chambers, prisoner security bars, and metal detectors.

How much will upgrades cost?

To bring a consolidated Rhinebeck courtroom up to a reasonable standard and make relevant improvements to Town Hall. The Laberge group staff Architect has assembled a high end estimate of \$400,000. We would have to assemble more detailed plans and publicly bid the project for final costs.

Who pays for all this?

New York State and Dutchess County are actively promoting local government efficiencies. Both the State and the County offer 10 to 1 matching grants for newly consolidated courts and other efficiency measures. So for every dollar that Rhinebeck spends, we can receive 10 more. The maximum available is \$400,000. Our out of pocket match would be \$40,000, if we used it all.

Must we spend the money?

No. The Town will likely hold off on improvements until grants are available. However, for safety reasons some upgrades to one or both courtrooms will be required in the future whether or not grant money is to be had. If we do not consolidate courts, we may have to undertake a renovation of Town Hall to reorganize and provide better storage, work flow, and accessibility.

Is the Town taking over the Village?

No. The Town and Village governments remain separate institutions. Both governments work together to save money when possible. This is frequently done through Inter Municipal Agreements, which allow us share goods and services when possible. It's not always possible however. For instance, an earlier study found that combining the Village and Town Highway Departments would not save money nor improve service, and so it didn't happen.

Has anyone else in New York State done this?

Coxsackie and Saranac have, and Catskill and many others are in the process.

Are the Judges in favor of court consolidation?

Judge Kane is on record as in favor of consolation. Judge Sanchez declined to participate in the process and in subsequent discussions with Village and Town officials.

Where does all this information come from?

In 2018 Dutchess County gave Rhinebeck \$30,000 to hire a consultant experienced in governmental organization. The Laberge Group of Albany was awarded a contract and wrote the report.



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This seems very fast.

The Laberge Group started their study in August 2019 and their final report was accepted by the Town in September 2020. However, the Village and Town have been discussing greater court efficiency in public meetings since 2017, when grant money was being made available.

What is the process?

If the referendum allows the courts to consolidate, the Town Board would work with the Town judges to properly plan, set up and fund the newly consolidated courts.

What exactly is planned for Town and Village Hall?

The Village hall will become more available for public functions and possible fire department expansion. Town hall will be re-organized with the assessors taking over the current judges' offices, and newly consolidated courts will be built where the stage currently is. The lower level of Town Hall will be exclusively for zoning, planning, code enforcement, and recreation offices.

If you want to learn more, you can find the full Laberge Report on the Town and Village websites. <https://ecode360.com/documents/RH0960/public/563224305.pdf>

We welcome all input.