

## Blooming Grove residents get look at proposed wards map

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BLOOMING GROVE - Tuesday's Town Board meeting drew a packed house as residents peppered a town consultant about what the future holds in the form of an election-by-ward system that the board plans to finalize well before the November 2017 elections.

Tuesday marked the first time most town residents got a peek at the proposed map, which would divide the town into six wards for council elections. Since the town has a total population of about 18,050, each of the six wards would contain about 3,005 people. The supervisor would continue to be elected at-large. About 130 residents jammed Town Hall.

When the board's consultant, Joshua Simons of the Benjamin Institute at SUNY New Paltz, wrapped his presentation, most town residents' questions focused on the long-term, especially the potential impact of the push for housing from Hasidic residents of the Village of Kiryas Joel just to the south of the Village of South Blooming Grove. Many residents said the pressure has been especially intense in the Worley Heights section of South Blooming Grove.

But Bonnie Rum, who was a member of the Blooming Grove Citizens Committee, the group that started the push for wards, said the pressure on real estate in South Blooming Grove has "fallen off the cliff" since voters approved the ward plan in a Nov. 8 referendum.

Blooming Grove has two villages, the Village of Washingtonville and the Village of South Blooming Grove. Simons said he used the village boundaries as starting points as he and a seven-member oversight committee set out to draw boundaries.

On the map, the Village of Washingtonville would be divided into two wards, roughly between north and south, with the dividing line expected to be Ahern Boulevard. Most of the village of South Blooming Grove would comprise one ward, with about 230 people spilled over into a ward to the northwest.

Since some of the existing council members live near each other, there is a possibility some could find themselves running against each other in wards if they seek to stay on the council. Simons said he was instructed not to consider incumbency as he drew the proposed map. He also said changes in population, indicated by the decennial census, might force some redistricting.

The public has 10 days to comment on the plan. A public hearing on the proposed law enacting the wards is tentatively set for Jan. 24.

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