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## Essex County Empire Zone, IDA to merge By Lohr Mckinstry

ELIZABETHTOWN – The Moriah-Port Henry-Essex County Empire Zone is seeking to escape financial hard times by merging with the Essex County Industrial Development Agency.

IDA Co-Director Jody Olcott said the zone once got \$58,000 a year from the state in operating funds, but that has since dropped.

“Over the years, it’s diminished. Last year, they received a whopping \$18,000,” Olcott said.

The zone provides tax breaks and utility discounts for qualifying businesses.

The zone program was completely revamped this year so each zone could have six non-contiguous areas in the county in which it’s located. Previously, unlimited spot zones had been allowed.

### **MOVE TO E’TOWN**

The zone office is located in the Moriah Town Hall in Port Henry now but has had periods of reduced operation due to low funds.

The county gives the zone \$40,000 a year, which would mean a 2006 budget of only \$58,000, Olcott said.

“It’s impossible to run the Empire Zone office in Port Henry for \$58,000,” she said.

“We determined because the zone program is moving countywide, it would be a good idea for the zone office to be a countywide office and be located in Elizabethtown.”

Zone Coordinator Barbara Brassard would work out of the IDA office in Elizabethtown under the new arrangement.

“The consolidation would save money and the keep the Empire Zone office operating,” Olcott said.

The IDA’s administrative assistant would also work for the zone, since the zone’s assistant is retiring.

“It makes all the sense in the world to me,” County Board of Supervisors Chairman George Canon (R-Newcomb) said. “They’ve (IDA and zone) got the same objectives.”

### **SAVINGS SEEN**

The Development Agency Board has already approved the merger, and the Empire Zone Board of Directors is slated to discuss it today.

“It would provide a savings, and it would be centrally located, for all our businesses and constituents,” said Supervisor Thomas Scozzafava (R-Moriah), who chairs the zone board.

The move would save \$21,000 a year on overhead and administration, Olcott said. Many supervisors are in favor of the plan.

“They should be together; we should be supporting them,” Supervisor Shirley Seney (R-North Elba) said. “I would like to see them move.”

The two agencies may be moving into a new building. The IDA has plans to construct new offices at the site of the old American Legion Hall in Elizabethtown.

The County Finance Committee has given its support to the consolidation, if the zone board Oks it.

#### **‘SO MANY BENEFITS’**

Supervisor Anthony Glebus (R-Lewis), who chairs the Industrial Development Agency, said the IDA Board didn’t have much difficulty endorsing the plan, since the IDA and zone work closely together anyway.

“There were so many benefits to consolidating these services,” Glebus said.

“There’s going to be much more continuity of delivery of services.”

The two agencies would keep their separate governing boards, Scozzafava said, because that’s required by law.