

The Case  
for a  
Community Manager

Town of Kirkland  
Village of Clinton  
Clinton Central Schools

Kirkland Ventures  
October 2007

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## 1. Overview

### Our Community

**Kirkland is a special community.** Few places on this globe offer the diversity and quality of life we enjoy. Our community embraces a world-class college, industries with global reach, farms and small businesses, an attractive village green, excellent schools, beautiful neighborhoods, a multitude of cultural and recreational opportunities, a library, an indoor ice arena, a historical society, an art center, and a variety of places of worship. Most importantly, Kirkland is populated with energetic, community-minded people crossing a large spectrum of socio-economic, ethnic heritage, age, and employment factors.

In local government, a team of talented and dedicated elected officials operates with strong revenue streams and virtually debt-free balance sheets. In the job sector, Kirkland's major employers, the college and nursing homes, are unlikely to relocate to another part of the world. And its major economic driver, Hamilton College, has in recent years taken steps to make good on its intention to "partner" with the community.

In short, Kirkland has most of the assets needed to compete in today's world. **We are the envy of many other communities.**

**So what is wrong?** There is plenty of evidence: empty stores, a bankrupt inn, a stagnant and ageing population, a slow-growing tax base, annual scrambling to limit government spending, perennially voted-down school budgets, village buildings not renovated to historic standards, fragmentation among stakeholders, and the lack of a long-range community vision and plan. Preliminary studies indicate that taxes, especially local school taxes, are a major contributor to our economic malaise. Budgets are further constricted since a number of non-taxed local entities use a disproportionate share of government services, thus adding to the burden for all other taxpayers.

### Kirkland Ventures

Two years ago, Kirkland Ventures, an all-volunteer, *ad hoc* citizens' group, began a five-phase effort to prepare a comprehensive community development plan for the areas served by the Clinton Central School District ("CCS") and the Town of Kirkland, including the Village of Clinton and the Clark Mills Fire District. These phases were:

- Phase 1: Observe deterrents to economic growth
- Phase 2: Identify major causes
- Phase 3: Quantify problem(s)
- Phase 4: Propose Solutions
- Phase 5: Implement Solutions

To complete Phases 1-3 and move to Phase 4, Kirkland Ventures approached the Maxwell School of Citizenship and Public Affairs at Syracuse University for assistance in conducting an economic and financial assessment of the Town, the Village and CCS. The analysis would include a benchmarking study of other, similar communities in the Northeast and recommendations for future action by Kirkland's stakeholders.

## The Maxwell Report

In May and early June, 2007, a team of professors and graduate students from Maxwell completed the "Financial Condition Analysis" of the Town, the Village, and CCS, a summary of which is included in Section 2 herein. The Maxwell team presented the report at a public meeting at the Kirkland Art Center on June 8.<sup>1</sup>

The Maxwell Report provides a detailed analysis of past, present and projected trends in the financial health of the Kirkland community. It quantifies the issues and proposes specific solutions. The three major recommendations of the Maxwell Report are:

1. create standardized and more transparent accounting practices;
2. advance the dialogue between Hamilton College and the community; and
3. add professional management to strengthen government, improve communication and plan for the future.

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<sup>1</sup> Copies of the full Maxwell Report are available for loan at the Kirkland Town Library.

## The Future

We are now in Phase 5. **It is time to begin implementing these solutions.** Kirkland Ventures proposes that the Town, the Village and CCS jointly fund a “**Community Manager**” to provide professional assistance to all three entities, improve communication, overcome fragmentation in our community, generate new revenue, help streamline government, and cultivate a plan for our future. This Community Manager would operate in an advisory capacity and be a critical liaison not only among the three governmental entities, but among and between all stakeholders in the community: government; businesses and industry; the Chamber of Commerce; civic and non-profit organizations; Hamilton College; and individuals.

Kirkland has had a fabulous past and is fortunate to have hard-working, conscientious and caring elected officials minding the community’s present. However, unless we, as a community, make certain changes, our future is threatened. There is no dearth of ideas and proposals to improve the economy and the life of the Kirkland community. In the past, the fragmentation of the community has hindered turning these ideas into reality. Kirkland Ventures believes that a professional Community Manager, utilizing and expanding the existing talent in government and in the community, can overcome this fragmentation and implement the changes needed to provide the Kirkland community with a bright and prosperous future.

Within 12-18 months the position is expected to be **self-sustaining** through:

1. generation of additional non-tax revenues for government and CCS,
2. grants and other public funds from outside the community,
3. streamlined and more effective local government, and
4. donations and financial support for projects that benefit the community but otherwise would not be undertaken without a Community Manager’s initiative and oversight.

In the long run, new tax revenues from new, for-profit businesses added to the Town’s tax rolls as a result of the economic development plan will further support the viability of the Community Manager position. Combined, both the new tax and non-tax revenues will return the community’s investment in its future many times over.

## 2. The Maxwell Report

### The Process

- Team from the Maxwell School of Public Affairs, Syracuse University
- Financial condition analysis of the Town, the Village, and CCS
- Qualitative overview of comparable college towns<sup>2</sup>
- Realistic and timely recommendations
- Written report and public presentation (June 2007)

### Findings

- Sound and steady revenue flow
- Little or no long-term debt
- Expenditures growing faster than revenues
- Stagnant population with shifting demographics
- Unsustainable, growing operating deficits at CCS
- No economies of scale in delivering public services
- Opportunity to adjust budgets and accounting practices
- Room for strengthening Town/Village relationship
- Management capacity in Town and Village governments

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<sup>2</sup> Canton, Cazenovia, Geneva, Hamilton, Potsdam and Red Hook, NY; Hanover, NH, Middlebury, VT; and Williamstown, MA.

## 2. The Maxwell Report

### Recommendations

- Communication**
- Improve communications among the various governments.
  - Strengthen and formalize the two-way Town/Gown relationship.
  - Encourage communication among community groups.
  - Develop a community “brand” to market the Town, the Village and the College.
- Planning**
- Complete the State-mandated Comprehensive Master Plan.
  - Cultivate a shared Community Vision.
  - Develop a Strategic Plan with consensus, buy-in and participation.
- Capacity**
- Hire a full-time professional manager to oversee Town, Village and CCS.
  - Expand hands-on management by elected officials.
  - Utilize community resources for econometric analysis and special projects.
- Governance**
- Maintain better records of assets, conditions and fund balances.
  - Measure service outputs and performance.
  - Consider long-term debt for development projects and future needs.
  - Hire full-time professional to manage financial affairs.

## 2. The Maxwell Report

### Salient Quotes

- “The Town of Kirkland and Village of Clinton do not properly account for their assets; their fund balances are comprised of the entities’ cash assets plus interfund transfers.” (Page 6)
- “There are certain indicators...that demonstrate that Kirkland must readjust its practices in order to continue to experience respectable financial condition.” (Page 9)
- “Growing state aid revenues should be continually monitored so Kirkland does not begin to overly rely on that revenue source.” (Page 16)
- “Kirkland is realizing growing operating expenditures [which] have grown faster than total operating revenues [and it] must make certain that they do not surpass revenues.” (Page 17)
- “Growing expenditures should be growing alongside increased or improved services.” (Page 17)
- “The Village of Clinton needs to develop a long-term financial plan and determine ways to increase their revenue sources.” (Page 31)
- “Changes in the demographic composition of the population of the Town of Kirkland and the shrinking student body have negatively affected the economies of scale of the provision of public education in CCS.” (Page 41)
- “Clinton Central Schools have constantly maintained high performance.” (Page 41)
- “The Town of Kirkland, Village of Clinton, and Hamilton College can all benefit from a branding campaign.” (Page 64)

## 2. The Maxwell Report

### Salient Quotes (continued)

- “Communication can never lack between [the College and the Town]; if and when it does the whole community will suffer.” (Page 64)
- “The future success of the Kirkland community depends on increased involvement and communication at all levels of this vibrant and diverse community.” (Page 3)
- “In order to be successful, any entity – business or governmental – must have a plan or a vision for the future.” (Page 44)
- “Planning for the future involves not only generating ideas and strategies, but also the will to implement those ideas and initiatives.” (Page 66)

### 3. Position Abstract: Community Manager

**Function:** Provides top-level support for the Town of Kirkland, the Village of Clinton, and the Clinton Central Schools to improve government effectiveness, publish a community vision, implement a strategic plan, and enhance communication and collaboration among all stakeholders in the community.

**Reports To:** Community Advisory Board (“Kirkland Now!”)<sup>3</sup>

#### Major Responsibilities

##### Helping Create Effective Government:

1. Identifies grant opportunities, writes or assists in the submission of grant applications, and oversees disbursement and use of grant funds.
2. Serves as the liaison among the three governments, including the planning and zoning boards.
3. Advises and assists government with annual budgets, financial planning, leverage, cash flow and reserve funds.
4. Identifies opportunities to streamline government through efficiency improvements, shared services and/or consolidation.

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<sup>3</sup> Nine (9) member committee made up of the Town Supervisor, the Village Mayor, the CCS Superintendent, plus one (1) additional member from each of the boards of the Town, the Village and CCS, and three (3) at-large members selected jointly by the three Boards.

5. Assists government officials with implementing updated accounting practices and standardized, transparent budgets and financial reports.
6. Assists government with periodic assessments of the quality, efficiency and effectiveness of delivered services.
7. Provides elected officials with the support necessary to expand their “hands on” approach to local government.
8. Develops and implements programs to deploy private-sector resources in the community that support government.

## **Planning Our Future:**

9. Leads, facilitates and manages the process of defining and publishing a long-term Community Vision and Strategic Plan including all stakeholders and encompassing economic, social and quality of community initiatives.
10. Assists with the publishing of the Comprehensive Master Plan and any other mandated public planning documents required of the Town, the Village, CCS and other agencies and jurisdictions.
11. Researches and publishes an economic development plan which targets specific industry and business sectors which will increase the tax base without affecting quality of community issues.
12. Spearheads studies on the economic viability of expanding public utility systems and other community projects, including local energy generation and internet service.

## **Communicating:**

13. Facilitates continuing communication and collaboration among and between individual and group stakeholders in the community, including government, agencies, businesses, civic and fraternal organizations, and the College.

14. Interfaces with Hamilton College and represents the Kirkland community and its stakeholders in all matters affecting the entities jointly.
15. Issues an annual State of the Community report and conducts annual community forums to generate consensus and participation.
16. Facilitates and manages a community branding project and the creation of a promotion plan.

## Additional Responsibilities:

17. *Ex Officio* member of the Hamilton College Town/Gown Fund committee.
18. *Ex Officio* member of the Town Planning Board and the committee updating the Comprehensive Master Plan.
19. Works with Mohawk Valley EDGE and other town and county agencies to promote and market the Town and the Mohawk Valley region.
20. Other duties, responsibilities and projects as assigned by the Community Advisory Board.

## 4. Next Steps

Kirkland Ventures is taking this proposal on “on the road” to solicit feedback, gather input, gauge consensus and build support for a plan for our community’s future. We are creating a conversation among elected officials and community leaders, civic and not-for-profit organizations, the College and other interested parties.

Kirkland Ventures will also schedule a community meeting in November for officials, community leaders and the public to discuss the Maxwell Report, its recommendations and this proposal. The meeting will begin the process of developing the community plan.

Kirkland Ventures believes that our community has the opportunity to craft its future, and the time is now. We cannot expect Oneida County or Albany to change on our behalf. Solutions will not materialize from outside our community. Our local officials have their hands full just keeping our government services running smoothly day-to-day. While we have the many of the resources needed for positive change, the community has heretofore been too fragmented to bring them together in a meaningful way. To be vibrant and successful, Kirkland must have a long-term community plan, the strategies to support it and the will to make it happen. A Community Manager is the first step in turning our shared community vision into reality.