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Amherst board defeats downsizing again

By Sandra Tan
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

After yet another agonizing round of debate, the Amherst Town Board on Monday night defeated an attempt to downsize the board from seven members to five for the fourth straight time since last January.

Council Members Barry Weinstein, Guy Marlette and Shelly Schratz voted in favor of the resolution. Council Members Daniel Ward, Mark Manna and Supervisor Satish Mohan voted against.

Co-sponsors Marlette and Weinstein reiterated that their resolution is not to downsize the Town Board, but to give town residents the opportunity to vote on the matter in referendum. "This is democracy in it's truest form," Marlette said.

Republican Council Member Weinstein attempted to gain a fourth vote for downsizing by offering to vote for a resolution that could have allowed the board Democrats to fill the board's seventh seat, currently vacant, with another Democrat.

But Manna, a Democrat, spoke against the idea.

Manna later called the downsizing proposal using "the democratic process to march ourselves to a dictatorship."

Mohan also reiterated his opposition to downsizing.

"We want dispersal of power," he said. "We want accessibility to our board members, and we want diversity of opinions. The more the merrier."

He did, however, say he would vote in favor of the downsizing resolution, but only if his amendment was attached. The amendment would have sent not only the downsizing resolution to referendum, but added seven other items for public consideration, including department mergers, outsourcing of town facilities, reducing town employees and consolidating the town's three school districts.

Those initiatives — which essentially highlighted all of the most ambitious goals of his administration — would save the town more than \$41 million, he argued.



His amendment led to lengthy negotiations among members of the board, as downsizing proponents tried to find ways of supporting Mohan's initiatives to gain his needed fourth vote for the downsizing proposal.

After several time-consuming and frustrating attempts to lay out a schedule of public hearings and resolutions for all of Mohan's proposals, board members lost patience. The supervisor's amendment was ultimately tabled, and the downsizing resolution failed to pass in a 3-3 tie.

Downsizing proponent Kevin Gaughan reiterated his plans to move forward with a citizens' petition to legally force the board to downsize.

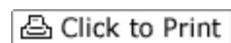
During the board's public comment period, more than half a dozen residents spoke out against the downsizing proposal.

"More power in the hands of fewer people is not democracy," said resident Judy Ferraro.

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