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Amherst's downsize votes offer 2 options

By Sandra Tan
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

The Amherst Town Board will be voting on not one, but two competing proposals to downsize from seven members to five at tonight's meeting. That promises to make the already controversial proposal even more divisive.

Republican Council Members Barry A. Weinstein, Guy R. Marlette and Shelly Schratz support a resolution calling for the board to be downsized through attrition, with two seats being eliminated by the end of next year.

But finding the critical fourth vote will be difficult. Democratic Council Members Mark A. Manna and Daniel J. Ward have steadfastly opposed downsizing.

The board will hold a work session at 3 p. m. and its regular meeting at 7 in the Amherst Municipal Building, 5583 Main St., Williamsville.

Supervisor Satish B. Mohan, a maverick Democrat, has said he opposes the notion of downsizing as bad for democracy. He has previously stated he still would be willing to let the public decide the matter in referendum, but he might have reconsidered that position in recent weeks.

Democratic Council Member Deborah Bruck Bucki, meanwhile, has previously stated that she supports the concept of downsizing but wants to see it happen through attrition. But she, too, seems to have changed her mind.

Bucki will be vacating her seat at the end of the year to become town clerk, and the board has voted to leave the seat unfilled next year, when her term would expire.

Schratz has also stated her intention not to run for re-election in 2009, meaning that two members would be leaving the board next year, making downsizing through attrition possible.

But Bucki has now submitted a competing downsizing resolution for consideration tonight that would not begin the downsizing process until 2011. In the past, competing downsizing proposals have led to the failure of the board to adopt any.



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Bucki could not be reached to comment late Friday afternoon.

Regionalism advocate Kevin P. Gaughan, who is spearheading the government-downsizing effort across the region, said he's seeing politics at work.

"I question Debbie's motives in submitting the second resolution rather than talking about and reaching a compromise on a resolution supported by three other colleagues," said Gaughan, who added that he wants to help broker a compromise.

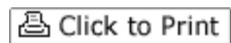
"I'm going to challenge these four folks who purport to support downsizing to get together in a room and work out language that will get downsizing accomplished," he added.

Any resolution to downsize the Amherst Town Board would need to be passed by referendum.

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