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Downsizing draws talk, not votes, in Amherst

By Sandra TanNEWS STAFF REPORTER

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At one point or another, four of seven members have expressed a willingness to consider downsizing the Amherst Town Board. But whenever the matter came to a vote, it always has been defeated.

Monday's resolution by Council Member Shelly Schratz to have the public vote on a proposal to cut the board from seven members to five by 2011 was shot down in a 5-2 vote. Two previous downsizing resolutions by members Barry Weinstein and Deborah Bruch Bucki failed to receive support in January.

Now, Kevin Gaughan, the advocate spearheading the downsizing campaign throughout the area, vows to take matters out of the board's hands, as he has done in West Seneca.

He said he was prepared to have residents go door to door with petitions to put a downsizing resolution on a ballot, but probably not in November.

"The Amherst Town Board demonstrated it does not trust town residents to decide the size and cost of government," Gaughan said Tuesday. "But by discovering and utilizing a little-known law, I intend to empower Amherst town residents to shape their government through a public referendum."

Council Members Daniel J. Ward, Mark A. Manna and Guy

R. Marlette have steadfastly opposed downsizing the board. But Supervisor Satish B. Mohan and Bucki have said they would support a reduction under certain circumstances.

Schratz's proposal Monday would have sent to public referendum a resolution to cut the board by one member in 2009 and another in 2011. Schratz said she would not run for re-election in 2009, which would create one sure vacancy.

"I do not believe that seven board members are needed to run this town," she said, estimating the reduction would save about \$80,000. "It's not really about the money. To me, it's more about a more effective and a more



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efficient type of government.”

Weinstein, who seconded Schratz’s resolution, echoed the sentiment that if the board wants to reduce the number of town employees, it should lead by example.

“If [Schratz] promises not to run in 2009,” Weinstein said, “I promise not to run in 2011.”

Those opposing the resolution argued that downsizing would be bad for local democracy.

“I think what the public wants is fewer bad decisions by its politicians, not fewer politicians,” Manna said.

Marlette added, “Bad decisions are easier to make with fewer people.”

Mohan agreed but said he would respect the people’s will. He offered to support a stripped-down version of Schratz’s resolution that simply offers to put a downsizing resolution on the November ballot.

Bucki, meanwhile, offered to support Schratz’s resolution if it were amended to establish geographic districts by 2011 for the four remaining board members, excluding the supervisor, so that residents from all parts of town would be assured representation.

Both amendments failed.

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