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Downsizing of Council comes to a halt

Lackawanna effort gets only 1 vote

By Brian Hayden NEWS STAFF REPORTER

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The latest effort to downsize government in Erie County was brought to a screeching halt Monday night.

A motion to reduce the number of Lackawanna City Council members from four to two did not have a single vote other than its sponsor, 1st Ward Councilwoman Andrea Haxton. She believes that cuts need to be made in the shrinking city of about 18,000.

"We have top-heavy government, and the spending is out of control," she said.

In Haxton's plan, the 1st and 2nd wards, and the 3rd and 4th wards would be lumped into two wards by 2012. Voters would decide which two Council members would remain in an election, Haxton said.

Other Council members were not so eager to support the initiative.

Second Ward Councilman Geoffrey

M. Szymanski said that the downsizing would cause a loss of representation. He worried that the move would isolate many in the community.

During the caucus before the meeting, he called reducing government an "atrocious."

"To reduce the amount of representation is to reduce people's voice," he said.

He claimed that Haxton proposed the issue only because she knew it would attract publicity.

In the last few months, downsizing and consolidation issues have been raised in several local municipalities. Currently, regionalism advocate Kevin P. Gaughan is circulating petitions in West Seneca to reduce the size of the Town

Board there.

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Haxton said she now hopes to bring downsizing in Lackawanna to a referendum as well. She said she also worries about reduced representation but thinks city residents deserve the right to decide the matter. She said that many of the Council members currently spend little time in City Hall.

“I feel citizens should vote on their government,” she said.

Szymanski said the Council is as large as it was when Lackawanna was a more populated city. However, he said that the best method of representation for citizens is to maintain the current number of councilmen.

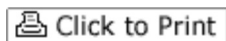
Currently, the Council comprises one at-large Council president and four ward members.

Monday night’s meeting ended abruptly. Council President Chuck Jaworski adjourned the meeting because of frequent interruptions from Haxton and the audience.

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