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CHEEKTOWAGA

Gaughan's pitch to downsize board is better received

By Harold McNeil
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Kevin P. Gaughan's most recent appeal to the Cheektowaga Town Board to consider reducing its seven-member board by two was greeted with a more measured response Tuesday than when he last appeared before town lawmakers in December 2007.

Then-Supervisor James J. Jankowiak characterized the effort as well-intentioned but misdirected. "We're efficiently run. The problem is state mandates and a county government that is inefficient," he said.

Since then, both the state and national economy have seriously faltered, which doesn't bode well for an already struggling local economy, noted Gaughan, a Buffalo lawyer and civic activist, when he addressed the Cheektowaga Town Board at a work session Wednesday.

"Given those changes in circumstances, it seemed like it would be a good idea to renew the discussion about whether or not the board should lead by example," he said.

In that vein, Gaughan presented lawmakers a proposed resolution that would commit the board to allow residents to decide whether they want the downsizing.

It is a proposal that, since last year, Gaughan has taken to Erie County's 45 town, village and city councils and boards — most contentiously, in West Seneca, where his initiative failed to make the ballot Nov. 4 on a technicality.

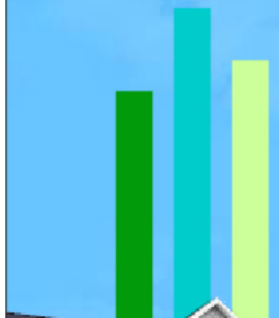
Gaughan commended the Cheektowaga board for taking alternative actions to reduce the cost of running town government, such as contracting out recycling collection and hiring civilians so police officers can be freed from performing clerical duties in the Police Department.

"But I'm here to tell you tonight that it's not enough, and the reason it's not enough is there is one additional



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change that has taken place since last December,” Gaughan said. “That is, tens of thousands of Western New Yorkers, . . . including thousands of Cheektowaga residents, are now demanding they be able to exercise their right to decide the size and the cost of their local government.”

Council Member Jeff Swiatek, who said that it is an opportune time to revisit the issue of downsizing the Town Board, echoed Gaughan’s sentiments on cost-cutting.

“So this is what I see as another step in the process, but it’s not the end, either,” Swiatek said. “The town’s challenges are not going to be fully addressed simply by one act. It’s going to take a lot of things. I think that’s what’s made clear in our budget deliberations this year.”

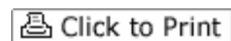
Council Member James P. Rogowski said lawmakers have already proposed cutting their salaries by 10 percent in an effort to reduce costs and lead by example. Council Member Stanley J. Kaznowski III insisted that a cost-benefit analysis be performed first.

When the board meets Monday, it is expected to consider appointing a five-member citizens panel to explore the proposal.

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