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AMHERST

Instead of finale, Gaughan the opener

By Sandra Tan NEWS STAFF REPORTER

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In a surprising about-face, the Amherst Town Board unanimously voted to move a presentation by regionalism advocate Kevin P. Gaughan near the top of Tuesday's agenda after initially relegating him to the end.

Gaughan, who spoke rapidly to try to squeeze as much of his presentation as he could into his allotted 10 minutes, asked the board to consider downsizing from seven members to five. The board ultimately let Gaughan finish in about 13 minutes.

"I just asked," Gaughan said in reference to the board members' sudden willingness to allow him to speak early. "All I said was, 'It's a valuable presentation, and it doesn't focus on any person.' "

According to a report on Gaughan's Web site, the Town of Amherst has 11 elected officials, and the ratio of citizens to elected officials is 16,644 to 1. If the City of Buffalo had the same ratio, the report states, there would be 17 Common Council members instead of nine.

Council Member Deborah Bruch Bucki said she does support downsizing of the board, pointing out that unlike many other communities in this region, Amherst is actually growing. "I think it's more important to have a more representative government," she said.

Bucki sponsored a resolution asking a committee to look into the matter further. It received no second, however, so it was not discussed.

Council Member Barry A. Weinstein later asked that the Government Study Committee make recommendations regarding the downsizing of the Town Board and the need to keep the town clerk and the highway superintendent as elected positions.

The resolution failed in a 4-3 vote.

In other business, the board voted on two measures designed to improve the town's strained relationship with the University at Buffalo.

The board agreed with a resolution by Supervisor Satish B. Mohan to establish a UB-Amherst Task Force that would meet quarterly to discuss common concerns. Mohan and Bucki said they recently met with UB President John B. Simpson and Vice President Marsha S. Henderson.

Planning Director Eric W. Gillert then recommended that the university have a role in making recommendations about the town's comprehensive plan since it affects property on the periphery of the North Campus.

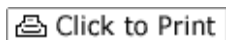
Several council members were initially supportive, but Town Attorney E. Thomas Jones pointed out that UB is currently suing the town over the board's support of a major housing development by GMH Communities on Rensch Road, near the North Campus.

The board declined to support the resolution.

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