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Lancaster Village Board OKs vote on ending ward election of trustees

By Sandra Tan NEWS STAFF REPORTER

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The Lancaster Village Board has taken another step toward downsizing its own governing body.

Monday, the board unanimously voted to give village residents the power to abolish the town's old-fashioned system of electing its trustees by ward. Currently, the village is divided into three wards, with two trustees representing each one.

The mayor is separately elected as a townwide official, bringing the total number of people serving on the board to seven.

Mayor William Cansdale said that by turning all board seats into villagewide, at-large positions, it will be easier for the board to eventually reduce its size from seven members to five through attrition.

A referendum to abolish the ward system is scheduled for March 18, paving the way for the board to eliminate two positions by as early as next year.

"We're the last village in Western New York . . . still electing trustees under the ward system," Cansdale said.

He added that there is strong public support in the village for a reduction in board size. "If I was at the supermarket, if I was at a restaurant, I've even had people approach me at funeral homes — I've had people take me aside and say they support this, that this is a good idea," Cansdale said.

He said there are concerns among some trustees about whether the elimination of wards was really necessary, but ultimately, everyone recognized the public push for change.

Deputy Mayor and First Ward Trustee Gary Ambrose called the ward system "antiquated."

"It's time to get rid of it," he said. "It's our first step in making our board two members smaller."

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Second Ward Trustee Joseph Dennis Sr. had expressed some initial interest in reducing the number of wards from three to two but said Tuesday he agrees that ending the ward system is best.

In fact, he said, the village should consider getting rid of its board altogether.

He pointed out that the village has handed over its Building Department, trash collection, animal control and police services to the Town of Lancaster and turned over its water services to the county.

That leaves the Village Board overseeing only the Fire Department, courts, sewers and Public Works Department, he said. "There isn't much for seven to do, because half of our stuff has gone to the town," Dennis said.

If voters approve ending the ward system in March, all board seats would become atlarge after the next general election for trustees in March 2009.

Both Ambrose and Dennis, who are completing their first terms and are up for re-election then, said Tuesday that they may not run for re-election next year. "It's unlikely I will run again," Ambrose said. "It's just not a good fit for me right now."

Dennis said, "I really don't feel like I will run again. I'll be 60 then. I might change my mind, depending on how I feel. Right now, my health is not so good." If those two trustees choose not to run for re-election, their seats would be eliminated, bringing the board size down to five members.

stan@buffnews.com

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