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FREDONIA

Lundine speaks up for mergers

By Susan Chiappone
CHAUTAUQUA CORRESPONDENT

FREDONIA— Former Lt. Gov. Stan Lundine said there are too many overlapping governments in New York as representatives from several northern Chautauqua County communities discussed the idea of mergers and consolidations Thursday.

The community forum held in the Fredonia Opera House theater was attended by several hundred residents who had the opportunity to hear from elected officials as well as Kevin Gaughan, an advocate for merger and consolidation who has been actively working in Erie County.

Chautauqua County Legislature Chairman Keith Ahlstrom challenged local residents: “People are too satisfied,” he said.

“We have proposed ways to reduce the size of the Legislature and reduce the size of government,” Ahlstrom added. “You need to elect people who are willing to make the change.”

Dunkirk Mayor Richard Frey said he will propose to the City Council that it be reduced by two members.

“We can put it on the ballot in the fall,” he added.

The mayor said he was in favor of consolidating police services between Dunkirk and Fredonia and even extending the service outward to other areas. He also indicated that he was in favor of one fire department to cover all of the Town of Dunkirk.

Fredonia Mayor Michael Sullivan said he was also in favor of consolidation and merger talks. He said he thinks that one water distribution system for all of northern Chautauqua County needs serious consideration. “If we can find a way to merge the village effectively, I don’t mind being the last mayor,” said Sullivan.

Gaughan encouraged people to get involved and attend meetings. “Compel a referendum on reduction,” he said.

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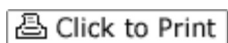
He added his efforts are having some effect in Erie County, where several municipalities are considering change.

Chautauqua County's shrinking population and high tax rates were discussed by several panelists. It was noted that each of the 25 county legislators represents about 5,000 people.

Lundine urged consolidation and mergers be studied with an eye toward savings and for offering better services.

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