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North Collins looks ahead

Leaders, residents weigh benefits of merging village into town

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Discussions in the Village of North Collins of a possible merger into the Town of North Collins will be historic. They should also be a catalyst.

This stroke of logic, rooted in hope for increased efficiency, is refreshing and could spur other villages to at least consider similar ideas. No other village in Erie County has ever dissolved its government. And the Village of North Collins is considering it for exactly the right reason: It might make government work better for residents and taxpayers.

The debate in the village stems from a convincing argument by Kevin Gaughan, a leading proponent of mergers among local governments, made during his tireless campaign to quantify and show “The Cost” of layers upon layers of government. Gaughan has been stomping around the county bringing his message of efficiency to towns, villages, hamlets and anything else that qualifies as a bureaucracy.

North Collins’ decision to change shifts what Gaughan sees as the burden of proof in consolidation arguments, to the point that “politicians must now prove why government must remain so large.”

Consider Gaughan’s stats: the Village of North Collins, with 1,033 residents, has five local legislators, creating a ratio of citizens to legislators of 206 to 1. If the City of Buffalo had the same ratio, there would be 1,358 Common Council members.

The Town of North Collins, with a population of 4,375, has 10 lawmakers including the village (five town council members and five village trustees) amounting to a ratio of citizens to legislators of 437 to 1. If Erie County had the same ratio, there would be 2,080 county legislators.

Moreover, Village Trustee Anthony George’s point was well taken when he said the village is a lower-income community and when it starts asking for money from the state and the town does the same, there’s competition.

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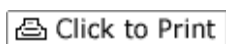
Standing together certainly makes more sense and benefits all residents.

Such benefits are crystallizing for more than just the Village of North Collins. The Village of Lancaster has agreed to eliminate two politicians and Gaughan has been in discussions with six other towns and villages that are considering his reform proposals.

A quote by North Collins Village Mayor John Mrozek says it all: “We think a single community with a single purpose, rather than two governments with perhaps competing agendas, is a more effective way of governing. We ought to be more efficient.”

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