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AMHERST

Proposal to shrink board by two members rejected, 6-1

By Sandra Tan NEWS STAFF REPORTER

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A resolution to downsize the Amherst Town Board went down in flames Monday.

Council Member Barry A. Weinstein, who sponsored the resolution, said he supported the campaign by regionalism advocate Kevin P. Gaughan to downsize the Town Board by two members.

The resolution would have dropped the number of council members from seven to five. It was defeated, 6-1, with only Weinstein voting in support of the resolution.

Weinstein said downsizing of local government is what the public wants. He referenced the successful downsizing of the Erie County Legislature from 17 members to 15, while Weinstein served as a county legislator.

“There was a hue and cry throughout the county from all kinds of elected officials opposed to it,” he said. “And yet we approved it in the Legislature, and it passed with an 80 percent vote in referendum.”

Downsizing the board could save taxpayers more than \$51,000 a year, Weinstein stated.

Several council members spoke out against the resolution, saying that the Town Board has significant responsibilities and broad policy-making and land-use authority in a town that is growing in population.

Given the town’s size, budget and scope of services, reducing the board’s size doesn’t make sense, they said. “What the public wants is fewer bad decisions by their politicians, not fewer politicians,” said Council Member Mark A. Manna. “Getting rid of two of us doesn’t make this board any better.”

With regard to Gaughan's presentation before the board, Council Member Guy R. Marlette said he found some of his numbers regarding the number of elected officials in Amherst to be inflated. He added that Gaughan asked him for a one-on-one meeting to further lay out his agenda but never followed through.

Council Member Deborah Bruch Bucki said that if the board were to be diminished, it should be done over time through attrition.

Council Member Daniel J. Ward said, "I suppose if I could take this to its logical extreme, if we reduce to four, why would you stop there? Then you go to two, and then you get into the one and have a dictator. It's certainly a lot more efficient, and it's a lot cheaper."

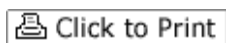
In other action, the board:

- Delayed a vote on a proposal for changes to the board's rules of order. The proposal, which was put together by a four-member bipartisan committee with Bucki as chairwoman, was tabled to give council members more time to read and offer amendments to the proposal.
- Voted to raise certain Recreation Department fees, and to increase preferred ice fees at the Pepsi Center by \$10 per hour and to increase nonpreferred ice fees by \$5 per hour, effective Sept. 1.
- Approved a resolution by Marlette to make sure the Highway Department plows sidewalks along Sheridan Drive in areas where homeowners have received a town waiver from having to clear the sidewalks that run behind their houses. The resolution was amended to apply to other areas where homeowners have received such a town waiver.

stan@buffnews.com

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