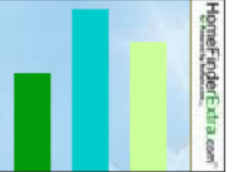




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Signals in Cheektowaga, Amherst differ on issue of board downsizing

By Michelle Kearns and Sandra Tan
NEWS STAFF REPORTERS

Two town boards sent different messages Monday night about the prospects for downsizing their local governments.

The Cheektowaga Town Board emphatically signaled that it's not interested in getting smaller when it voted, 5-2, to reject a committee study of how to trim the board by two members.

Amherst Town Board members were more ambiguous, with members choosing not to fill a vacant seat. Some members said that it could be the first step on the road to a smaller board, while others said that it might have more to do with politics than reform.

Cheektowaga's board, which was trying to save money last week by looking for ways to trim the \$20,000 salaries of its members by \$2,000, voted down the beginnings of a more drastic plan to save money: cutting the number of board members.

"Does Kevin Gaughan live in Cheektowaga?" asked Stanley J. Kaznowski III, one of five board members to vote against the proposal to form an exploratory committee on downsizing. "I'm just asking a simple question: To your knowledge, will this board consist of Cheektowaga residents or not?"

While the committee would have included Cheektowaga residents, it also would have included Gaughan, a Buffalo resident and smaller-government advocate.

"How sad that politicians would play on Cheektowaga residents' fears by talking about who lives where when we all live in the same community no matter what town or village," Gaughan said after the meeting.

Cheektowaga and Amherst are the only suburbs in Erie County with more than five members on their policymaking boards.




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In an early sign that some members of Amherst's board might be ready to consider permanent downsizing in the future, the board approved a resolution Monday to leave Council Member Deborah Bruch Bucki's position open when she becomes town clerk Jan. 1.

The board typically appoints, by a four-vote majority, a person to fill a board vacancy when a council member vacates his or her seat midterm. Bucki's council term expires at the end of next year, meaning that any new board appointee would serve for a year then be free to run for re-election.

However, the board voted, 5-1, to leave the seat open, which would mean that the board would operate with only six members in 2009. Under this scenario, a 3-3 tie vote on any resolution would equal non-approval of a resolution.

Gaughan has made a study of local governments with the idea that fewer council and board members in Western New York municipalities would save money.

Once the measures are put to a public vote, they do well, he said, citing votes to go from seven to five members passed with about 90 percent in favor in the Village of Lancaster and 80 percent in favor in the Town of Tonawanda.

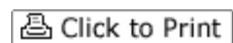
Cheektowaga's population has shifted enough to make shrinking the board sensible, Gaughan said: It has gone from 121,000 in 1980 to the current count, closer to 87,000, he said.

Gaughan said that in Cheektowaga, "we're going to consider the petition process."

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