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EDITORIALS

Streamlining government

A proposal to make villages vanish should spur real debate over efficiency

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Regionalism advocate Kevin Gaughan, that ever-useful thorn in the side of government bureaucrats, has come up with a dramatic proposal that is undeniably logical, even if it is politically improbable: He wants all of the county's 16 villages to dissolve and merge into their town governments.

Why not? With villages comprising 9 percent of the population and 23 percent of its 439 elected officials, they would need some compelling reason, besides the simple fact of their existence, to justify the continuation of their separate political structures. We can't think of any.

The problem, of course, is that they do exist — in fact and in the imaginations of many residents, who like the idea of living in East Aurora better than the Town of Aurora, or Williamsville more than the Town of Amherst. The physical villages, of course, would remain. But the cost of separate government is exorbitant and the benefits often negligible.

Challenging that mind-set is the first task in pursuing Gaughan's vision of smaller, more efficient government. Dissolving villages into towns requires the assent of both municipalities. And, indeed, that's part of the purpose of his reports on the size and distribution of elected officials: changing minds.

We don't know if Gaughan will ever be able to celebrate the goal of seeing all 16 villages dissolved, but it's probably more useful to see the challenge as a direction rather than a destination. If one or two villages take on this worthwhile project, then one or two more might join the parade.

It's worth noting that other people also are working on consolidations and efficiencies, making lower-profile and local — but undeniably valuable — contributions to the process. But none of it would happen without someone applying the dynamite to a tangled and wasteful system. With his investigations and reports to the public on how

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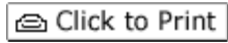
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their government works, Gaughan has been trying to strike the match. The public owes him its thanks, but more than that, its action.

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