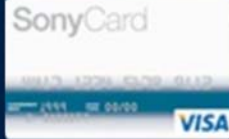




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ORCHARD PARK

Town board is not receptive to Gaughan's downsizing plan

By Elmer Ploetz **NEWS STAFF REPORTER**

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Regionalism advocate Kevin Gaughan said his presentation to the Orchard Park Town Board Wednesday night drew a more muted response than at his previous stop in Lancaster.

That's if you call "muted" having his recommendations to reduce town and village board size be described as "simplistic" and "unfortunate." And that was by a Town Board member.

Gaughan says he's no longer trying to get local governments to merge themselves into fewer entities. There was just too much resistance.

So he's attempting to address every town and village board and city council in Erie County. Orchard Park was No. 2 on the list.

He had a friendly audience Wednesday night, or at least the more vocal portion of the crowd. The response from Board members was cordial, but — as in Lancaster — skeptical.

Councilwoman Nan Ackerman suggested Gaughan was pinning the blame for Erie County's decline on too many elected officials while ignoring the opening of the St. Lawrence Seaway, the loss of control of Niagara hydropower and the end of the mining that used to bring iron here to be converted into steel.

"To look at it and say we're in this terrible mess because we have too many government officials I think is a little simplistic and a bit unfortunate," said Ackerman.

After the meeting, Gaughan acknowledged that getting elected officials to consider giving up some of their jobs isn't an easy argument. He said he's trying to build relationships with local officials in hopes of bringing about



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some change in how government is run in Western New York, but he said that isn't easy.

"The public officials, you can almost feel an institutional resistance," Gaughan said. "But I think all of that's going to be overwhelmed by this universal yearning for a better economy for Western New York. And I'm just offering a measured, responsible step toward that goal."

Gaughan has issued reports showing that Erie County, with its 25 towns, 16 villages, three cities and a county government, has 439 elected officials — far more than similar metro areas such as Indianapolis, Baltimore and Charlotte.

He said over the past 10 years, local governments could have saved \$150 million if they could have halved those positions.

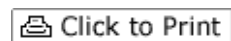
It was a message that resonated with some in the audience.

"Everybody is saying, 'Somebody else do the changes, not me,' " said Louis Boehm, a resident. "It's got to start somewhere."

eploetz@buffnews.com

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