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## Another Voice / Local government

# Vincent Graber: Downsizing in West Seneca is not worth the risk

By Vincent Graber Jr.

For the first time since West Seneca was formed in 1851, town residents will be voting on the size of their Town Board.

Our five-member board, the same size it was in 1851 when our population was just over 2,000, was chosen because it was determined to be the best size to conduct the town's business. With 46,000 residents, that five-member board is needed more today than it was when our town was formed.

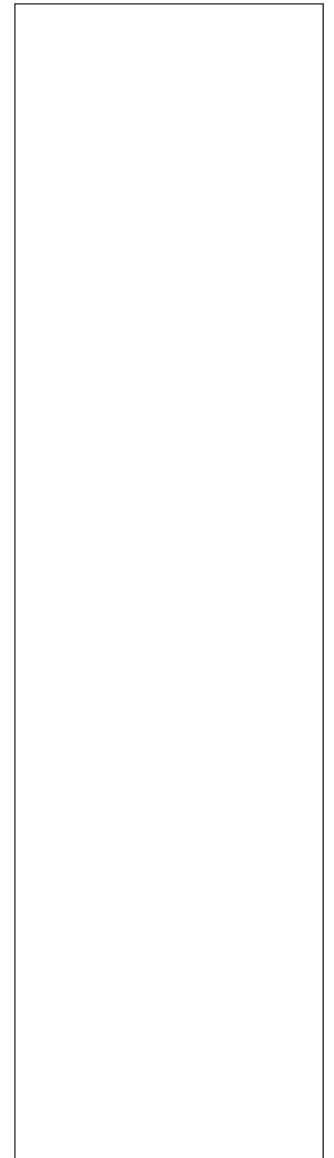
The complexity of running the town today is not comparable to what it was in 1851. In 2009, the town provides services that did not exist in the past, such as garbage pickup, snow removal, roads, parks, water, sanitary and storm sewers, police, and youth and senior services.

These services are not discretionary. Providing these services costs more than \$41 million a year and the Town Board is tasked with making sure that they are being performed in the most cost-effective way.

If the objective is to reduce the cost of government, then downsizing is not the answer. Eliminating two council members could save taxpayers only 5.4 cents per thousand of assessed valuation. Assessed value or taxable value is lower than market value.

You can find your assessed value on your tax bill. A house assessed at \$70,000 would have a property tax reduction of only \$3.78 per year. This is a small benefit, especially when weighed against the risks posed by downsizing.

Downsizing will hurt the town's ability to borrow money, which is essential to running the town's business. To rebuild roads, repair buildings and purchase new equipment, including new snowplows and garbage trucks, the town must borrow money. In 2008 alone, the town borrowed more than \$4.8 million.



Downsizing will downgrade our bond rating, a critical factor that determines interest rates. The result will be increased borrowing costs. A 1 percent increase in the interest rate for the borrowing in 2008 alone would have raised our annual payment by \$48,000. Since our nearly \$25 million in debt turns over at higher interest rates, the town could waste even more money.

Since downsizing doesn't make economic sense, what about its impact on the integrity of the town? Three-member boards are more subject to manipulation and corruption. A three-member board requires only a two-person majority to run the town's business.

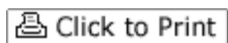
It is far easier for two people in a room to collude against the third to get what they want. Five members in a room set a higher bar for agreement. Our five-member board is vital to the integrity of West Seneca.

I admit getting rid of two politicians will make you feel good, but in the end, having good representation is worth more than having less representation. On June 3, I will be voting "no" to downsizing.

*Vincent Graber Jr. is a council member in the Town of West Seneca.*

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