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HAMBURG

Vote urged on reducing Town Board

By Barbara O'Brien
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

Downsize fever is catching. Endorsed Democratic candidates in Hamburg are calling for a referendum in November to reduce the size of the Town Board.

They said they plan to collect signatures to get the measure on the ballot.

Democrats said the votes last week to downsize the boards in the neighboring towns of West Seneca and Evans have something to do with their stance.

“We believe this vote is a reaction by the public,” said Patricia Michalek, the party’s candidate for supervisor. “People want to reduce costs, . . . and we agree wholeheartedly.”

Jon Gorman, a candidate to fill the two years remaining in an unexpired term, said the action would eliminate the seat he is seeking and the one held by Kevin Smardz, a Republican, when both terms are up in two years.

He said a vote in November would allow time to consider the advantages and disadvantages, and provide an opportunity for more residents to vote — without costing any extra money.

“If we’re serious about saving the taxpayers of the town money, and if we’re serious about putting government in the hands of the people, it should be in November,” he said. “Primary vote turnouts in September are not very large. If you want to ensure the largest number of people get a say on town government, we should do it in November.”

The endorsed Democrats are not saying they favor reducing the Town Board to three from five members but that the public should vote on it.

Gorman said the endorsed candidates, who include Joseph Collins and Leonard Kowalski, would study the issue and present a position before the election.



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“What does this entail?” he asked. “How much does it increase the workload? You’ve got three people whose workload doubles. Is that going to best serve the taxpayers?”

Michalek said other questions also should be considered.

“How much are we going to save by reducing two Council seats? Why don’t we look at [eliminating] lifetime health benefits for the Council, or stipends?” she said.

Some might see this as the endorsed Democrats’ trying to co-opt the issue from citizen activist Kevin Gaughan, who spearheaded the efforts in West Seneca and Evans, and his cousin, Dennis Gaughan, who is mounting a primary challenge to Michalek for supervisor.

“Good for them. I’d be for it,” Dennis Gaughan said. “I back my cousin Kevin’s reforms.”

Michalek called for conferring with Gaughan on whether he would work to put the measure on the ballot in November.

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