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WEST SENECA

West Seneca plans June referendum on Town Board downsizing

By Helen Jones
NEWS STAFF REPORTER

After a short but contentious meeting Wednesday night, the West Seneca Town Board set June 3 for a public referendum on the issue of whether to downsize the five-member board to three members.

Town Supervisor Wallace Piotrowski said the town had received a sufficient number of petition signatures to put the issue on the ballot, and offered a resolution to schedule the vote for May 26. The resolution also named 14 polling sites, and set the hours for 8 a. m. to 8 p. m.

Board Member Vincent Graber immediately offered an amendment to the resolution, changing the date of the vote to June 3, and said details about the times and voting sites would be discussed at a later date.

Town Board Member Sheila Meegan asked Graber why they couldn't discuss the details during Wednesday's meeting. "The opportunity to discuss this is right now," she said.

While he said he didn't want to discuss the issue Wednesday night, Graber did say he wanted fewer hours for voting and fewer sites than those the supervisor proposed.

"I will not be in support of having 12 hours," he said.

Piotrowski then asked Graber if he was trying to suppress the vote.

Graber argued that the changes would make it easier for voters and save the town money.

Within minutes of Graber's amendment, Councilwoman Christina Wleklinski Bove called the vote, bringing the discussion to an end. Piotrowski resisted the effort, saying they were still on the question — the time before the



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vote, when members voice their opinions.

“I think we still have a right to discuss it,” he said.

Wleklinski Bove persisted, and the board voted, 3-2, with Piotrowski and Meegan voting no. The board then immediately voted to adjourn.

Kevin Gaughan, the citizen activist who has been traveling throughout Western New York in an effort to reduce the size of local governments, was pleased with the board’s decision to set the date for the referendum.

“You just saw something that has never happened before in Western New York,” he said. “We’re going to have a magnificent debate. This is about citizens reclaiming government.”

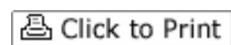
The attempt to downsize the West Seneca Town Board began last year, when Gaughan discovered a little-known law that allowed voters to put the issue on the ballot. A team of volunteers collected more than 4,000 signatures, but a decision by the appellate division of State Supreme Court ruled that the wording of the petition was misleading and would confuse voters.

Gaughan then crafted a “court-sanctioned” petition and the volunteers started all over again, collecting more than 1,400 signatures, enough to put the issue on the ballot, he said.

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