

Ward election system to be on November ballot | Goshen and Chester NY

CHESTER

Chester town board agrees unanimously to put the idea to voters even as some members express doubts

Published Jul 12, 2018 at 2:38 pm (Updated Jul 12, 2018)

Photos



By Frances Ruth Harris

— The Chester town board voted unanimously Wednesday night to put the proposed ward election system on the November ballot.

Two board members, Bob Valentine and Brendan Medican, said they weren't sold on the idea of changing the town's election system to one that would divide Chester into districts, with each deciding its own representative on the board. But they agreed with the rest of the board that the decision should be left to the voters.

Stephen Keahon of Preserve Chester, a citizens' group that supports the switch to a ward system, told the Chronicle: "The agenda was pushed by the residents and should be voted on by the residents. Preserve Chester is happy with this result. Everyone has a right to live anywhere. We just want to ensure we have equal representation in our town. Now that we have wards on the November ballot, it's all about stopping voter apathy. Chester residents need to wake up and get in the voting booth."

Valentine noted that a referendum held at the same time as the general election would save the town from paying for a special election, which would cost from \$15,000 to \$20,000.

Supervisor Alex Jamieson said he wants to retain a four-member board rather than expand it to six members, an option under the ward system.

He also said that, if the ward system passes, he'd prefer that the town board draw the district boundaries and not the Orange County Board of Elections.

Proponents say the ward system will help ease the social exchanges expected when the Greens of Chester, a 431-unit housing development, increases voter rolls by nearly 13 percent. Hasidim are expected to occupy the Greens when it is completed.

Gerald Benjamin, a professor and director of the Benjamin Center at SUNY New Paltz, which collaborates with local governments on topics of concern to local citizens, told residents in June: "We have seen these effects on local governance as Hasidic population grows — one, increased conflict over land use, two, resultant effort to create new governments and villages, three, increased growth-related pressure for basic services like water and sewer, four, increased litigiousness, five, redefinition of local political dynamics from party-based politics to politics based on support or opposition to the Hasidic community to overall increased mobilization and turnout."



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