

Village will pay longtime clerk to retire

Written by Carol Pomeday

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Lila Mueller agrees to severance package worth \$55,000, ending year of tension between her and officials

A year of tension between Village of Belgium officials elected last year and longtime Clerk Lila Mueller ended last week when Mueller agreed to step down in exchange for a severance package worth an estimated \$55,000.

Mueller will receive an annual payment of \$10,000 for three years and three years of health and dental insurance, which will cost the village about \$8,200 a year, according to Treasurer Jamie Cecil.

Mueller's resignation, submitted Wednesday, Sept. 15, was unanimously accepted by the Village Board Friday.

Village President Kevin Kowalkowski said it was time to part ways.

"Lila's done a lot for the village and we realize that, but there comes a point in time when there needs to be change," he said.

"She recognized it, and we recognized it. As a village and board, we chose to move on."

Mueller, 62, said the last year "has been extremely contrary to the previous 28 years," but she has received strong support from residents.

"I wish to thank the wonderful people of Belgium who continue to support me," she said. "I have many wonderful memories to carry with me to the next stage of my career. I'm just taking the next step on my life's journey."

Her reflexology business Ray of Hope in Belgium will become a full-time job, Mueller said.

Mueller's severance package is not overly generous, Kowalkowski said.

"With a person of her tenure, it is standard and average according to our legal representative, who deals with this all the time," Kowalkowski said. "It's what people get with 30 years tenure. We didn't want to do anything that could be construed as unfair, and we didn't want to give away the bank."

Mueller agreed to hold the village harmless, which essentially means she will not sue officials, Kowalkowski said.

"Obviously, she can try if she wants to, but we will point to the clause. Her legal team approved it before she signed it," he said.

On the advice of Village Attorney Gerald Antoine, the board hired human resources attorney

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Jim Korom of von Briesen and Roper, a Milwaukee law firm, to negotiate with Mueller and her attorney.

Mueller was elected village clerk in 1981. The job was later made an appointed position and combined with the treasurer job. The jobs were separated in December when Mueller was named clerk and deputy treasurer and Cecil was appointed treasurer and deputy clerk. Mueller was paid \$54,000 last year.

Ozaukee Press has requested a copy of the severance agreement. The terms require the village to give Mueller five days notice prior to releasing the document, Cecil said.

Kowalkowski said the board will decide how to structure and fill the clerk's job.

Last week, he asked the board to change the residency requirement for employees, including appointed positions. He recommended employees be allowed to live within 30 minutes travel time.

Trustee Vickie Boehnlein disagreed, saying that was OK for office help, but public works employees should live closer so they can respond quickly to emergencies.

Kowalkowski said he based his recommendation on what other communities the same size require.

"Some of these jobs require certain skills and the residency requirement limits our pool to the people who live here," he told the board.

The issue was referred to the General Government and Finance Committee.