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Town decides to appoint its own building overseer after hearing of delays, but who gets the job debated

After listening to complaints about a state building inspector from contractors and a frustrated homeowner, the Belgium Town Board decided Monday to hire its own inspector, but who it will be remains a question.

Town resident Peter Weiss told the board he expected to have the foundation of his new home poured two months ago and the walls up by now.

Instead, the footings were poured Tuesday for the 2,300-square-foot house at 5529 Lake Church Rd.

Weiss said the state building inspector assigned to his project is requiring such detailed plans that it's caused delays. He said he paid $1,400 in permit fees and has little to show for it.

The state recently changed building inspectors, Town Zoning Administrator Charles Parks said. When the town decided not to hire a certified building inspector two years ago, the state appointed Independent Inspections of Waukesha to do inspections. There were no problems until this year, Parks said.

"Apparently, commercial building inspectors don't have much work with this economy, so they're doing home inspections," Parks said.

Parks said he's had complaints about the paperwork required and delays in returning telephone calls.

The board unanimously adopt the state uniform dwelling code and created the position of building inspector, but who should be appointed created controversy.

Parks asked Independent Inspections based in Waukesha and Rick Fellenz, building inspector for the towns of Grafton and Port Washington, to submit proposals.

Fellenz said he is a state-certified inspector but does not have the $2 million insurance coverage required to be an independent inspector. He is a Town of Port Washington employee and covered under its insurance. The town keeps 15% of building permit fees, Fellenz said.

The Town of Grafton keeps 20% of fees because it provides insurance, a computer and office, Fellenz said.

Connie Watt, vice president of Independent Inspections, said her company, which has inspectors throughout the state and in Illinois and Florida, has its own insurance coverage.

The company would hold office hours if the town wants, she said. At the end of the project, the

town will get a complete record of the inspections.

“Our reviews don’t take nearly as long as what you’ve experienced,” Watt said. “We usually provide next day service.”

Town Chairman Francis Kleckner said he prefers hiring someone local and directed all his questions to Fellenz.

Parks and Supr. Tom Winker expressed concerns about Fellenz being covered by the town’s insurance.

“Personally, I think it’s important for the inspector to have his own insurance,” Winker said. “I think it opens the town to a little bit of liability.”

Parks said it was difficult to compare the two proposals, but he estimated the owner of a basic 2,000-square-foot house would pay $695 in fees to Independent Inspections and $875 in fees to Fellenz.

Kleckner questioned his computations.

Parks objected to what he called the cozy relationship with Fellenz.

“I don’t know Mr. Fellenz and you all apparently do. You need to read both proposals. You have to look at what the town is getting for what you’re paying,” Parks said. “Mr. Fellenz will essentially become an employee, and we’ve always said we want to keep the town simple.

“We’re basically volunteers. We don’t have staff or an office. I think that’s part of the reason we went with state inspections.”

The board directed Town Clerk Ginger Murphy to send the ordinance to the state with a letter stating the town is reviewing proposals submitted by two certified inspectors and will appoint one of them.

Murphy will also find out how much it will cost to include Fellenz under the town’s insurance policy and how that affects the town’s liability.