

## Village residents face garbage fee

Written by CAROL POMEDAY

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### Finance Committee says shifting waste services will help meet tax-levy limits

In an effort to keep within the state-imposed tax levy restrictions, the Village of Belgium's Finance and Personnel Committee has recommended garbage collection be removed from the operating budget and instead be a fee assessed on tax bills.

The board also decided to no longer subsidize garbage collection for businesses.

It costs the village \$136,000 to have Veolia Environmental provide weekly curbside pickup at all residences and businesses. If approved by the Village Board, each residential property would be assessed \$100 for the service. Businesses will pay Veolia about \$40 more.

"There is a likelihood the village may still absorb some of the cost," Trustee Vickie Boehnlein said Wednesday. "We estimated (the fee) low."

The Village Board will be asked to approve a resolution allowing the fee to be placed on the tax bill.

Saukville has been assessing a fee for the service for several years and Grafton plans to assess a fee for recycling this year.

"People aren't going to pay more. They will just pay differently, but I'm worried about how people will react to it," Belgium Public Works Director Dan Birenbaum said.

"I'm all for this," Trustee Ken Hirschmann said. "We pay for it either way, and it takes it off our budget."

Trustee Jeff Thiel, who is not a member of the committee, argued that it is another tax and circumvents the intent of the law not to raise taxes.

"We have to do something or cut services," Boehnlein said.

Hirschmann suggested a drop-off site rather than curbside pickup, but no one supported that change.

The committee recommended a \$1 million budget that calls for a \$700,101 tax levy, a 1.1% increase, the maximum allowed by the state.

Village officials learned last week it will receive \$45,690 in state shared revenue, a 23.8% decrease from last year's \$60,000. The village also expects to get \$47,450 in state transportation aid.

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The budget includes \$188,678 in debt service for previous borrowing including new water and sewer lines on some streets.

Among items cut from the budget by the committee were \$5,000 to create a dog park on 11.3 acres owned by Julaine Demge adjacent to the wastewater treatment plant and \$2,300 from the Tree Committee budget, including \$2,000 for planting trees.

The village's largest expense, \$189,600, is for fire protection. That includes \$126,655 for hydrant rental, which is paid to the village's water utility fund, and \$55,400 for fire department operations. The village pays 40% and the Town of Belgium pays 60% of the fire department's budget (see related story).

Public Works Department employees will receive a 3.5% increase. The raises were approved by the Village Board in September after learning the employees wages had been frozen for three years.

Employees were contributing to their pension plan and paying a portion of their health insurance premium before it became mandatory under the state budget-repair law.

The board also agreed to put \$2,500 in the budget for incentive bonuses for the treasurer, clerk and office assistant.

Village President Richard Howells had recommended wage increases, but Boehnlein opposed that because each was hired or promoted this year. Instead, she suggested bonuses based on performance reviews.

Street maintenance is expected to cost \$78,300 with \$14,050 allocated for snow removal.

Village Board members aren't receiving pay increases although it may look that way in the budget. The amount is higher next year because the board is at full strength. There were one or two trustee positions open for most of this year.

The board's compensation will total \$10,800 with each member receiving \$45 per village board meetings and \$22.50 for each committee meeting.

The village president will receive \$1,500 in addition to the meeting pay and get a new computer for \$500.

Legal services are estimated to be \$20,000.

A five-yard plow truck is scheduled to be replaced in 2012, but that expense will come from tax incremental district funds.

A public hearing on the budget will be at 6 p.m. Thursday, Nov. 10. The Village Board will meet after the hearing to adopt the budget and vote on the garbage fee assessment resolution.

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