

Village OKs land deal for unpaid taxes

Written by CAROL POMEDAY

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County holds off on foreclosure while terms are being negotiated

The Belgium Village Board last week unanimously approved acquiring 11.3 acres in the industrial park next to the wastewater treatment facility for back taxes and assessments.

The property owned by Julaine Demge of Oceanside, Calif., was scheduled for foreclosure for back taxes owed to Ozaukee County. The county has agreed to hold off the foreclosure while the village negotiates with Demge.

Demge owes \$9,000 for back taxes to the county and \$28,000 in village assessments. If the county forecloses on the property, the village would probably receive nothing, Village Attorney Gerald Antoine told the board Nov. 14.

"We'll try to complete (the acquisition) before Jan. 1, so we don't have to pay another year in real-estate taxes," he said.

All expenses related to the purchase, including legal fees, will be paid through the tax-incremental district. The district will even cover the \$27,000 in village assessments, which was for infrastructure in the industrial park, according to Dave Wagner, the village's financial consultant.

The land acquisition has been debated by the board for several months. Demge, who grew up in Belgium, wants assurance that a dog park named in memory of her dog Pepi will be developed on the land.

Because a change in the zoning code is needed to allow a dog park in the area, the village cannot make that promise, Antoine said.

However, Village President Richard Howells said he has assured Demge the village will try to fulfill her wishes.

Trustee Vickie Boehnlein, who spearheaded a failed effort to develop a dog park in Heritage Park, said no tax money should be used to develop a dog park.

People have volunteered to raise money for developing and maintaining a park where they can allow their dogs to play off leashes, she said. The Demge land is ideal because there are no residences close by, she added.

In other business, the board approved installing a second video camera at the recycling center. The \$2,300 camera will be aimed at the license plates of vehicles entering the recycling area to discourage nonresidents from using the site and people bringing items that are not allowed or require a fee for disposal. The video can be monitored in the shop, Public Works Director Dan Birenbaum said.

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The board asked that additional bids be obtained for taking down four trees in Community Park. The large trees have been dropping limbs for years. This year, some limbs were large enough to hurt people, Birenbaum said. One tree has an 18-inch diameter hole in the trunk.

The village will allow people to pay utility bills, permits and other charges, except taxes, on GovPayNet. The user will be charged a 3% fee. The board decided not to allow taxes to be paid that way because of the fee.

In another accounting move, the board approved switching its three operating accounts from Harris Bank to Associated Bank, which offers a higher interest rate. The village also has funds at Port Washington State Bank.

The village's ice skating rink will be moved from the ball diamond in Community Park to the tennis courts, which are lit at night.