

Remote-read water meters approved

Written by CAROL POMEDAY
Wednesday, 15 February 2012 17:34

Village officials say \$375,000 expense will be covered by reduced labor costs; president's computer nixed

Village of Belgium officials approved some expensive purchases Monday, but a new laptop for the village president was not one of them.

The board approved spending up to \$375,000 to purchase Sensus remote-read water meters that will be monitored by the company rather than village employees. It was estimated the village would save \$50,000 because it won't have to purchase software and updates for the meters. Upgrades are included in the software hosting option.

"I know it's a huge figure, but we're going to be borrowing money for the water system and this could be included in that," Public Works Director Dan Birenbaum said.

Water meters are supposed to be replaced every 20 years and many village meters are almost that old, noted Pat Wester, public works employee who currently reads meters.

Having remote-read meters will save money in labor costs and will detect water leaks quickly, Birenbaum said.

A proposal to spend \$560 on a laptop computer for Village President Richard Howells failed on a tie vote.

Voting for the laptop were Howells and trustees John Hise and Clem Gottsacker. Opposed were trustees Vickie Boehnlein, Jason Acevedo and Ken Hirschmann.

The board agreed the office needs a new server and office assistant Sherri Erickson needs a new computer, but a more powerful one than the one she selected so the item was tabled.

A village vehicle is needed, trustees agreed, to reduce liability when employees, including the marshal, use their own vehicles for village business.

A debate on whether it is wiser to purchase a used, high-mileage vehicle for under \$10,000 or a new vehicle for \$16,000 was cut short when Paul Walsh, owner of Say Cheese, a cheese store in Belgium, said they should lease a car or buy a 2010 Toyota Camry with 30,000 miles that will last for 10 years.

Walsh said he was a car salesman before starting the cheese store.

Acevedo said he will check into leasing a vehicle and the cost of a Camry and will have a recommendation at the March 12 meeting.

The board authorized Antoine to draw up a resolution to create incentives to help lure

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businesses to the tax incremental district, which includes the industrial park and areas around the Luxembourg American Cultural Center. He will also draw up a sample agreement based on the criteria developed.

Businesses elsewhere in the village that decide to move to the district would be eligible for the incentives, the Finance and Personnel Committee recommended.

The incentives would grant \$2,000 per full-time employee up to \$25,000. During the first five years, \$2,000 per year would be forgiven with the remainder of the loan forgiven at the end of the sixth year.

Hirschmann said he's concerned that there is nothing to prevent a company from hiring 25 employees, then cutting the jobs a few years later.

"It's an honor system," Howells said. "Not everyone is honest, but there are a lot of honorable people."

Acevedo noted that the village doesn't have to grant incentives if they don't like the company's credentials or plans.

"We need a program in order to offer any incentives and this is the first step," Boehnlein said.

The money will come from funds that were generated by the district, she noted.

Incentives will also be given to businesses that advertise on the village's message board at Community Park. The cost will be \$15 per month for those who commit to one year, \$20 per month for a six-month commitment or \$25 per month.

The board decided to spend \$1,000 from the room tax fund to promote the village in the Belgium Area Chamber of Commerce map and brochure and the Ozaukee County 2012 tourism brochure.

The village will split the cost for a one-quarter page ad in Ozaukee County brochure with the chamber.

Village Attorney Gerald Antoine said the state law requires 70% of the room tax be used to promote overnight stays.

The Regency Inn, which had not paid its room tax for years, is current for 2011, Treasurer Kelly Romanini said.

The room-tax fund has \$6,900.