

Bid to remove village trustee fails

Written by MICHAEL LoCICERO
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Village president files charges contending Hirschmann's absences were neglecting duty

A rare attempt to remove a Village of Belgium trustee from office for neglecting his duties failed Monday.

The Village Board voted 4-2 against ousting Trustee Ken Hirschmann, who called the effort to remove him from office a "witch hunt."

Village President Rich Howells, who filed the "verified charges" against Hirschmann because of the number of meetings he has missed, and Trustee John Hise voted to remove Hirschmann.

According to village records, Hirschmann had not attended a Village Board meeting since Aug. 12 or any meeting of the three committees he serves on since Aug. 26.

He was, however, at Monday's meeting and told trustees his absences were due to unspecified personal and medical issues.

"Maybe I didn't handle this right, but I ran into some problems that made me not able to serve the board," he said. "I want to fulfill my obligation. I'm not resigning. I'm not going anywhere."

Village Clerk Kaity Olsen presented "verified charges" against Hirschmann during a public hearing Monday in support of Howells' attempt to oust him.

The charges stated in part that Hirschmann "should be removed on the grounds of gross neglect of duty."

"The facts support the removal of Ken as trustee," Olsen said prior to the vote by the board.

Hirschmann is the chairman of the Public Services Committee and serves on the Parks, Recreation and Forestry Committee and Public Safety Committee.

Hirschmann was originally appointed for a one-year term in 2011 and re-elected in 2012. His term will expire on April 14. He is not seeking re-election.

"Every trustee has a responsibility to be here when the big village decisions are made," Hise said. "Long absences need some documentation. It ought not to be a stretch to have a letter or an email or something."

Hirschmann wouldn't discuss the issues he was dealing with, saying it's "not responsible for me to do so."

"I don't know of any huge thing that has happened in this village in the months of September, October, November, December," he said. "I anticipated coming back after the holidays when

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things got straightened out.”

Trustee Jason Acevedo, who voted to keep Hirschmann on the board, said Hirschmann should have told the board he wasn't going to be able to serve instead of “having a disconnect.”

“I didn't need to know specifics. You shouldn't have to tell people about your personal life,” Acevedo said. “If it was me, I would just want to inform them (the board) that I have stuff going on and it's not going to happen for a little while.”

Hirschmann defended his performance as a trustee.

“All I can say is up until August, I think I was a pretty decent trustee,” he said. “Let me finish my term and fade off into the sunset.”

Howells seemed relieved that the process is over and can work with Hirschmann.

“I'm one of those who believes now it's over and done with,” Howells said. “It's now ink, and it's ancient history in my opinion.”