

Town ponders ways to buy fire truck

Written by CAROL POMEDAY
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Residents will be asked to exceed tax levy limit for one year or borrow money

Town of Belgium officials are trying to determine the best way to pay the town's share of a 2002 Pierce Quantum fire truck that costs almost \$265,000.

Belgium Fire Chief Dan Birenbaum told the board Monday that its share of the truck is \$158,800 or 60% of the cost. The village will pay 40% or \$105,690.

The split is based on equalized valuations, but Town Chairman Francis Kleckner said that should change.

"Considering the fact the village has a lot more population than the town, I proposed a 50-50 split, but that hasn't been discussed with the village," Kleckner said.

He asked Birenbaum to set up a meeting with village, town and fire department officials to discuss that option.

The town does not have enough money to meet its obligation by mid-September, when the truck is expected to be available, regardless of the cost-sharing ratio, Town Clerk Ginger Murphy said.

When the last fire truck was purchased, residents approved increasing taxes for one year to pay for it rather than borrow money. The vote was taken at the annual meeting.

A meeting of electors would have to be held to authorize the board to exceed the state tax levy limit, Murphy said.

Even if a tax increase is approved, the money will not be received until next year, so the town will have to borrow funds for the truck, she said,

Murphy said the least expensive option she found was a 10-year note that a guaranteed interest of 3.75% for three years. The interest would then increase to the prime rate. She will continue to check with other financial institutions.

Town resident Dennis Dimmer suggested she look for 10-year loans that don't charge a penalty fee for early repayment.

"There is no guarantee that people will say, 'Pay it off. Raise my taxes,'" he said.

Supr. Tom Winker said he prefers a one-time assessment.

"It makes us live within our means," he said.

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Village and town officials approved the fire truck purchase in June.

The fire department was unsuccessful in its attempt to obtain a grant to purchase a new Pierce Quantum fire truck for \$500,000, so Birenbaum found the used fire engine.

The truck, which has 20,000 miles and pumps 2,000 gallons of water per minute, is large enough to hold all the department's rescue equipment, which is now carried in three trucks, Birenbaum said.

It was owned by the Freewood Acres Fire Company in New Jersey and is being purchased through Command Fire Apparatus of Lancaster, Pa., which will paint the truck white and add a foam suppression system.

The truck will replace a 1979 fire engine that can only pump 750 gallons per minute.

Birenbaum said the department will not have to purchase another major piece of equipment until 2018, when a grass fire unit is scheduled to be replaced.