

District puts squeeze on notices

Written by MARK JAEGER

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Officials say publishing condensed proceedings could cut expense in half

The Northern Ozaukee School Board has voted to cut back on publishing meeting minutes in a move intended to save money.

After Supt. Blake Peuse noted the district spends between \$2,000 and \$3,000 to publish monthly proceedings in Ozaukee Press, the board asked that condensed versions of the meeting proceedings be used.

Peuse said Wisconsin Statutes do not require school districts or municipalities to publish detailed accounts of public meetings, saying the minimum requirement is that motions and votes be published.

The state law says published minutes must reflect “the substance of every official action taken.”

Although board meeting minutes can be read on the district website after they have been approved by the board, state statutes require that they also be printed in some format.

Board member Stacie Stark said she was reluctant to support a suggestion that the printing of minutes be dropped.

“I am concerned that people would think we have something to hide,” Stark said.

Board member Kendall Thistle cast the lone vote against abbreviating the meeting proceedings.

Thistle said he was concerned the district would be minimizing communication, especially with older adults who might not be computer savvy enough to read minutes online.

Publishing condensed meeting minutes would cut the district’s legal notice bill in half, according to Peuse.

“We could put the money saved toward educating children,” he said.

The decision to print condensed proceedings will be reviewed after a trial period of up to six months.

In another move designed to save money, the board named the Milwaukee law firm von Briesen & Roper its legal counsel.

Peuse said he worked with the firm when he was assistant superintendent in New Berlin and was pleased with its background in legal matters involving school districts.

He also said the firm’s rates are lower than Godfrey & Kahn, which has represented the district in legal matters.

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The hourly rates for von Briesen & Roper range from \$230 to \$180.

In approving the motion to name the new firm the district's legal counsel, the board also kept the door open to use Godfrey & Kahn in specific cases.

"We will do our best to make sure you have no business from us," Board President Paul Krause told attorney James Korom of von Briesen & Roper.