

Town to stick with county plowing

Written by MARK JAEGER

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Officials unconvinced private contract could provide comparable service when needed most

It didn't take long last week for the Fredonia Town Board to decide there is no benefit in pulling its snow-plowing contract with the Ozaukee County Highway Department.

Supr. John Blasczyk had championed the notion of seeing what kind of savings were possible in hiring a private contractor for winter road clearing.

Town Chairman Richard Mueller reluctantly went along with the request, but said he has been satisfied with the work the county has done in the town.

The privatization push lost considerable momentum when only one contractor submitted a bid for the work, and that offer was a little sketchy.

The town received a sealed bid from M. Peters Trucking of West Bend, indicating the company would be willing to do plowing for the town.

However, the bid only made reference to the hourly rate it would charge for three different pieces of plowing equipment.

Those rates included \$72 an hour for a one-ton plow with 10-foot blade, \$104 an hour for a truck with plowing wings and \$110 an hour for a payloader.

There was no representative from M Peters at the board meeting.

In contrast, Ozaukee County Highway Commissioner Robert Dreblow attended the session to make the case for retaining county services.

Dreblow said the county has a contract with the town for snow removal that runs through 2012.

"We do want to keep providing plowing services to the township. We are available 24/7 and have the equipment needed if there is any kind of winter emergency. We can handle anything that comes up," he said.

"However, if this is something you want to do, the county wouldn't stop you."

Dreblow then provided town officials an exhaustive accounting of how much plowing work the county has done in recent winters.

In the past five plowing seasons, which run from November to April, Dreblow said the town has been billed \$398,000 — an average of just under \$80,000 a year.

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County plowing expenses ranged from as little as \$41,600 in 2006-'07 to as much as \$100,000 in 2007-'08. Last winter's plowing bill came to more than \$96,000.

Dreblow denied the suggestion that all plowing in the town is charged at time and a half, although he said that rate does apply for work done on weekends.

The town is also charged \$820 a month for equipment storage, which is essentially the charge to have plows and salt ready when needed.

"We are not here to make a profit. The law allows us only to cover our costs," Dreblow said.

The county services received some unsolicited support from two local fire chiefs, Pete Wagner from the Waubeka Fire Department and Brian Schommer of the Fredonia Fire Department.

"We have some serious concerns about going to privatization," Wagner said.

He cited a bad storm three years ago when more than 18 inches of snow fell, and a rescue call came into the department. County plows cleared the route for rescue personnel.

"You are talking life or death if we can't get to them," Wagner said.

Several residents of Country Lane and River Park Road also asked town officials to retain county services, saying their isolated neighborhoods might be cut off for extended periods if a private plowing company is hired.

Supr. Mark Schubert said he received a lot of phone calls about keeping the country plowing contract, and made that motion.

The board unanimously approved staying with the county.

After the meeting, Blasczyk said he was satisfied with the outcome of the vote, even though he was disappointed that only one contractor was interested in the work.

"After hearing from the county, I have no problem staying with them," he said.

"It all comes down to dollars and cents, and that is why we had to look into using a private contractor. We owe that to the taxpayers."