

Higher parking fines, fees on the way

Written by Steve Ostermann
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Village set to raise charges in sweeping changes needed to offset shortfall from state aid reductions

The Village of Grafton is poised to raise fees for parking tickets, record requests and other services offered by the police in an effort to offset a pending budget crunch.

The Public Safety Committee this week recommended raising the fees in response to a request from Village Administrator Darrell Hofland, who said the increases are part of sweeping changes needed to ease a shortfall created by state aid cuts.

As recommended by Police Chief Charles Wenten, parking fines will be doubled — from \$10 to \$20 — if paid within 20 days. The fine will be increased to \$50 if paid after 20 days but within 60 days as well as for all handicapped-parking violations.

The current schedule for parking citations calls for fees of \$10 if paid within 10 days, \$20 for 11 to 28 days, \$35 for 29 to 58 days and \$40 after 58 days. Handicapped-parking violations are \$30 if paid within 58 days.

In a report to the committee, Wenten said his department has not increased parking fines for more than 20 years.

Other proposed fee changes for police services include charging \$10 to open a locked vehicle, \$10 to take fingerprints for employment or identification and \$2 for the first page of a document copy in an open-records request plus 25 cents for each additional page.

Currently, the department does not charge for unlocking vehicles and provides free fingerprinting for people who live or work in the village. The fee for documents is 25 cents per page.

Wenten recommended all the fee hikes go into effect immediately after being approved by the Village Board.

Hofland said the increases are part of a comprehensive effort to recoup expenses and offset the village's anticipated loss of more than \$254,000 in state shared revenue, transportation aid and recycling grant money.

"The notification of a significant reduction in state aid has resulted in the village staff examining all aspects of municipal operations," Hofland said. "The goal of all the requests is to bring fees in line with the village's actual costs for providing the services."

Hofland said the charges for parking citations and police services are part of a comprehensive effort targeting fee changes and service cuts in other departments, including public works, parks and recreation.

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He said the proposed changes for police-related fees are expected to generate an additional \$17,100 in revenue annually, including \$12,000 more from parking tickets.

The current schedule for parking fines is expected to generate \$20,000 in revenue this year, Hofland said.

Among other fee changes, the Public Works Board this week recommended increasing cost of permits for street construction from \$100 to \$200; for construction of curbs, sidewalks and alleys from \$35 to \$50; for construction in a public right-of-way from \$35 to \$50; for utility work in a right-of-way from \$25 to \$50; and for utility work in a street from \$25 to \$200.

The board recommended assessing a triple fee for failure to obtain a permit before work begins. The village currently charges a double fee for that violation.

In addition, the board backed charging nonresidents \$40 per load to deliver wood chips, a service that is currently free.

Hofland said the Works Board recommendations would generate \$4,600 more in yearly revenue.

He said the pending enactment of the state budget-repair bill into law has prompted Grafton and other communities to expedite searches for cost-savings options. In response, the Village Board is scheduled to consider an extensive list of proposed fee increases and service cuts at its 6 p.m. meeting Monday, April 17.

“The reduction of state aid is part of a bigger challenge facing all levels of government to right-size their operations,” Hofland said. “The village management team will make a comprehensive recommendation to the Village Board.”

Hofland said the village faces a \$500,000 budget shortfall, which includes the \$254,000 reduction in state aid and contractual commitments to unionized employees in 2012.

“There are existing contracts in place for next year, so additional adjustments have to be made for fixed costs,” he said