Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
Wednesday, 29 June 2011 17:06

Grafton, Cedarburg officials agree to study consolidating operations in reponse to 2012 budget constraints

Options for shared services, including the consolidation of emergency dispatch, library and recreation services, will be explored by Grafton and Cedarburg officials in the coming weeks in response to 2012 budget constraints.

The Grafton Village Board and Cedarburg Common Council agreed to take that step during a joint meeting Monday.

“Officials in both communities are committed to working together to find cost-savings alternatives,” Village President Jim Brunnquell said. “We’ve agreed to look at a variety of options that would benefit both sides.”

The cooperative effort comes as both municipalities begin preparing 2012 budgets with pending cuts in state-shared revenue.

Brunnquell said he and Cedarburg Mayor Greg Myers will appoint a committee made up of board and council representatives for the study.

Among the committee’s focal points will be four cost-savings options identified in a Joint 2012 Initiative report presented at Monday’s meeting:

• Consolidate emergency dispatch operations of the village and city into one site at the Grafton Police Station.

Joint operations would be initially staffed with an equal number of Grafton and Cedarburg telecommunicators. Each department would continue to be responsible for its own clerical staff needs.

The change is expected to save each municipality $80,000 in reduced staff and technology costs.

• Having Grafton contract with the city to manage the Grafton Park and Recreation Department.

Cedarburg’s Park, Recreation and Forestry Department would oversee village operations and be a staff resource for the Grafton Park and Recreation Board. With the change, the village would eliminate its park and recreation director.

The Grafton department currently oversees parks, recreation programs, the Family Aquatic Center and senior center. Under the change, the Grafton park system would eventually be managed by the village’s Public Works Department.

The change is expected to save each municipality $45,000.

• Operate the Grafton residential yard-waste site as a joint venture, with each community providing equal staffing and equipment.

Using an electronic card, village and city residents could access the site during daylight hours seven days per week to dispose of brush, grass clippings, leaves and other debris. Free mulch and topsoil would be available to card holders.
A user fee of $40 per household is expected to cover the annual cost of $75,000 for staffing and equipment.

The change is expected to save Grafton $15,000, which would be paid by Cedarburg to help defray the cost of the facility. The city would not receive any savings in 2012.

• Consolidate the Grafton and Cedarburg library boards to promote joint planning and operations.

Although each community would continue to own and operate its own library, oversight by one board could “maximize their limited resources for the betterment of the two communities,” the report states.

The consolidation is not expected to save either municipality money next year but could result in more cost-effective library operations, officials said.

Village Administrator Darrell Hofland said the joint meeting was a brain-storming session to review concepts. No decisions have been made, but any cooperative efforts will have to be agreed upon by early September, he said.

“If a decision is made by Labor Day, it would fit in with final budget deliberations (in October),” Hofland said.

Brunnquell said the four initiatives came out of talks between Grafton and Cedarburg officials earlier this year.

“These are just ideas for some areas where the communities have similar services and operations,” he said. “But they aren’t the only ones the committee will look at.

“I think there will be a lot of questions and comments from staff members, employees and residents as we discuss things further.”

Brunnquell said the proximity of Grafton and Cedarburg and a long history of cooperative efforts in municipal services and civic activities make a joint study of cost-savings options a natural.

“We do share equipment and contracts now,” he said. “This is a logical thing to look at.”

Early this year, the village anticipated a loss of $223,000 in state aid as part of Gov. Scott

Walker's biennial budget. With the budget now signed into law, final adjustments are expected soon.

"Whatever the numbers, I think it's important to understand the concept of business as usual doesn't apply anymore," Brunnquell said. "An important goal is for residents realize some changes may have to be made, and there could be difficult decisions."

Brunnquell said he expects the joint committee to make recommendations to the Cedarburg Common Council and Grafton Village Board for consideration as part of the budget approval process.