

Shared waste-yard plan to get closer look

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
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Grafton-Cedarburg committee agrees to further study proposal as one of several cost-saving options

A plan that would give City of Cedarburg residents access to the Village of Grafton's yard-waste site as part of a cost-savings option for both communities is continuing to be explored.

The proposal, which is projected to save Grafton at least \$15,000 in 2012, was reviewed Tuesday by the Joint Initiative Executive Committee, a six-member group that includes Grafton trustees and Cedarburg aldermen.

In a report to the committee, Village Public Works Director Dave Murphy proposed operating the yard-waste site on Lakefield Road as a joint venture, with each municipality providing equal staffing and equipment.

The village has operated the yard since 2010, allowing residents who purchase annual access cards for \$20 to drop off grass clippings, brush and small amounts of dirt, concrete and rocks. Residents are also allowed to pick up wood chips and topsoil at no cost at the facility, which is open daily.

Murphy suggested allowing Cedarburg residents to use the yard with access cards in exchange for the city sharing operational costs and making several other contributions, including paying the village \$20,000 annually for 19 years to cover half the construction cost as well as \$10 per card annually for administrative costs.

Cedarburg has its own waste yard, but the facility is only open Saturdays and limits drop-offs to grass clippings, leaves, brush and garden debris.

"The Village Board and Public Works Board decided these were reasonable costs," Murphy said.

However, Cedarburg officials expressed doubt that the shared-use plan would benefit the city.

"This is the first time we've seen this proposal, but it's hard to see how we would get any savings out of this," said Tom Wiza, Cedarburg's public works director, who noted that the city spends \$12,500 annually to operate its waste yard.

"I'm sure our residents would like to be able to drop off items every day, but it would be difficult for Cedarburg to realize a cost savings."

Under the plan for a joint operation, Cedarburg would save money by closing its waste yard and possibly eliminating curbside collection of brush, Murphy said.

Committee members Robert Loomis and Paul Radtke, both Cedarburg aldermen, said the proposal was worth further study.

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“I think it would make sense for our Public Works Commission to look at this and see if there are more savings,” Loomis said.

“Grafton does offer some services we don’t,” Radtke said. “It’s just a matter of making the numbers all work.”

The proposal was referred to the city’s Public Works Commission for discussion Thursday, Sept. 1. A recommendation from the commission is expected to be considered by the committee at its next meeting Wednesday, Sept. 21.

The committee was formed following a June meeting in which village and city officials agreed to explore ways to pare municipal costs in response to 2012 budget constraints. In addition to the waste-yard plan, the options include consolidating emergency dispatch, library and recreation services.

Last week, the committee rejected a plan to combine dispatch services into one site at the Grafton Police Station, a move which could have saved each municipality \$80,000 in reduced staff and technology costs the first year.

The plan called for joint operations to be staffed by equal numbers of Grafton and Cedarburg telecommunicators. Each department would have been responsible for its own clerical staff needs.

However, Grafton Police Chief Charles Wenten and Cedarburg Police Chief Tom Frank both said there would be additional costs for equipment to combine dispatch systems and a loss of some local services for each community. Consolidating the systems by the end of this year to provide cost savings in 2012 budgets was not practical, committee members agreed.

On Monday, the committee also began discussing a plan that calls for the village to hire the city to manage the Grafton Park and Recreation Department, a change that would save each municipality an estimated \$45,000 annually.

The city’s Park, Recreation and Forestry Department would oversee village operations and be a staff resource for the Grafton Park and Recreation Board. In turn, the village would eliminate the position of park and recreation director, currently held by John Safstrom.

Committee members took no action on the proposal, but two of them — Grafton trustees Susan Meinecke and Jim Grant — voiced opposition to the plan.

“I don’t see how merging the programs would work,” Meinecke said. “I can’t imagine having one director going between communities.”

Referring to Safstrom, Grant said it “would be a bad move to remove someone who has built a lot of these programs.”

Committee members agreed to have officials from both recreation departments explore options

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for shared programs, which is currently done on a limited basis, including youth track and field and some senior activities. The City of Port Washington should be included in discussions, members said.

Shared recreation programs will be on the agenda at the Sept. 21 meeting, which will be held at 7 p.m. at Grafton Village Hall.

The committee also scheduled a 6 p.m. meeting Wednesday, Sept. 28, at Cedarburg City Hall to consider the possible consolidation of library services.

The committee is expected to make recommendations to the Village Board and Common Council this fall as part of each municipality's 2012 budget approval process.

Other committee members are Grafton Trustee David Liss and Cedarburg Alderman Ronald Reimer.