

Board sets residency rule for emergency personnel

Written by STEVE OSTERMANN
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Ordinance change means employees will be required to live within 20 miles of village

In an effort to standardize residency rules for emergency personnel, the Grafton Village Board on Monday approved an ordinance change requiring them to live within 20 miles of the village.

The decision, by a 5-2 vote, is designed to update long-standing rules calling for public works employees to live within 17 miles of the village and Police Department members to live within 25 miles.

Village Administrator Darrell Hofland said the new residency rule would comply with state law and help ensure that employees can respond quickly to emergency situations, including snowstorms.

The requirement applies to full-time employees in the police, fire, public works, sewer and water departments as well as park and recreation employees required to be licensed for snow removal and ice control.

With the passage of the 2013-15 state budget, municipalities are prohibited from having residency rules for employees except for law enforcement, fire and other emergency personnel, all of whom can be required to live within 15 miles of municipal boundaries.

In recommending the change, the village's Finance Committee "split the difference" between the residency distance requirements for public works employees and police department members, Hofland said. Even with the change, employees are allowed to live farther away than state law requires, he added.

Because residency rules for police officers are covered by contract, the village will have to negotiate ordinance changes with the Grafton Professional Police Officers Association, Hofland said. He recommended the residency rules for the police chief, police captain and the newly hired full-time fire chief be consistent with contract language.

Hofland said all village employees currently live within 20 miles, so a grandfather provision is not needed to exempt anyone from the requirement. After the ordinance was adopted in the 1970s, the board never changed it, instead spelling out residency rules in the employee handbook, he noted.

Trustees Lisa Harbeck and Dave Antoine voted against the change, which Harbeck said was unnecessary.

"It's all micro-management. We're trying to put in more regulations," Harbeck said. "I don't think it's necessary because most people fall into this category anyway."

Sean Kellar, a public works employee, told the board the residency rule is unfair.

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“I think most employees realize that we have certain criteria to follow,” he said. “To tell someone you’re two miles away from an imaginary line — what happens if you find a house outside of the area?”

But Hofland said the ordinance allows the Village Board to waive the residency requirement for a full-time employee after reviewing individual situations.

“We’re not telling people where to live,” Village President Jim Brunnquell said. “This only refers to people responding to emergencies. It’s for what the village feels it needs for its residents.”