

Port police chief job draws a crowd

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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Soon-to-be-vacant post attracts more than 20 applicants, including two department members, before deadline

Twenty-three people applied to become Port Washington's new police chief by Wednesday morning, just hours before the 5 p.m. Aug. 31 deadline, Police and Fire Commission Chairman Rick Nelson said.

"I'm a little surprised," Nelson said. "I expected a few more, but a lot of the time a number of applications come in the last day or two before the deadline so the number should increase."

There are about eight candidates from out of state, Nelson said, but the vast majority are from throughout Wisconsin.

Two applicants are from within the department, he said, adding he expected at least one more candidate from the department to apply before the Wednesday evening deadline.

There are five potential candidates in the department — Captain Mike Keller and lieutenants Kevin Hingiss, Mike Davel, Tom Barbuch and Eric Leet — who meet the standards set for the job, commission members have said.

Applications postmarked by Aug. 31 will be considered by the commission, he noted.

In 2005, the last time the city sought a new police chief, 72 applications were received after a nationwide search.

"There are some highly qualified candidates," Nelson said of the field of applicants. "Those who meet the criteria set by the commission really meet it and are highly qualified. Some have significant life experiences. Some have master's degrees and even beyond. Some have gone to some really fine schools.

"There are also some that I look at and wonder why they're sending in an application."

A panel of five area police chiefs will do the initial review of applications next week and recommend a list of candidates to interview, Nelson said.

The commission will review that list in closed session during its Monday, Sept. 12, meeting, he said, noting the group can accept the list, or add or subtract candidates from it.

The panel of police chiefs will then do face-to-face interviews with the candidates, Nelson said.

The field will then be narrowed, with the finalists being sent to an assessment center, probably in October, he said.

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"I'd like to get it (the list) to no more than a half-dozen," Nelson said.

The commission will then interview the finalists before selecting a successor to Chief Richard Thomas, probably in November, he said. A background check will be done following the selection.

Commission members would like the new chief to be on the staff in time to work with Thomas, who has been the chief since Aug. 29, 2005, before his retirement on Dec. 31.

The commission has discussed the possibility of allowing all the candidates from within the department to continue through the entire selection process, Nelson said, but no decision has been made.

The requirements for the new chief include:

A bachelor's degree in business, public administration, criminal justice or a closely related field.

Additional training from the FBI National Academy, Northwestern University, Southern Police Institute or similar law-enforcement institution.

At least 10 years of progressively responsible law-enforcement experience, including five years in a command position.

A valid driver's license and be eligible for Wisconsin law-enforcement certification. That certification must be attained within one year.

Applicants must be willing to move to the City of Port Washington within one year of their appointment.

They must be serious about such things as accreditation, consolidation, community-oriented policing, collaboration with Ozaukee County and other police agencies and budgeting.