

Town to hold referendum on clerk's post

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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Port board decides to ask residents next spring if they want office changed from elected to appointed

Town of Port Washington residents will decide next spring whether to continue with an elected clerk or instead appoint the community's next clerk.

The Town Board on Monday decided to hold a referendum on the issue during the April 2014 election.

"You don't hurt anything by putting it on the ballot," Supr. Mike Didier said.

The impetus for the move was a spat between Town Clerk Jenny Schlenvogt and Town Chairman Jim Melichar over a land division.

But Melichar praised Schlenvogt's work as clerk Monday, saying "She is the most qualified in the town for the job. I think the town's been running pretty smoothly except for a couple bumps in the road."

Town resident Teri Dylak, who recently retired after 23 years as the Village of Grafton clerk, urged the board to hold the referendum.

An appointed clerk is the way to go, Dylak said.

"It's in the best interest of the town. It's in the best interest of everybody," she said. "It's a position that takes a long time to feel comfortable in."

The clerk's duties are many and varied, Dylak said, and it takes a long time to learn them.

Because the clerk is elected every two years, there is the potential for turnover every other year, she said, and that "would be disruptive to the whole process."

Appointing a clerk would not only give the town the opportunity to select the best qualified person, it would provide security for the employee, Dylak said. Residents and businesses also would know that a trained person is filling the post and will be there when needed, she said.

Appointing a clerk would make the process of filling the position simpler if the clerk resigns in mid-term, Melichar said.

It would also eliminate the possibility that a clerk would be elected in a popularity contest, Didier said.

"If it's a personality contest, an unqualified person could get in," he said.

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This will be the second time in recent history the town considers appointing its clerk. In 2010, residents rejected the change by a 25-vote margin.