

Town to ask voters if clerk should be elected

Written by KRISTYN HALBIG ZIEHM
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Should the Town of Port Washington clerk be elected or appointed?

That question will be put to voters this spring, the Town Board agreed earlier this month.

The position is integral to the town and its operations, board members said, and if someone who isn't qualified is elected it could cause havoc.

"This is one position where, if you don't have someone in who's qualified or if you get a disgruntled person in, it could really put the town in a tizzy," Town Chairman Jim Melichar said.

By appointing a clerk, the town could ensure continuity and a professional operation, he said.

"Otherwise, every two years you could have a new town clerk elected," Building Inspector Rick Fellenz added.

"It's a pretty specialized job," Town Supr. Jim Rychtik said. "I know what the town has invested in training to get a person who's qualified for the job. I think this is a good idea."

Town Clerk Jenny Schlenvogt said it takes a substantial amount of training and experience to adequately handle the post.

"I've been clerk for 3-1/2 years, and I finally feel comfortable, like I know what I'm doing," she said — something her predecessor Susan Westerbeke told her would be the case.

Schlenvogt also noted that the board could require more of an appointed clerk than an elected one.

For example, she said, an elected clerk can hold as many or as few office hours as he likes. An appointed clerk, on the other hand, would have to keep the hours determined by the Town Board.

The clerk isn't a voting member of the Town Board and doesn't determine policy, the board added.

This wouldn't be the first time the town put the question of the clerk's position on the ballot. A referendum on the issue in 2010 failed, 343-319.

Supr. Mike Didier noted that most townships have elected clerks. A 2012 Wisconsin Towns Association poll showed of the 1,257 townships, only 188 had appointed clerks, he said.

Resident Terry Anewenter questioned the need for a change, saying elected clerks have served the town well.

"What's the point?" he asked. "We've had what — three clerks in 20 years. Jenny's been

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unopposed the last two elections. She's qualified."

Although the board informally agreed to the referendum this week, members deferred formal action until Jan. 6, when they will determine the actual wording of the question to be placed on the ballot.