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Contract with Grafton for inspections covers for Biernat's departure

When Village of Saukville Community Development Director Brian Biernat left his position last month for a planning job with the City of Cudahy, it forced village officials to take a closer look at how they conduct business.

That brainstorming resulted in shuffling of responsibilities in what village officials are touting as examples of intergovernmental cooperation on two front.

The Village Board unanimously approved an agreement last week contracting with the Village of Grafton for all building inspection services.

Those duties had previously been handled by Biernat.

Beginning Monday, Nov. 7, the processing of building, electrical and plumbing permits will be administered by the Village of Grafton's Inspection Department.

Permit forms will continue to be available at Saukville's Municipal Center, as well as at the village's Web site, but all questions and inspection scheduling will be done at the Village of Grafton's municipal offices.

The intergovernmental agreement, which was also endorsed last week by the Grafton Village Board, runs through 2012.

Presuming the arrangement works well for both municipalities, plans are already under way for an extension of the agreement.

"We are confident we will be receiving professional service from Grafton. (Building Inspector) Tom Johnson does a great job for Grafton," said Village Administrator Dawn Wagner.

"We are expecting this to be a beneficial relationship with the Village of Grafton. It should be a win-win for both communities, resulting in a cost savings for us and a source of revenue for Grafton."

The agreement specifies that Saukville will pay Grafton $500 a month for the service, plus 60% of the permit fee revenue.

In order to implement the agreement, Saukville also had to adopt the fee schedule used by Grafton. That new schedule will mean an increase in virtually every permit and inspection charge.

As an example, the cost of a building permit for a single-family home will increase from 26 cents a square foot to 36 cents a square foot under the Grafton schedule.

The permit fee for manufacturing buildings will increase from 22 cents per square foot to 34 cents per square foot.

Saukville will be billed $55 an hour if Grafton officials are required to attend local meetings to discuss inspection issues.

“The current economy has been bad, but it is good in that it gives us time to make this change before the end of the building doldrums reach us,” Wagner said.

“If there are any bumps in the road, you guys will be the first to know,” she told trustees.

Wagner said the village may have to contract with professional planners to handle issues as they arise.

“That would be money well spent,” she said.

Trustees also agreed to contract with Ozaukee Economic Development to handle local revolving-loan fund agreements. Biernat previously handled local participation in the program, which makes state money available to new or expanding businesses.

Although it is the first such administrative agreement OED has with a municipality, Executive Director Kathleen Cady Schilling told trustees the arrangement is likely to become a model for other communities as the Southeastern Wisconsin Regional Planning Commission bows out of the program.

Cady Schilling said OED has already been active in coordinating local loans, and the agreement will simply expand that role.

The village will be charged $80 an hour for work done on the loan program, although that cost will be taken from any approved loans rather than the tax levy. The SEWRPC fee is $85 an hour.

Wagner likened having OED take the lead role in the loan program with “one-stop shopping” for businesses.

Biernat’s departure from Saukville can be seen an another sign of the stalled economy. In 2009, his job was reduced to 30 hours a week because there was not enough development activity in the village to justify a full-time position.