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Officials hope part-time position will spur interest in development possibilities

Village of Saukville officials are hoping a change in the way planning services are provided could lead to a new surge in economic development.

Last week, the Village Board approved contracting with Marilyn Haroldson of Hartland to handle planning and development duties for the village on a trial basis.

The initial agreement, once finalized and reviewed by the village attorney, will run through July. Haroldson's monthly retainer fee will be $1,150, for 25 hours a month.

The contract will make it clear she is an independent contract who is not eligible for employee benefits.

The agreement is the village's response to filling the need for planning services created when Brian Biernat resigned as director of community development in September to take a position with the City of Cudahy.

Up until this time, those planning duties were handled by Village Administrator Dawn Wagner and Public Works Director Roy Wilhelm.

Because of a slumping economy, there hasn't been much demand for planning services in the village, but officials are hoping that Haroldson will come up with ways to spur interest in local economic development.

"Other communities are seeing development. There is no reason we shouldn't be seeing that in Saukville, too," Village President Barb Dickmann said.

"We were very frank in discussing the position with Marilyn, saying we expect it to be more than reviewing plans and taking minutes at meetings. My thought is to ask her for ideas on how we can push our community forward. We need to find ways to put Saukville back in the market."

One of the challenges Saukville faces if growth is a goal, Dickmann said, is that there are no buildable lots in the community.

"We have some projects already platted, but nothing ready," she said.

Another priority, Dickmann said, will be to re-energize the downtown redevelopment plan which the village spent months crafting shortly before the nation's economic downturn took hold.

Dickmann said she and Wagner met with individuals and groups about providing planning assistance to the village. Both saw the importance of personalizing the service.

According to the agreement, Haroldson will be in Village Hall at least one day a week, and be readily accessible in off times via e-mail or telephone.

“When someone comes in the door and asks about how to proceed with a building plan, we want to be able to provide immediate answers — they don’t want to wait a couple of days,” Wagner said.

Dickmann defended the six-month trial as being in the best interest of the village and Haroldson.

“We want to make sure this arrangement works for us and for her, and that she accomplishes the goals we set for her,” Dickmann said.

Although supportive of the agreement, Trustee Robert Hamann said the village must be careful not to set Haroldson up for failure.

“The problem will be there is only so much she will be able to do in six month. Will she be able to build a fire under someone to get development moving in that time?” Hamann asked.

Dickmann said Haroldson seemed excited by that kind of challenge.

“We told her she needs to be ready to move fast and furious. If she brings ideas to the Plan Commission and the Community Development Authority, they’ll get it done. It has been quiet here too long,” Dickmann said.

Haroldson has a master’s degree in urban planning from the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee with an emphasis on real estate and economic development. She has been an adjunct professor at UWM’s School of Architecture and Urban Planning.

Formerly executive director of the Jefferson County Economic Development Corporation, Haroldson is currently a planning consultant with the Town of Merton and advises the Business Improvement District in Hartland.

She also has extensive background in commercial real estate sales, having worked with Mooney LeSage Group and MLG.