

Supervisor says county eager to work with towns

Written by MARK JAEGER

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Port's switch to private contractor for plowing has attention of officials

Town of Fredonia officials watched with great interest as their counterparts in the Town of Port Washington voted earlier this month to hire a private contractor to keep town roads clear of snow and ice.

A local business, Dave's Excavation and Grading, was hired to plow the roads from Jan. 1 to May 1.

Up until that point, the task had been the sole duty of the Ozaukee County Highway Department.

Leaders in the Town of Fredonia had previously looked into the use of private contractors for plowing, but opted to remain with the county.

County Supr. Don Dohrwardt told the Town Board that the vote in the Town of Port Washington is being taken as a wake-up call.

Last week, county officials met with town leaders from throughout the county to discuss their concerns about county services.

Dohrwardt represents a portion of the town on the County Board, and is a member of the county's Public Works Committee. He is also a village trustee.

To make budgeting more predictable, the county is considering making minimum payments a part of their next contracts with townships.

That and the charges the county initiated for equipment storage and billing has upset leaders in some townships.

"We are looking at our contracts with the towns," Dohrwardt said.

"Our intention is to create more of a partnership between the county and the towns. We want to remain your vendor."

Facing a mandate to keep expenses in check and generate new revenues, Dohrwardt said the county may have implemented ill-advised billing procedures.

"You've raised complaints, and we are going to look at that. There may be a couple of flaws in how we estimate costs," he said.

Dohrwardt said the pattern for highway billing is based on the charges the county passes along to the state to keep state highways plowed, and conceded that might not be the most appropriate approach for dealing with towns.

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“The bottom line is we want to save taxpayers money, because whether the costs comes out of the county’s pocket or the town’s, the same people are paying,” he said.

“We want to reach an agreement where we have all come to the middle, rather than a boss-employee relationship where the county dictates terms.”

Dohrwardt said the Town of Port’s decision to go with a private contractor for plowing may turn out to be a good thing for the county.

“You don’t fix things if you don’t know there is a problem. This gives us a test case, so it might end up being a good thing,” he said.

Town Chairman Richard Mueller said town officials are watching the county developments closely, but made a distinction between the rural areas of Port and Fredonia.

“They have 22 miles of roads to keep clear. We have 51 miles,” Mueller said.

According to the county, the Town of Fredonia has spent an annual average of \$199,000 with the county over the past three years for road maintenance and plowing.

On another road-related topic, he said traffic counts made on Jay Road showed much lower volume than was indicated in an early count.

Mueller said he has not heard from the town’s engineering firm or the state on whether the reduced traffic numbers will be sufficient to justify downsizing the road profile when Jay Road is rebuilt.