

News

Saratoga Springs City Council scheduled to vote tonight on whether to fill principal planner position

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By PATRICK H. DONGES, The Saratogian

SARATOGA SPRINGS — Tonight, the City Council is scheduled to vote on whether Mayor Scott Johnson will be permitted to fill the city's principal planner position.

On March 16, the council unanimously approved policy requiring members to consult with the rest of the council before filling vacant positions.

The \$64,500-per-year planning position was vacated earlier in March when Jackie Hakes resigned to take a position as a project manager at Saratoga Springs-based Elan Planning and Design. Hakes was hired in 2007 by Mayor Valerie Keehn following the adoption of policy that expanded the department from two positions to three: principal planner, senior planner and planner.

"Our building department is our lifeline to the future," Johnson said Monday, adding that the planning department has been strained while the position has been vacant.

The responsibility of overseeing the city's Planning Board has been given to Bradley Birge, administrator of Planning and Economic Development. Birge also oversees the Design Review Commission as well as community development grants and projects.

Johnson said he expects the council to give the green light for filling the principal planner position because it was not vacated due to budget cuts.

"I expect it will because this vacancy was the result of a resignation," he said. "It was never intended to remain vacant indefinitely."

Speaking about candidates who have expressed interest in the position, Johnson said, "We've met with some qualified applicants."

Interviews have been taking place over the past four months.

The full-time position would be union exempt, and the salary is expected to total about \$2,000 more than previously paid, which would place it at between \$66,000 and \$67,000, for increased hours and increased responsibilities.

"It is within budget," Johnson said.

Accounts Commissioner John Franck, who proposed the council confirmation policy, said while he is aware the salary is

within budget, he is not sure if a full-time position would be necessary.

“There is a lot of technology we’ve received over the years in grants that the department is not using effectively,” Franck said, citing tools that have been received through his department, like “laserfiche” filing, that are meant to increase efficiency. “I do believe we might be able to get around not having a full-time person.”

In other business:

- Mayor Johnson will make three appointments, one each to the city's Design Review Commission, Zoning Board of Appeals and Recreation Board.
- During Commissioner Franck's agenda, the council will hear a presentation on whether or not the city should lock in a fixed rate for electricity and gas utilities for the remainder of the year.

The City Council meeting is scheduled to begin at 7 tonight in the council chamber of City Hall.

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