

Port Henry gets new village clerk

Written by , Staff Writer
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â Budget, delayed due to arrest, expected to be completed soon By LOHR McKINSTRY PORT HENRY — The Village of Port Henry got a new village clerk this week and is making headway on its delayed budget for the new village fiscal year.

Mayor Gary Cooke said he appointed Denise Daly of Port Henry as village clerk, effective April 16.

Daly will work with new Village Treasurer Erin Gilbo on the budget, with assistance from retired Village Clerk Sue Baker, who returned to help with the process.

Daly will be paid \$18,000 a year for a 30-hour work week. She formerly worked for Edwards Sales and Service in Port Henry.

The budget has been delayed since former Clerk-Treasurer Barbara Tesar was charged with embezzling from village coffers. Tesar, who's free on her own recognizance, was on sick leave for weeks before her arrest and didn't prepare a budget.

Her appointment as clerk-treasurer expired on April 2. Cooke said the clerk-treasurer position was bonded, so the money will be recovered.

He said he's heard people say they think the village is out of money due to the alleged theft, but that is not the case.

"We have \$72,000 in certificates of deposit and \$250,000 in the general fund. It isn't like we're on the verge of bankruptcy."

The exact amount missing will be determined by a forensic audit now under way by the State Comptroller's Office, but State Police say it was between \$3,000 and \$50,000.

"They (auditors) will try to determine how much has been taken," Cooke said.

"They will work with us to design a transparent system. We will know what's going in and what's coming out" of the village treasury.

He said the annual budget is almost ready to go to public hearing. The village missed statutory deadlines to complete the budget and hold the hearing, but Cooke said the Comptroller's Office understands the unusual circumstances.

The village has until May 1 to pass a budget, which would take effect June 1.

"There's just a few things we need to get together on the budget," Cooke said. "We have money. We're paying our bills. There'll be no change in the tax rate."

The previous budget totals \$617,000, and the village tax rate of \$11.95 per \$1,000 of assessment will remain about the same, he said.

At some point during her seven years as clerk, Tesar had the locks to the Village Hall changed on her own initiative, saying too many people had keys. She then held the only key to the clerk's office, Cooke said.

"The village was being run by the clerk. She was trusted. The mayor didn't have a key to the office."

Cooke, who came into office as mayor on April 2, said he now has a key to the office, and new precautions are being taken to safeguard village assets.

"We'll get this fixed and go on. I'm optimistic."