



New W.P. Village Manager Arrives Aug. 4

BY JOHN KRAHNERT III: NEWSROOM INTERN

The Whispering Pines Village Council has hired its first-ever village manager.

The council announced Tuesday night that Steve DeBolt, of Reynoldsburg, Ohio, will assume his duties Aug. 4.

Mayor Bob Zschoche said he is happy that the search is over.

"We're very glad for the process to be completed," Zschoche said Wednesday. "It's time to move into the era of a village manager. We're pleased to make it a reality."

Zschoche said a number of residents echoed the council's sentiments.

DeBolt earned his

undergraduate degree from Kent State University and a master's degree in public administration from the University of Toledo. He has more than 20 years of experience with state and municipal government agencies.

DeBolt currently serves as the director of safety/service/disaster for the city of Reynoldsburg. He oversees the police, buildings, streets, and waste/storm water departments. He was responsible for more than 100 employees.

DeBolt held several positions in state government in Ohio. He worked for the Bureau of Construction Compliance and for the Division of the State Fire Marshal. He also taught at the high school and university levels.

DeBolt said Wednesday that he is excited about his new position.

"Being the first village manager, I realize that it is a challenge and an opportunity," DeBolt said. "I'm looking forward to working closely with the mayor, council and residents to increase the quality of life they expect."

DeBolt is no stranger to the Whispering Pines area. He has family in Pinehurst and has been a longtime visitor to the Sandhills. He originally envisioned retiring here but developed an itch to move down sooner.

"I fell in love with the area," DeBolt said. "I asked myself, if I find a position, why wait until retirement?"

DeBolt learned about the position on The Pilot's Web site and decided to apply.

He said that Whispering Pines, with its lakes and dams, has a lot of unique water and infrastructure characteristics. He said he believes that his long background in municipal government will serve him well as village manager.

"I think I've dealt with a lot [of these issues] in the past," he said.

DeBolt said that a top priority is customer service, something he specializes in. He stressed the importance of working with residents one at a time to address their specific concerns.

DeBolt's salary will be \$70,000 per year. He and his wife, Abbe, plan to live in Whispering Pines.

In other business, the council set a public hearing for July 22 to consider a conditional-use permit for Charlotte-based JDH Capital's property on N.C. 22. The company plans to build a new shopping center, The Shops at Whispering Pines, on the property. The project has experienced significant delays.

Councilman Skip Gebhardt said he wanted to see the project proceed but was concerned that the developer has not proven that the shopping center has adequate utilities, specifically water and sewer.

"You have not provided utilities," Gebhardt said. "We have to have assurances that they are there."

The town of Southern Pines has indicated that it has the capacity to serve the shopping center's needs but has not formally committed to the project.

Gebhardt supported imposing certain conditions on the developer, including obtaining a written commitment from Southern Pines to provide water and sewer services.

Mark Ball of JDH Capital said that Southern Pines will not commit until the project has been approved.

David Clarke, also of JDH, expressed to the council his frustration with the delays.

"All we want is a public hearing," Clarke said. "We know how to do this. We'll either meet the conditions or we won't. But we first filed in 2005, and we've lost so much time that it's a different world now."

The public hearing will be quasi-judicial and based on sworn evidence, not opinion.

The council also met in closed session with Village Attorney Mike Brough to discuss a letter from the Moore County Airport Authority. According to Zschoche, the airport's attorney disagrees with Brough's interpretation of Whispering Pines' zoning authority over the airport.

Contact John Krahnert III at 693-2473 or by e-mail at jkrahnert3@gmail.com.

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