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Brightbridge Wealth Management Headlines: Second Top Village Official Resigns in Less Than Two Weeks by Brightbridge Wealth

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Finance director Al Zochowski cites frustrations in accomplishing goals as reason for departure; his last day coincides with the village administrator, who announced his resignation on Nov. 11.

The second top official in Lake Zurich announced his resignation today.

Finance Director Al Zochowskiâ€™s last day will be Dec. 31, which is the same the day as Village Administrator Bob Vitas, who submitted his resignation on Nov. 11.

Zochowski has accepted a position as finance director for the city of North Las Vegas, which has a population of 225,000 and a $450 million budget.

The reasons for Zochowskiâ€™s departure are multi-faceted.

While moving closer to one of his children and his three grandchildren who live in Arizona factored into his decision, he said he wouldnâ€™t have considered it if not for the lack of progress on financial matters in the village over the last couple of years.

â€œIâ€™ve done the same work throughout my career, but we were not able to accomplish goals and objectives I set for the financial well-being of the village,â€• Zochowski said.

Issues that discouraged Zochowski include recent information brought to the village board about the need to increase water and sewer rates to have sufficient funds to run the system.

â€œAfter two studies, one in 2010 and the other presented at the last village board meeting, the board has not acted even though the fund is out of cash,â€• Zochowski said.

Another issue is what Zochowski says is the need to charge the water and sewer fund to help balance the general fund.

â€œThere is a service level that the community expects, and the village needs resources to provide that; meanwhile the board has continually said to cut costs while also telling us to maintain or improve services,â€• Zochowski said.

Frustrations aside, Zochowski does feel that early on in his tenure, he was able to accomplish some of his goals.

Those include starting to mandate contributions to public safety pensions, which Zochowski said was costly for the village, but appropriate to begin doing after previous administrations underfunded them.

â€œWe had to start funding pensions in accordance with state law, but it did cost the village $1 million in 2010 and another $1 million in 2011,â€• Zochowski said.

Zochowski also feels positive about the steps taken to restructure debt in the tax increment financing district.

â€œThe day I started I was handed a document showing how the board was going to restructure the TIF

debt, but the revenues projected to repay it were not achievable,â€• Zochowski said.

Zochowski says he stopped the process immediately and took steps to stop the cash flow problems, which included restructuring the TIF debt with more accurate data.

â€œWe ended up spending $400,000 with the correct projections, when it would have cost the village roughly $2.5 million to restructure the debt the way it was planned,â€• Zochowksi said.

Revamping health insurance for village employees was also pointed out by Zochowski as a success during his tenure.

Zochowski spearheaded an effort to move from a self-funded to a fully-insured plan, which he says saved the village $1.5 million by adding an HMO option and doubling employee contributions.

The turning point for Zochowski came in the summer of 2009, at the time the new board started, when he says he noticed a change.

â€œWhen we would bring new concepts to the board, they would not accept them, believing other alternatives would be better; there seemed to be a lack of confidence in staff,â€• Zochowski said.

Going forward, Zochowski says his replacement will have their work cut out for them.

â€œFinances of the village are the biggest issue. They will have to develop a budget that will ultimately need to reduce services, which would likely come in the way of layoffs,â€• Zochowski said, noting that 80 percent of the village budget covers personnel.

He added the entire village workforce is stretched to a point where there is no flexibility for staffing and budgets.

â€œThe fire department has already run through 100 percent of its overtime budget with four firefighters on duty disability; meanwhile we have to ask firefighters to cover those open shifts and pay them time-and-a-half,â€• Zochowski said. â€œThis means the fire department must restructure their budget to find the extra money.â€•

In regards to the police department, Zochowski said there is one police officer for every 727 residents at any given time, not taking into account visitors in the village.

â€œWe are manning our police force with a minimum amount of people as well,â€• Zochowski said. â€œI know how to do it â€" our workers are stretched so far and we donâ€™t have additional resources.â€•

Zochowski will begin his new position in early January 2012

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