

Council takes lead on setting fees for the Building Department and Office of Planning and Economic Development

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SARATOGA SPRINGS — At its Tuesday night meeting, the City Council unanimously approved two measures — one that allows it to set fees for the Building Department and Office of Planning and Economic Development, and a second to establish new fee schedules for those two departments.

The council voted to forward the proposal, introduced by Mayor Scott Johnson, to the city Planning Board at its Jan. 4 meeting. Planners voted to send the measure back to the council with an affirmative advisory opinion at its Jan. 12 meeting.

When the proposal was first introduced, Johnson noted that the amendments would mark the first time there has been a complete revision of the fees since 2003.

The newly adopted schedule includes some new fees that include \$100 each for demolition permits and stop-work orders, and \$50 each for roofing permits.

Amendment of the fees will also no longer require review by the city or county planning boards. The council typically sets fees in other departments on an annual basis.

On Tuesday, Johnson cited a comparative study undertaken by the city of more than 10 comparably sized municipalities, including Kingston, Ithaca and Elmira, that showed a disparity in the amounts being charged in the city for permits and plan review.

"That's really what led us to suggest these revisions," Johnson said, calling the new schedule "more uniform and equitable."

Johnson did note that in its letter of determination the Planning Board suggested the council at least recognize that there was some question as to how New York's State Environmental Quality Review Act would apply to the amendments.

The council also voted unanimously to allow Johnson to renew an agreement with the law firm of Miller, Mannix and Schachner LLP for legal services as advisors to the ongoing recodification of the city's zoning ordinance.

"It's critical that this thing is updated," said Bradley Birge, city administrator of planning and economic development, describing to the council that the review of the ordinance is nearly half completed.

Over the past two years, Birge said the department has spent nearly 700 hours between three or four employees working on the ordinance, and 125 hours of legal review.

The renewed contract with the law firm was approved for up to \$160 per hour, with an annual cap of \$20,000. While more than 300 text and map amendments have been made, the zoning code has not undergone significant amendments

since 1990.

The City Council is scheduled to meet next beginning with a public hearing at 6:50 p.m. Feb. 1 at City Hall.

In other business:

ä Public Safety Commissioner Richard Wirth scheduled a 6:50 p.m. public hearing before the Feb. 1 City Council meeting to allow the public's input on an amendment to the 2011 Capital Budget that would add about \$300,000 for a new fire engine. The proposal comes after a 19-year-old back-up truck caught fire at the scene of a Dec. 17 structure fire on Pinewood Avenue.