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VBH BOT FYI Legal

1 message

Mon, Jan 17, 2011 at 8:22 AM

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Oak Forest rebuked by AG for violation
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Jan 17, 2011 2:31AM

[PHOTO] John Marquart

The Oak Forest City Council will be a little more specific about what it discusses in closed sessions after being rebuked by the state recently, a city official said.

Illinois Attorney General Lisa Madigan's office determined the city council violated the Illinois Open Meetings act during a closed session July 13 when it discussed the benefits and drawbacks of privatizing the city's community development department.

The attorney general notified the city of its violation Nov. 30 and recommended the city hold a public discussion, along with another vote on whether to affirm its July 27 vote on a contract with Manhard Consulting.

At the July 27 meeting, the council voted to approve a three-year contract to have the Vernon Hills-based company provide community development and planning services. Community development director Adam Dotson and city planner Marisa Munizzo would continue their duties with the city as Manhard employees instead of as city employees.

After obtaining the recording of the July 13 closed session, attorney general's office assistant public access counselor Steve Silverman wrote to the city stating "almost all of the substantive discussion regarding the contract occurred in the July 13 closed meeting." Silverman said in a letter that the city should make a transcript of the July 13 closed session available to the public.

"The attorney general made its decision per review of the relevant facts. Whether I agree with it doesn't mean anything," said John Marquart, Oak Forest's city administrator.

Also, per Silverman's recommendation, aldermen revisited the contract and voted 6 to 1 to reaffirm their original vote on the Manhard Consulting contract at the Jan. 11 city council meeting. Ald. Richard Simon (2nd) voted against because of issues he had with the contract itself, not the attorney general's review, he said.

Oak Forest resident Jim Keane asked the attorney general for the review.

"I'm just looking for more open government," he said. "All I'm asking

is to please just give a little better explanation on these things.”

While watching a broadcast of the July 13 and July 27 meetings, Keane said it was “impossible” to tell what the Manhard contract was about.

Then Keane noticed a memo from Marquart included in an electronic packet of information for the July 27 meeting that referred to the Manhard contract the council discussed during closed session. That prompted him to contact the attorney general.

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