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City contracts out building inspections

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Now that Westland has a contractor handling building inspection services, the first noticeable change will be location.

When city offices reopen for business Tuesday, July 5, the Building Department will have relocated from its current offices in the Westland Economic Development Building into space at the Department of Public Services, 37137 Marquette.

“We’re remodeling the lobby. Citizens will notice how much more customer friendly it is. They will have more access to the employees,” said Mayor William Wild. “The other thing people will notice is that it will be more efficient and timely with more access to inspectors.”

The council recently approved a contract with McKenna Associates Inc. of Northville for professional services including inspec-

tions, enforcement and plan review of codes for electrical, mechanical, building, plumbing, the City’s Residential Rental Housing Inspection Program, Home Certification Program and Community Development Block Grant Program.

“It will all be done through scheduling, we will have access to nine inspectors and more could be added as the volume increases when the economy does better,” said Wild. “We were trying to cover it with two or three inspectors.”

In the past, that could have meant two-three-week delays in getting inspections for city certifications required before a house is sold.

“The real estate agents and sellers will see quicker inspections,” said Wild.

Under the agreement, McKenna will be paid by inspection fees receiving 70 percent with 30 percent going to the city to cover clerical and administrative costs. City staff will process

permits and schedule inspections with Planning Director Bruce Thompson serving as the department head.

The effective elimination of the city-staffed Building Department resulted in three inspector positions being eliminated and the inspectors allowed to bump into other positions within their American Federation of State, County and Municipal Employees bargaining unit. “I was against outsourcing the jobs and I need to remain consistent,” said Councilman Bill Johnson, who cast the only vote against the McKenna contract.

Johnson was also the only opposing vote on a second contract to hire Patrick Ostrosky, employed by a McKenna subcontractor, to work 20 hours per week serving as the city’s building director for inspections and handling plan reviews.

Contracting the building inspection services was spurred by finances. Wild noted the decreased demand

for building permits and inspections due to the slow economy but the city inspectors still had to be paid full-time wages and benefits.

“Under this contract, there are no costs to the city if there are no inspections,” said Wild, who estimated a \$1.5 million savings over five years.

Additionally, Wild said the relocation to the DPS building will make the building clerical staff person able to work with two existing DPS clerical workers as needed.

“McKenna has an exceptional, award-winning reputation for helping Michigan communities reach their full potential,” said Wild. Recently named Small Business of the Year by Crain’s Detroit Business magazine, McKenna specializes in community planning and zoning, urban design, landscape architecture and economic development.

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