

# County board, executive talk staffing decisions

## Doemel proposes more effective collaboration

Oshkosh Herald

New Winnebago County Executive Jon Doemel told county supervisors last week that he will be proposing an expansion of positions in his office, seeking a chief of staff and a communications specialist, that he said is needed to get the executive staff in a more functional and transparent governing mode.

Doemel spoke to the County Board to offer a general understanding of his agenda and leadership style. He said the office's current staffing compared with similar and smaller counties around the state is inadequate and works against initiatives that need agreement.

"I was elected on a platform of communication and collaboration and growth and reform, and these are things that I really feel that we can do here in Winnebago

County," Doemel said in promoting what would be a doubling of his staff that he said will help the county collaborate better on agenda items. The Personnel and Finance committee last week decided to table the staffing changes until July.

District 18 supervisor Bill Wingren of Oshkosh had what he called some "blunt" questions for the new executive about his critical comments about Winnebago County government during the executive race and his appointment of an acting chief of staff who has been described as a far-right conservative.

Doemel said his selection of Ethan Holtenberger was solely based on his ability to deal with issues that require nonpartisan solutions at the local level, and apologized for criticism of county government during his campaign to unseat Mark Harris.

"I was very critical, especially on this office, for the lack of work that I felt it was doing," he said. "But it wasn't built for work, and that's why this is No. 1 here" to

get the office adequately staffed.

Other supervisors questioned Doemel's authority to name his acting chief of staff without board approval, which he said was done after consultation with corporate counsel and is a temporary position pending approval.

Among other topics discussed at the board meeting:

- Progress on the new airport terminal project at Wittman Regional Airport was detailed by airport director Jim Schell, noting that most of the outside work, including masonry and glass work, has been completed. Schell said the focus is now on interior spaces and exterior apron and parking lot.

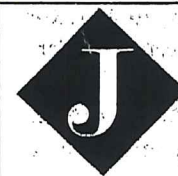
He said the project is on schedule for completion in June and is well under the \$7 million pre-bid estimate with the cost expected to fall below \$5.5 million.

- Doemel noted that the Sawyer Creek watershed issue should get some immediate attention as it potentially affects 3,800 county residents and their insurance costs related to ongoing flooding risks.

Oshkosh has been working with a consultant and the county to mitigate flooding within the city since 2001 bridge repair and new bridge construction, dredging near the Fox River, and water detention basins within the watershed. While the projects have reduced flooding within the Sawyer Creek corridor there have continued to be new developments near Sawyer Creek that will require continued water retention efforts.

- UWO Chancellor Andrew Leavitt gave the board an update on UWO's three-campus system that was officially established in the summer of 2019, noting an emphasis on easily transferable course work within the campuses and the overall UW system.

Martin Rudd, assistant chancellor for the Fox Cities and Fond du Lac campuses, said tuition rates have been either frozen and kept lower at those locations than any other UW campus, while investments have been made toward student services, veterans resources, information technology and sports clubs.



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