

East Aurora Consultants looked at to help trim costs

East Aurora Village Hall wants to trim escalating health insurance costs for its employees as it looks to hire a benefits consultant who would manage health care for the village's workers and retirees.

The proposal to contract with Niagara Insurance Group projects a first-year savings of \$80,000 to the village.

This fiscal year, the village's health care costs total \$361,000 - with the village's 42 full-time employees (including police officers) spread among four different health insurance plans, three of them health maintenance organizations.

"It's one of our continually climbing costs at no less than 12 percent a year in each of the last eight years," Village Administrator Kimberly LaMarche said. "The health insurance costs grow every year. It (the study) just seems very worth going forward on."

The Village Board expects to vote tonight on a detailed study with Niagara Insurance Group that would cost \$5,750, including a \$3,000 upfront retainer fee. Trustee Patrick McDonnell last week pushed the board to seriously consider going that route, as many

local companies look to consolidate their business with a single insurer or limit health insurance choices for their workers.

Niagara Insurance Group would

research the four health plans and talk with the village's unions about opening their contract talks to review health care coverage and then craft a plan.

"There are now four different health plans, and this company could manage care and farm it out," LaMarche said. "It would give uniformity for health care. With one employee, we can save

\$80,000. If we start now, it could be in place by June (the start of the village's new fiscal year)."

The Quaker Club police union is interested, LaMarche said.

With the exception of new hires who pay a certain percentage of their health care, the village generally picks up the full tab for workers' health insurance through Community Blue, Univera, Independent Health and also traditional Blue Cross and Blue Shield.

The village also pays full health insurance coverage for retired employees. Those who retire at age 55, have fully paid health coverage through the village until they turn 65. After that, they can choose to pay for the policy themselves or use Medicare.

The village presently is paying full health insurance for at least six retired employees.

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