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Parking clerk charged with theft

A Village parking administrative clerk was suspended without pay late Thursday pending an administrative hearing after a charge of misdemeanor theft was filed by the Cook County State's Attorney.

The clerk was charged following a Police investigation that began after a citizen reported having paid a fine to have a vehicle removed from the Village's immobilization list, only to have it booted a few days later.

This is the second time in the past seven months a worker in the Parking Division has been separated following an internal Village investigation of theft. A parking enforcement officer was fired last October after being charged with seven counts of felony theft and one count of official misconduct for allegedly taking cash to remove boots from motorists' cars.

Village Manager Tom Barwin called the clerk's indictment an unfortunate development, but said the situation underscored the importance of initiatives now underway to improve how parking is managed in Oak Park. Parking enforcement was recently moved to the Police Department and Oak Park's new Chief Financial Officer, Craig Lesner, is revamping the collection system procedures and processes to improve control and oversight.

"Parking clearly has issues. I discovered that very soon after coming to Oak Park last August," Barwin said. "But we are working to improve how parking resources are managed, both in terms of enforcement and transactions. Our efforts also include improving our hiring procedures to better screen applicants as well as provide more rigorous training.

"The only positive side to this issue is that it should send a loud and clear message – we investigate wrongdoing and, when it is found to have occurred, we respond swiftly and appropriately."

Barwin said he wished to thank the citizen who stepped forward to report the situation and the Police for their swift and conclusive response. He also urged any citizen who suspects wrongdoing on the part of a Village employee to report it to his office.

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