

AG's Public Integrity Unit looks at possible criminal acts in Library/Village Center financing scheme

By **GEOFF DAVIDIAN**
ShorewoodVillage.com

MADISON, Wis. (February 28, 2004) – When the Wisconsin Department of Justice this week announced the Library/Village Center controversy had been referred to its Public Integrity Unit, the Village Board, staff and Library Board came under the first stages of a criminal investigation.

The passion and political posturing, most recently exhibited by Trustee Guy Johnson and his determination that there be no audit of the Library finances and funding practices, has convinced the state Attorney General's office that there is cause to look closer at how the Library/Village Center project was funded.

The Public Integrity Unit is not a consulting service for municipalities; it is an investigative arm of the Wisconsin Department of Justice's Division of Criminal Investigation that will look beyond the finances and practices at the actions of the individuals who are involved.

Assistant Attorney General Monica Burkert-Brist, a 1987 graduate of the University of Wisconsin Law School, heads the unit and has been assigned the case. She was in Milwaukee this week to instruct public officials on public records and public meetings.

The Public Integrity Unit was formed in August 2003 to investigate and prosecute public officials who violate laws on elections, open government and ethics.

Wisconsin's open records law generally presumes openness, Burkert-Brist said. "Local officials get in trouble when they try to be too cute" and obfuscate items they intend to discuss, she said.

Attorney General Peg Lautenschlager created the five-person task force in August after a series of scandals sullied Wisconsin's clean-government image.

Most recently, the unit investigated the University of Wisconsin System's Board of Regents, which failed to properly notify the public of a Sept. 2 meeting where higher pay ranges were to be considered for senior UW administrators.

Lautenschlager already has reached one settlement with the board and is considering a response to a request by three legislators for a new investigation.

Deputy Attorney General Daniel Bach said the unit will let the department handle open government complaints more efficiently. Agents will be in Eau Claire, Appleton, Milwaukee and Madison, the Associated press has reported.

Asked this week by a reporter the significance of a complaint being referred to the Public Integrity Unit, Burkert-Brist suggested that most complaints are dismissed without being referred to the unit and that Shorewood was the focus of what might be called a preliminary investigation.

Shorewood residents with questions about or information that might help the Public Integrity Unit with its review should contact Assistant Attorney General Monica Burkert-Brist, Wisconsin Department of Justice, Public Integrity Bureau, 17 W. Main Street, P.O. Box 7857, Madison, WI. 53707-7857.

This inquiry now goes beyond rhetoric to evidence, and no letters to the *Shorewood Herald* by backers of any candidate or former or current official will have significance.