

Riverway Board hears setback on Wintergreen Conference Center, hears SNA report

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purchaser of the property. Cupp said the explanation he was given stated DNR does not have adequate funds for purchase of public lands and, therefore, doing an appraisal would not be practical. Cupp said he will look for alternate funding sources, but told the board the lack of DNR support for the

purchase was very disappointing.

In other action, the board learned that a closed session review of design changes for the proposed Lone Rock bridge may be necessary to protect confidentiality. Cupp said he would review the proposed changes and work with DOT officials to determine if a committee or board meeting would be

necessary to approve the changes.

Cupp said three candidates had reached out to him regarding the open slot to be created in Iowa County representation due to LWSRB Chair Jerry Dorscheid's decision not to seek re-appointment. Cupp referred the interested parties to the Iowa County Administrator. The board also

approved issuance of a timber harvest permit to the Agnes Tetzlaff Trust for a parcel in the Town of Millville, Grant County. The walnut tree harvest will not have an adverse impact on Riverway aesthetics.

The next Riverway Board meeting is slated for April 14, 2022, and again will be held in Muscoda.

Bill Lueders: state of open government in Wisconsin is in peril, Vos no friend of openness

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Department certainly used poor judgment in labeling the city's mayor a "target" and putting journalist Holmes on a watch list of protesters. But when asked to produce records that revealed these lapses of judgment, it turned them over. The public records used by the *Milwaukee Journal Sentinel* to expose the problem of faulty wiring and inadequate enforcement were also provided upon request.

But Gableman and Vos blocked and even destroyed records to which the public was clearly entitled. Dane County Judge Frank Remington ruled on March 2 that the pair's "denials, delays, and refusals . . . violate the letter and the spirit of Wisconsin's public records law." He ordered that they pay the legal fees of the group that took them to court over these refusals as well as \$1,000 fines, costs that will likely be paid by the same taxpayers that the pair are seeking to keep in the dark. An appeal has been promised.

Remington noted that the response of Gableman's office in denying access to these records "was to send a three sentence, misspelled, summary rejection email." As Remington put it, "This is the

sort of 'unconsidered and irrational' conduct deserving of punitive damages."

Another Dane County judge, Valerie Bailey-Rihn, on March 10 ordered Vos to make an effort to retrieve the emails he had deleted to cover his tracks. "This is a governmental agency," she said, expressing frustration over the lack of cooperation from Vos' office. "I can't believe there's no policy, practice or procedures in place" with regard to records requests, "that it's just up to whoever wants to do it, when they want to do it and . . . who knows if anybody did anything with it."

There were others who made a mockery of the state's openness laws in this past year. Fred Prehn, the Natural Resources Board member who refuses to leave even though his term expired on May 1, 2021, is being sued for his refusal to turn over text messages regarding this scheme to deny Gov. Evers the ability to install his own appointee. A judge rejected Prehn's lawyers' bizarre claim that he is not subject to the records law because he does not get paid to usurp — er, serve — on the board.

And Mike Huebsch, a former member of the Public Service Commission, has

sought to block the release of encrypted email messages he sent to an employee of American Transmission Co. (ATC), which is building a contested powerline requiring PSC approval. On February 28, in a hearing on a lawsuit alleging that Huebsch's contacts with ATC created an unconstitutional "appearance of bias and lack of impartiality," the Wisconsin Supreme Court's conservative majority expressed support for the nondisclosure of records claimed to be "personal" communications.

Justice Brian Hagedorn called requiring these communications to be produced "a dramatic intrusion," explaining that he's in a fantasy football league with an attorney friend who has appeared before the court. "People have a lot of phone calls," shrugged Justice Rebecca Bradley.

But even the cases of Prehn and Huebsch involve disputes that reasonable people might have over what records should be available. The failure of Gableman and Vos to even attempt to perform their obligations under the state's open records law is a matter of much graver concern.

As hard as it may be at times to do so, most public officials in Wisconsin recognize their responsibilities under

the law to produce records or at least an explanation for why a request is being denied. Gableman and Vos simply treat these requests with contempt.

Vos' admission, in a deposition, that his office routinely deletes communications he receives may come as a shock to some readers. After all, how could it not be illegal for a public official, and an elected one at that, to destroy records?

But it isn't. Wisconsin law grants state lawmakers the ability to destroy records at will, because they have exempted themselves from the records retention rules in place for all other state and local government officials.

Last March in the *Wisconsin Examiner*, during Sunshine Week, I was quoted as saying that this ability of legislators to evade accountability would lead "to inevitable abuse and eventual corruption." Justice Gableman and Assembly Speaker Vos have delivered it.

Bill Lueders is editor of The Progressive magazine. He also serves as the elected president of the Wisconsin Freedom of Information Council, a statewide group that works to protect public access to government meetings and records.

JENNIFER ANGUS: A IS FOR ANT, B IS FOR BUG, C IS FOR CICADA



The natural world brings out many different emotions in people: sometimes awe, sometimes spirituality, and sometimes fear. Being a part of this natural world, insects often bring out fear in many of us, but they also can demonstrate the remarkable ability that nature has in making all things beautiful. Creating some of the most provocative work in an art museum setting, Angus' medium is insects. Jennifer has exhibited her work internationally including Australia, Canada, France, Germany, Japan, and Spain, as well as prestigious American institutions including the Renwick Gallery, part of the Smithsonian in Washington DC.

EXHIBITION

MARCH 26 - JUNE 12 2022

Wyoming Valley School Cultural Arts Center, 6306 State Hwy 23, Spring Green, WI 53588
10:00 AM - 3:00 PM, THURS - SUN | 608-588-2544

This exhibition/performance is supported by the University of Wisconsin-Madison Division of the Arts Edna Wiechers Arts in Wisconsin Award. This exhibit is supported in part by grants from River Valley ARTS and the Wisconsin Arts Board with funding by the State of Wisconsin.

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