

Ad hoc committee discusses more potential transit sites

By Kelly Holm
OF THE LAKELAND TIMES

An ad hoc subcommittee of the Oneida-Vilas Transit Commission (OVTC), formed this spring to pursue potential sites for a new Northwoods Transit headquarters after plans to purchase a long-sought property likely fell through, met June 15 to discuss updates on a variety of options.

While driving around Rhinelander, commission member Fred Radtke reported scoping out buildings

that looked promising in terms of vacancy and potentially being for sale, as well as having the necessary features — such as at least 12 feet of clearance and indoor space to store and clean buses — to accommodate vehicles and transit operations.

Connection to city sewer and water services was also a desired quality.

“I did find a place called K-Tech. (The) K-Tech building is on River Road, just before the railroad tracks,” Radtke said. “Two

large overhead doors, looks like it has a fairly large office space. I contacted a realtor... and the owner now isn't sure if he wants to sell it.”

Radtke said the asking price for the building was \$300,000.

Committee chair Richard Logan said that he had reached out to the Department of Transportation about possibly available vacant land near their Rhinelander office, while commission member Tony Rio mentioned a former car dealership site.

Transit manager Barb Newman reported that the owner of the building Northwoods Transit currently rents was possibly willing to sell part of a parcel. She had also had talks with Rhinelander-Oneida County Airport director Matthew Leitner.

“We had talked a while ago, when we thought we had to leave our (current) building,” Newman said. “He also said if we needed some space he would be able to cut down some trees for us ... That possibility is

still open. If we wanted to look at the airport, we would need to have more negotiations with them.”

However, Newman was uncertain whether a construction project on land not owned by the building party would be eligible for certain grants, and commission members voiced desires to purchase an already-existing building in order to save on costs.

Newman said that the Aging & Disability Resource Centers (ADRC) of Oneida and Vilas counties, with

whom Northwoods Transit works closely, were willing to assist financially with such a purchase.

“The first step would be, once we find a building and come up with a dollar amount, getting together with both Oneida and Vilas ADRCs,” Logan said. “They're going to have to approve wanting to spend that money, and both of those county boards will have to approve.”

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State sponsored boat patrol program to be proposed again in St. Germain

Correcting inaccuracies a focus this time around

By Trevor Greene
OF THE LAKELAND TIMES

The town of St. Germain is once again considering adopting the state sponsored Municipal Water Safety Patrol program with the hope of deterring dangerous and illegal watercraft operation.

The program would consist of adding a town employee, with previous Wisconsin law enforcement experience, to patrol town lakes for a total of 480 hours throughout the summer months of June, July and August. Seventy-five percent of costs spent toward the program, such as the purchase of a patrol boat, would be reimbursed by the Wisconsin Department of Natural Resources (DNR).

The remaining 25% would be covered by the town, possibly with revenue it receives from room tax.

Along with discussion about the lake patrolling issue at the June 14 town board meeting, last discussed

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Ted Ritter

St. Germain town supervisor

at length a year ago, there was opposition to the patrol program as well.

Lake residents are concerned with the possibility of their lakes being over patrolled, further resulting in unnecessary anxiety and caution as they enjoy all that comes with being a riparian owner.

Members of the town lakes committee and town board, however, feel there is a strong need to curb what has been noted to be increasingly inappropriate and dangerous watercraft behavior.

The right information

Two days after the town board meeting, Bob Schell of the Found Lake Property Association, during a June 16 lakes committee meeting, recalled while volunteering last summer at the Big St. Germain Lake boat landing, an out-of-town boater exited the lake because it was too “crazy” for his family and him to be out there.

From a different perspective, Joe Domenico was one

of the many other riparian owners present during the meeting, and called into question the program's citation quota requirement needing to be met for reimbursement. He also expressed concern about being stopped for unwarranted or petty reasons.

Besides residents' skepticism about the boat patrol program itself, displeasure was also voiced as to why the matter was brought up again.

Following the June 16 lakes committee meeting, town supervisor and lakes committee chairman Ted Ritter provided *The Lakeland Times* with some of insight on the issue.

About a year-and-a-half ago, Ritter said, Vilas County sheriff Joe Fath informed town officials lake patrol provided by the sheriff's office would be nearly impossible due to low staff and deputies having already heavy workloads.

He said the DNR gave the town a similar response.

Then, at a lakes committee meeting last July, a DNR warden presented the Municipal Water Safety Patrol program.

“We thought ‘Wow, there's the answer,’” Ritter said.

He explained how he relayed the boat patrol program idea to the town board, which welcomed it, but included the understanding that the town would sponsor the program and the burden would be that of the lakes committee.

With August fast approaching, Ritter said the board and the lakes committee “had to act quickly” to create a plan for subsequent proposals at each of the lake districts' annual meetings — the lakes committee is made up of the town's four lake districts and one property owners association.

“In the meantime, that didn't give us any time really, to anticipate the negativity that surfaced,” he said. “Consequently, when those annual meetings occurred

there was an anonymous, very negative letter (that) had been circulated in high volume ... and then there was a second letter that was added onto it.”

Ritter claims the letters contained many inaccuracies about the program and ultimately caused many residents to disapprove of the program.

“And this committee is saying no, we need to get the right information out there (and) we need to ask the lake organizations to take a second look at this, set aside what happened last year, rethink this, and act on it with full information,” he said. “If it's defeated it's defeated, but at least let's act on it with proper information.”

A draft correspondence with information regarding the Water Safety Patrol program was approved by the town's lakes committee during its June 16 meeting. The correspondence was to be sent to members of the five lake organizations with Ritter's recommendation it be forwarded to residents of the lakes.

Trevor Greene may be reached via email at trevorgreene@lakeland-

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