



THE LAKELAND TIMES



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Fifield first responder disciplined for comments made after June 26 lakes association meeting

Residents worry for their safety; public officials withhold information

By Trevor Greene
OF THE LAKELAND TIMES

Pike Lake fire chief Warren Johnson said at Fifield's July 11 town board meeting he "imposed"

disciplinary action on one of the town's first responders, Mike Sloane, at a July 3 business meeting of the fire department.

Johnson said at the town board meeting he wouldn't share what

the disciplinary action was the department took with regard to Sloane because it was decided in closed session at the fire department's meeting.

See **Fifield** . . . page 5

Lac du Flambeau town board holds off on roadwork bid

Legal fees and other costs associated with road easement issue beginning to be a factor for the town

By Brian Jopek
OF THE LAKELAND TIMES

A possible financial bind the town of Lac du Flambeau is in as a result of the ongoing, four-road easement situation between the town and the Lac du Flambeau Band of Lake Superior Chippewa Indians had only been mentioned or alluded to over the course of the past several town board meetings.

Last week, though, the "financial bind" was brought out in the open during the town board's July 12 meeting.

Two bids for work on Plummer Lake Road had been received from Pitlik and Wick, one of them, for \$175,250, already approved at a May town board meeting.

That bid was for about half of the road and the decision was made to seek a bid for the rest of the road and that bid, also from Pitlik and Wick at \$111,228.65, was opened at a town board meeting last month.

The second bid was on the agenda for the July 12 meeting and, as he's done previously when his employer, Pitlik and Wick, has been involved, town chairman Matt Gaulke recused himself from the meeting and left the room for the duration of the road discussion.

Town supervisors Gloria Cobb and Bob Hanson ultimately decided to "stay the course" with the Pitlik and Wick bid for the first section of Plummer Lake Road, town clerk Susan Schoonover telling them that contract was already signed and the money to pay for it coming from the town's share of American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) money.

It was the second bid the discussion ended up centering around, Cobb and Hanson indicating a desire to get the entire project completed at the same time.

At the beginning of the discussion, Cobb summarized the bids to that point and Schoonover said there had been communication from Pitlik and Wick stating the company could get the entire project done this year.

"I guess the big question is do we have the money to pay it?" Hanson asked.

Schoonover said, regarding the second bid, the town didn't have money in its general fund and didn't have

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TREVOR GREENE/LAKELAND TIMES

CIRCLES AT THE CIRCUS

Robert Hansen walks along with his 2-year-old daughter Sawyer while she takes a pony ride during intermission at the Culpepper & Merriweather Circus on Thursday, July 13, at Brandy Park in Arbor Vitae.

Boulder Junction electors authorize property purchase

By Brian Jopek
OF THE LAKELAND TIMES

Electors in the town of Boulder Junction last week authorized the purchase by the town, the property the former Phillips 66 filling station sits on and a vacant lot near it.

The vote was 40 to 16 in favor of the purchase for \$97,500.

"At one time, the town owned both lots," town chairman Dennis Reuss told *The Lakeland Times*. "We used the one lot to store snow that was plowed off of town streets. We also used it for a parking area."

He said the interest in the property the former filling station sits on is to

demolish the building and "have real estate available for town use at some point."

"Some of the ideas that have come up for uses have included the possibility of a location for public restrooms," Reuss said. "The town has temporary, portable toilets for the public to use and they get a great deal of use. That and other ideas people might have for the property will be subjects we can and will discuss at town board meetings going forward."

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BRIAN JOPEK/LAKELAND TIMES

HIS FIRST PARADE

Dakota Ress of Merrill watches St. Germain's Independence Day parade with his year-and-a-half-old son, Lincoln. "It's Lincoln's first parade," Ress said.

LdF

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enough ARPA money left after committing it to the other half of Plummer Lake Road in addition to other items the town board designated for ARPA funding.

"We'd have to take it out of reserve, which is about half the balance," Schoonover said.

Cobb asked if that left the town's reserve fund with enough to handle legal fees associated with the expired easement issue for Annie Sunn Lane, Center Sugarbush Lane, East Ross Allen Lake Lane and Elsie Lake Lane.

"Not comfortably," Schoonover said to Cobb as she looked over figures in front of her. "By my forecasting, the legal (fees) are gonna be next quarter what they were this quarter. I'm not comfortable with going forward with that. I just don't ... we don't have enough wiggle room."

She said she thought the cost to do the Plummer Lake Road project would "be much less since they (Pitlik and Wick) would already be onsite and it was, you know, a shorter distance."

Cobb asked if the town had enough money to cover the first part of the Plummer Lake Road project and Schoonover said that was the case and she'd already subtracted the \$175,250 from the town's ARPA account.

"What do you think?" Hanson asked Cobb. "Do we split it again? I hate to do that but ..."

"I hate to do it but I don't wanna put us in a financial bind either," Cobb said.

"We're there already," Hanson said.

"More of a financial bind," Cobb said. "It's a hundred grand."

The two town supervisors were asked about putting off the Plummer Lake Road project until the easement issue with the tribe is resolved.

"There's a problem, I think, with putting road repairs off too long because then the road really falls apart and it takes a lot more to fix it," Hanson said. "I think what we need to do is try and find the 'sweet spot' here where we can do as much repair work as we can with the money we have to prevent the roads from totally disintegrating."

He said he felt Plummer Lake Road "is a good candidate for that."

"I don't know what else to do," Hanson said. "I know we're short on money."

He made the motion to stay with the bid from Pitlik and Wick for the \$175,250 the town and company already have a contract for and to put the other bid "on hold until we figure out whether or not we have the money for it."

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Fifield

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Sloane, husband of Fifield town supervisor and Pike Lake Chain Lakes Association secretary Ann Sloane, is accused of confronting two residents after a June 26 lakes association listening session and meeting and indicating to them he may not respond if they report emergencies.

Sloane was apparently upset with both residents' stances on four buoys the lakes association is looking to replace on Pike and Round lakes. The additional slow-no-wake buoys were placed on the lakes last boating season, but were placed illegally, though the Price County Sheriff's Office still enforced them.

Since then, Ann Sloane has been accused by some residents of using her position in public office to place one of the illegal buoys near her lakefront property.

A separate incident

At the July 11 town board meeting during the public comment portion, and before Nate Ramker and Jason Morris gave their firsthand accounts of what Sloane said to them on June 26, resident Judy Talbott said an ambulance was called to her house on July 7 when she became unconscious.

Unfortunately, she said, that ambulance never arrived.

Talbott said luckily she regained consciousness and her friends, her husband and herself continued to wait for the ambulance for nearly an hour.

Eventually, though, she said her husband decided to drive her to the hospital himself. Talbott did note, how-

ever, there were fire trucks and first responders appearing to be at another emergency call on Turner Lake Road when her husband and her were on their way to a hospital in Minocqua.

"I'm just amazed that (not) one single person couldn't go two miles to an emergency call and wait (for) someone to come, or maybe come, from a half-hour or more away," she said. "It turned out, fortunately for me, that it wasn't life threatening and I was OK. ... But it's a big concern, I think, for people who live in my neighborhood waiting for an ambulance to come."

Talbott said she wanted to share with the town board what happened so hopefully protocols can be changed and "something will be done so it never happens to anybody else."

Town chairman Bill Felch said he requested and received a recording of both the July 7 emergency calls from the Price County Sheriff's Office. He said he will be listening to it with first responders of the Pike Lake Fire Department.

"And once they hear it, I think we will be able to have a good explanation of what happened," he said.

Talbott added she was also bothered that there was never any followup from first responders until she called emergency personnel herself two days later.

"How they handle their stuff out there, I have no control over it," Felch told her. "This CD will hopefully change some things and make it so there's some better communication all around."

The Sloane incident

Morris was the first to share his June 26 encounter

with Sloane at the July 11 town board meeting. He read from a written document he prepared prior to the meeting.

First, Morris pointed out that the incident with Sloane was on the town board's meeting agenda, and given Ann Sloane is Mike Sloane's wife, he said he assumes she will recuse herself from that discussion; she didn't.

Morris said there was a lot of opposition with regard to placing the four additional buoys on the lakes at the listening session and meeting.

"Emotions were fairly high based on how the buoys had been placed originally in the chain," he said. "I thought Mike Ida did a good job keeping the meeting on task and emotions pretty well under control."

After the meeting, Morris said he was standing outside talking with another resident when he heard loud voices coming from the fire department, where the listening session and meeting were held. He said he didn't think much of it, but became more interested in what was happening when the verbal altercation between Ramker and Sloane grew louder.

"As I truly started to tune-in, I heard Mike say to Nate that as EMS maybe the next time there was a call to his house, he would go as fast or as slow as he wanted to," Morris said.

"Upon hearing this, I raised my voice to Mike and said that comment is completely unprofessional, and if you pardon my french, it was total bullshit. At that time, Mike turned to me and said he could say or do anything he wanted, and that I should keep in mind that he knows where I live as well, and he could respond as fast or (as)

slow as he wanted to if he responds at all."

Sloane, Morris said, "stomped" towards him while speaking and it appeared as if he was going to confront him "physically."

At that point, Morris said he walked away from Sloane to "disengage" from the situation.

He then questioned Sloane's outburst on "something as minor as the placement of buoys" and continued to question Sloane's position as a first responder with the town.

Morris also wondered if Sloane had ever "acted on this thinking in the past" and responded to emergency calls "as fast or slow as he wanted to" before.

"To me, this seems like a tremendous liability to the fire department and for the town as a whole to have an individual on the EMS team verbalize these thoughts," he said. "At this point, if there were to be a delay in response to a situation, should we consider it a legitimate delay or is it him seeking revenge for comments made or a difference of opinion on something and him purposely dragging his feet?"

Morris indicated he feels Sloane is the outlier compared to the rest of the crew at the Pike Lake Fire Department. He said he understands how finding volunteers is hard, but still worries about Sloane.

"Based on this incident, I would hope that Mike's punishment falls nothing short of removal from the EMS team," he said. "Anything short of that I will forward on to the state fire commission for review."

Morris added he would hope for an apology from Sloane too, though he's not

really interested in "hearing it."

"If he was truly sorry for his actions, I would expect him to show up at our house the next day and apologize," he said. "Based on his comments that night, I know he knows where I live."

Jennifer Morris, Jason's wife, said she witnessed Sloane "storming at" her husband "with his fists clenched and face bright red."

Morris also said she worries about Sloane acting on his comments because her 87-year-old diabetic father lives with her husband and her.

Can their household trust an EMS team that includes Sloane? she asked.

Morris reiterated her husband's call for Sloane's dismissal.

When Ramker spoke about his experience at the June 26 meeting, he said Sloane came up behind him and shoved him to get his attention.

He said he didn't know who Sloane was at the time, but noted Sloane was "shaking" and his "face was red."

"And he's like 'This is a safety issue!' and I'm like 'What's a safety issue?' because I had no idea what he was talking about," Ramker said. "And he said 'These buoys are a safety issue!'"

Ramker said Sloane told him he needs to witness for himself the people he sees operating their watercraft improperly at high speeds in close proximity to shorelines.

Everything Sloane said, according to Ramker, is already illegal.

He said Sloane told him no one enforces it though.

Fifield

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“Well I go ‘They’re not gonna enforce the buoys either, unfortunately,’” Ramker said. “He just went on to say that ‘Me and my wife (Ann Sloane) are obligated to get in the water if one of these people has an accident.’ I said ‘OK.’ And he goes ‘Oh no, well we’re obligated to get into the water, but it’s our discretion on how fast or how slow we go.’”

Ramker said he told Sloane that’s “on him and his conscious” if they didn’t respond to an emergency where they could have.

Sloane, he said, told him that he can go as slow or as fast to an emergency call as he wants three different times, and the third time was when Morris heard it.

He said he noticed Sloane “charge” Morris at one point, and heard him tell Morris, too, that he can respond to emergency calls as fast or as slow as he wants.

Ramker then pointed to Talbott’s recent experience of not having an ambulance respond to her call on July 7.

“And you know (with Mike Sloane’s comments) and if something serious would’ve happened, you’re (the town) opening yourself up for a huge lawsuit,” he said.

What happened to Sloane?

Chief Johnson started the discussion with regard to Sloane and the incident on

June 26.

He explained the process and procedures the department followed while holding its “department business meeting” on July 3.

While at least one resident called for town supervisor Ann Sloane to recuse herself from the meeting at that point, she declined to by remaining seated at the table with the rest of the board.

Johnson said an initial complaint was filed with the Pike Lake Fire Department and he proceeded to obtain four written email statements from those who were involved in the incident.

He said he interviewed Sloane and obtained a written copy of his version of the story.

“After careful review by myself and my department officers with all the information provided, I decided on a course of action that I pursued using the department’s policy and procedure manual,” he said, adding he then called and publicly posted the July 3 department business meeting. “After the meeting was called to order, a motion was made to move to a closed session per Wisconsin Statute 19.85(1)(b).”

Johnson said included in the closed session discussion were members of the Pike Lake Fire Department and Sloane.

He said they discussed the “gravity and seriousness of the allegations,” before he told Sloane how he

would be disciplined.

“And they (Sloane) accepted the consequences I imposed upon them,” Johnson said. “They signed an agreement as to my decision, witnessed by me, and a motion to return to open session was made and seconded. We returned to open session and a motion was made and seconded to adjourn the business meeting.”

Johnson confirmed for town chairman Felch that Sloane was the only person he interviewed face-to-face.

Felch said he feels Johnson should interview Ramker to get a better understanding of what happened. Johnson said Ramker’s email was lengthy, though it never mentioned Sloane pushing or shoving him.

Jason Morris asked the board if Johnson could interview him too. He said he also wanted the opportunity to tell his complete side of the story face-to-face.

Town supervisor John Smith said he feels that if there will be face-to-face interviews, than Johnson should speak to everyone involved.

Johnson agreed to the interviews and asked if a town board member could be present during all of them. Smith agreed to be the one to attend them.

Johnson also prepared a packet for each board member consisting of information regarding the investigation and the discipline “imposed” on Sloane.

When Felch asked board

members if they needed time to review the documents Johnson prepared, Ann Sloane indicated there was no reason to.

“Well the decision’s been made, hasn’t it?” she asked, and Felch said it has. “So there’s nothing (to say).”

Smith asked Johnson if anyone besides members of the fire department and town board knew what Sloane’s disciplinary decision included.

Johnson said no. As members of the public pressed Johnson and the board to reveal what has been done, town clerk Kelly Kleinschmidt said it’s not being shared because, from her understanding, it occurred in a closed session meeting.

Johnson agreed with her. “If it’s under closed session and it’s an employee issue, I believe it (can stay in) closed session,” Felch said.

“It’s not public record, but I can definitely contact the town’s attorney and double check with them,” Kleinschmidt said.

Even though a decision was already made at the fire department’s July 3 business meeting, Felch said there will be an update on the situation at the town board’s August meeting after Johnson holds face-to-face interviews with all involved.

Regarding the information Johnson provided to the town board at the July 11 meeting, *The Lakeland Times* filed a verbal and written open records re-

quest with Kleinschmidt on July 12.

As of press time Friday, July 14, Kleinschmidt didn’t supply the requested information, though she confirmed she received the request and will work to satisfy it.

One other comment

While there were others who spoke during the public comment portion of the meeting that aligned with Ramker’s and the Morriss’ opinion on the buoy situation, there was another person to comment with an alternative perspective.

Ron Ahles said he spoke in defense of the lakes association and town at the June 26 lakes association listening session and meeting.

He said, in his eyes, Ramker and Morris seemed like “they were going for a pound of flesh or something because those buoys were put in place.”

Ahles agreed the buoys being placed illegally was a “terrible” thing, but said there was never any intention to place them illegally.

“When I got up and spoke every time, I felt like I was totally disrespected because I wasn’t in favor of their point of view,” he said. “I felt like a few of them were staring holes in the back of my head. That’s how angry they were. So it wasn’t just a one-sided thing.”

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