

Ulterior Political Motives are Asserted to be Behind Ethics Commission Complaint Filed Against Grand Chute Supervisor Jeff Ings

Grand Chute Supervisor Jeff Ings' response to an ethics complaint filed against him alleges that ulterior motives may be the reason for the complaint. The response claims that the complaint filed against Ings was purely political, in an effort to discredit and defame Ings, a two-term incumbent who was overwhelmingly elected in 2020 and again in 2022 by residents interested in eliminating the Town's long-standing practice of specially assessing property owners for street and related improvements. The use of special assessments was a standard practice under former Grand Chute Town Board Chairman David Schowalter.

Supervisor Ings' response explains that the complaint was not based on defensible facts submitted by the complainants, but rather on a convoluted compilation of information that was taken out of context. Multiple examples of the use of that tactic were identified in Supervisor Ings' response.

The ethics complaint against Ings may be part of a series of political attacks on Ings, Town Chairman Jason Van Eperen and Supervisor Ron Wolff, who all stood up against the use of special assessments which continued to increase in amount over time under the Schowalter regime. The special assessments were apparently used, tacitly, to offset

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the high cost of urbanizing all Grand Chute roadways when roads were reconstructed. Under the Schowalter Board, it was not atypical for affected residents to be specially assessed amounts of \$15,000 - \$35,000. Some small businesses and non-profit organizations were also being assessed amounts which exceeded \$100,000, and up to \$390,000. According to Town Chairman Jason Van Eperen, **"Special assessments were being improperly used to target and force small numbers of residents, who could not defend themselves, to pay exorbitant special assessment amounts. This is because the Schowalter Board apparently feared voter backlash if the high cost of its overly-aggressive practice of reconstructing and urbanizing roads would have been placed on the Town property tax roll."**

By voting to repave and reclaim a portion of N. Gillett Street where Ings resides at the September 5, 2023 Town Board meeting, the Board's action saved Grand Chute taxpayers more than \$1.1 million dollars, as the cost of reconstructing this portion of N. Gillett Street was budgeted at \$1,330,000 in the approved 2023 Town Capital Improvement Plan. In contrast, the cost of the Board's approved action to reclaim and repave the road has been estimated at just \$195,000. The final cost of reclaiming and repaving the road will be known in 2024, after a final layer of asphalt is applied. Residents of the affected portion of N. Gillett Street had been waiting for the Town to fix the road since 2016, which was the originally scheduled timeframe.

Supervisor Ings stated that he did not believe the road needed to be reconstructed at this time. An adjacent section of N. Gillett Street had already been reclaimed and repaved earlier in 2023. Both sections of the road had originally been built at about the same time. The difference is that the section of road approved for work on September 5, 2023 had been badly beaten by ongoing, heavy truck traffic associated with nearby development that took place over the past 30 years. Ings further stated, "The surface of the affected road was badly beaten, but if the base would not have been solid, the surface of the road would have separated and sunk more than it has over time. That did not happen. We will be able to get 25-30 years of use from this new road surface, especially since the amount of heavy vehicle

use will no longer be experienced. The decision to reclaim and repave the road saved our taxpayers and residents a lot of money.”

It was also cited in Supervisor Ings’ response that Supervisors Brad Gehring and Beth English, who vehemently opposed the September 5, 2023 action to reclaim and repave N. Gillett Street, and called for it instead to be reconstructed, had an opportunity to propose reconstruction of the road at a May 2, 2023 Town Board meeting during which Supervisor Ings had recused himself from the discussion. Instead, the two supervisors took no action, not even to discuss the street project.

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For Supervisor Gehring and Supervisor English to not propose reconstruction of the road on May 2, and to then call for reconstruction of the road on September 5, only after Supervisor Ings made a motion to reclaim and repave the road, suggests that the actions Gehring and English took on May 2 were disingenuous and politically motivated.

In an email dated September 6, 2023, addressed to Town Clerk Kayla Raatz, Interim Administrator Jeff O’Dell and Chairman Van Eperen, Supervisor Ings expressed concern that Supervisor Gehring and Supervisor English’s failure to take any action on the topic of N. Gillett Street on May 2, 2023 was motivated by a desire to harm Supervisor Ings, his family and eight other resident families of N. Gillett Street by allowing a badly deteriorated road, that had become dangerous to motorists, and which was causing excessive wear on vehicles, to continue without repair for at least another construction year. In the email Ings further stated, “Politically motivated actions should not be guiding our actions or the service we provide to our residents.”

The ethics complaint against Supervisor Ings was filed by Connie Raether and Patti Clark-Stojke, who appear, based on a review of various documents, to be aligned with former Town Chairman David Schowalter, former Fire Chief Tim Bantes, former Town Administrator Jim March, and current Town Board Supervisors Brad Gehring and Beth English, among others.

Supervisor Ings’ response requests that the Wisconsin Ethics Commission find the complaint filed against him to be declared frivolous. Wis. Stat. § 19.49(2)(b)(1m) provides that if a complaint is determined by the Ethics Commission to be frivolous, “the Commission may order the complainant(s) to forfeit not more than the greater of \$500 or the expenses incurred by the Commission in investigating the complaint.”

In addition to the ethics complaint filed against Supervisor Ings, he also has been the target of a false media smear campaign in which he and Chairman Van Eperen were publicly accused on network television and news radio broadcasts as being the subject of search warrants issued by the Wisconsin Department of Justice. These highly publicized political attacks were made on March 22, 2022, and in the days following. The false attacks appeared in the media just two weeks prior to the April 5, 2022 Spring election, in which Ings was a candidate. Despite the false media reports, Ings defeated former Grand Chute Chairman David Schowalter in the contest for the position of Supervisor #2, by a margin of 67% to 33%. Van Eperen had previously defeated Schowalter for the position of Town Chairman in April 2021 by a margin of 63% to 37%.