

Rock-Koshkonong Lake District

Lake District board tees up audit issue

By Jeff Brown
Reporter staff

Taxpayers clamoring for the Rock-Koshkonong Lake District to provide detailed information about how it spends the money it raises from a special charge added to their property tax bills will get their chance to approve an independent, in-depth audit at the district's annual meeting on August 10 at Fort Atkinson High School.

At the lake district's board meeting on June 4 board member Andy Walton said the audit issue should be listed in the newsletter sent to lake district electors ahead of the annual meeting. Lake district chairman Brian Christianson agreed, and said he wants the cost for an independent, in-depth audit to appear as a separate line item in the budget, with the amount it would add per parcel to the 2014 special charge, for voters to approve at the annual meeting.

"Then we can have a healthy discussion on do you want the additional monies, the increase in your special charge on your property tax, to go to accountants for the audit," said Christianson, "or for boots and shovels on the ground and more projects like the dredging."

Walton, who is also a member of the Fulton town board, said "a substantial number of people" have signed a petition asking the Fulton town board to join the Albion, Koshkonong and Milton town boards in seeking more detailed financial information from the lake district. Christianson wasn't impressed.

"It does kind of get my anxiety going when I see town board agendas where people are petitioning their town board to audit the lake district," said Christianson. "That would be like going to a Janesville city council meeting and demanding that they audit the city of Edgerton's city council. There's such a disconnect here."

Christianson wondered if all the people who signed the petition lived in the lake district, and said their efforts were misguided. "They're shooting at the wrong target. They should come to the lake district board, they should come to the annual meeting."

Walton invited Christianson to attend the Fulton town board meeting on June 11. Before Christianson could reply, board member and treasurer

Ray Lunder jumped in. "I'd go attend it, and I'd take this letter right with me," said Lunder, brandishing a letter from a lawyer backing up Christianson's claim that the district has complied with state law by performing an internal audit of its financial statements. Christianson later decided not to send anybody to the Fulton town board meeting.

Christianson warned that an in-depth independent audit would mean a lot of extra work for the Albion, Fulton, Koshkonong, Milton, and Sumner town clerks. "It's not just an audit on lake district expenditures, on where they money's going," said Christianson. "It's an audit on making sure that every town has brought their revenue to us, because it's collected on the property tax bill."

"For the town clerks, they're going to have to go through their property tax rolls, and specifically the parcels that are in the lake district, to ensure that they forwarded that special charge—for each of however many years we do this—to the lake district," said Christianson. Lunder told Sumner town clerk Barbara McGann, sitting in the audience, "you're going to spend hundreds of more hours."

The warning was directed at Milton town board chairman Bryan Meyer, who appeared at the board's meeting in May and said the towns are entitled to know more about how the lake district spends money it raises from the special charge because state law requires the towns to collect the special charge on the district's behalf.

Toward the end of the meeting Lunder went through the proposed 2014 budget with the board. Lunder took special care to point out that no money was budgeted or spent for board member wages, and said the district has spent only \$2,878 of the \$5,000 budgeted for the district's website, contrary to allegations that the board had spent \$40,000 on the website.

"These are the real numbers," said Lunder of the budget, "and I'd be happy to take it through an audit."

The Rock-Koshkonong Lake District board will hold a special meeting to finalize the proposed 2014 budget on June 24 at 6:00 p.m. at Tallgrass Restoration LLC, at 3129 East County Highway N in Milton.