



Choice words: Somers Town Supervisor Mark Molinaro, left, confronts Somers Village President George Stoner after Village board meeting Tuesday after Molnaro said Stoner was "chuckling" during his citizen comments. (photo by Jon Brines)

Sparks fly in Somers over public access, compensation

By: Jon Brines Aug 12, 2015

SOMERS — The road to cooperation between the Town and Village of Somers took another detour Tuesday.

Issues over public access and compensation for board members dominated the Village Board of Trustees meeting. It began when Town Board Supervisor Mark Molinaro took to the podium during the citizen comments section of the village board meeting to criticize Village President George Stoner.

“I respect that you may not like what I am saying, but there should be nobody in this room who disagrees with the fact that the town government earned the reputation of not being very forthright with the taxpayers and the village president seems committed to perpetuating the reality,” Molinaro said.

Molinaro called on Stoner to stop opposing citizen comments in village work sessions and support a recommendation from Trustee Joe Cardinali to make it policy. The Somers town board is considering a similar move.

“Just when I thought things may be on the right track to getting better our village president decided the taxpayers need to be shut out of the process all together,” Molinaro said.

Molinaro took issue with Stoner failing to put citizen comments on the agenda for special village board meetings called earlier this month. One was amended by the clerk after Molinaro complained. Molinaro got a lot of attention last month after he was critical of Stoner not cooperation between the town and the village priority when he said, “Somers is a village not a kingdom.”

On Tuesday, Molinaro called out Trustee Larry Harding and Stoner for being involved in town government when Somers “got into a financial position.” Despite the criticism, Stoner allowed Molinaro to speak past the recently amended 5-minute time limit for citizen comments.

Molinaro took further issue with Stoner’s handling two weeks ago when compensation for board members was approved; \$6,000 for trustees and \$12,000 for village president annually.

“(Stoner) proposes a salary for the board and himself but provides not a shred of supporting documentation for why and further includes health insurance in the motion,” Molinaro said. “We can throw that in too.”

It’s unclear how Tuesday’s display will impact the negotiations for the first draft of an intergovernmental agreement between the Town and the Village of Somers. Molinaro, Stoner and Trustee Dave Geertsens are expected to negotiate the details of a legal agreement on how dual government would work.

“I support the town and understand the problems,” Stoner said. “We’re working on it right now.”

Trustees respond Trustee Joe Cardinali responded to Molinaro’s comments by calling on Stoner to put citizen comments in work sessions.

“Work sessions are where the sausage is made,” Cardinali said. “All I’m asking for is a healthy discussion.”

Harding said he did not want insurance and considers the issue settled since the board approved compensation without benefits last month. Stoner used the floor to respond to Molinaro's attacks as "misinformation."

"Let's clear the air here," Stoner said. "You supervisors get \$6,000 the town chairman gets \$18,000. He's the highest paid chairman in the state of Wisconsin."



Somers Town Supervisor Mark Molinaro spoke at the village board meeting during public comments Tuesday to call on Village President George Stoner to allow citizen comments at work sessions as well. (photo by Jon Brines)

After the meeting Molinaro confronted Stoner again this time about "chuckling" during his public comments and two were seen pointing fingers at each other. Stoner said Molinaro has no place to talk about board benefits because he took benefits when he was on the Kenosha County board. Molinaro contends he was chairman when the practice was ended.