

NOSB member files suit over pay

Written by MARK JAEGER
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Thistle contends school district improperly withheld \$500 stipend owed to committee members

Northern Ozaukee School Board member Kendall Thistle has filed a lawsuit against the school district in a dispute over committee pay.

The suit is an ironic turn of events, because the district filed a lawsuit in February against Thistle and his wife Carla due to an unresolved drainage issue.

The Thistles live immediately north of property owned by the school district. The landowners have been at odds over who is responsible for longstanding drainage problems.

In the suit filed by Thistle, he contends the district reneged on payment for serving on the Negotiations Committee.

Up until state law altered the way school districts pay teachers, the committee had been paid a \$500 stipend for negotiating contracts.

After Act 10 became law last year, a vote to recertify the Fredonia Education Association as the local teachers' union failed. That left the district without the need to handle contracts through collective bargaining.

Thistle was a member of the committee, and noted the \$500 payment for 2011-12 was not made this year on the recommendation of Interim Supt. Joe Gassert because no contract negotiations were handled.

Board policy states the stipend will be paid "for negotiation of contracts."

Thistle filed the suit on June 22, asking for double the damages — \$1,000 — plus court costs.

The legal issue was a topic of a closed session at the end of Monday's School Board meeting.

According to School Board President Paul Krause, Thistle recused himself from that discussion, but refused to leave the room during the session.

"The closed session was to let board members know that they are going to be asked to provide depositions in the case," Krause said.

Following the closed session, which also addressed a student expulsion, the board returned to open session and voted to alter its policy on committee payments.

The Negotiations Committee was formally dissolved earlier in the evening, and the board voted that all committee members should be paid at a rate of \$25 a meeting.

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Thistle voted against the motion, which was supported by all other board members, including the other two members of the Negotiations Committee.

“The stipend was established to encourage the Negotiations Committee to expedite contract talks, since there would then be no incentive in dragging out negotiations,” Krause said.

If the union is recertified and the committee is reinstated, Krause said the per diem approach would be followed.

“It comes down to a question of fairness. It is not right to treat members of one board committee differently,” he said.

Krause said the lawsuit is a distraction from the work the board was elected to perform.

“I believe Kendall’s heart is in the right place, but as a board we have real problems to resolve and real needs of our kids to address,” he said.

A hearing on the case is scheduled for Wednesday, July 18, in Ozaukee County Circuit Court before Judge Sandy Williams