

Glen Arbor's new sign to go dark

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"Balance is difficult, but the sign will change the character of the community," Jeff Hamilton said from the audience. "All you have to do is look at Gatlinburg, Tenn. It's an abomination."

Residents said the sign is "significantly larger" than what's allowed in the township Zoning Ordinance, and the illumination is not supposed to be seen off the property.

However, township zoning administrator Tim Cypher, who was not at the meeting, said the sign is allowed through Article 10 of the Zoning Ordinance. That provision states, "Any and all institutions ... public lands, grounds or area now under the ownership or control of federal, state, or local governmental authority including the Township of Glen Arbor shall so remain and shall not be regulated by this ordinance."

In other words, the township is exempt from regulation.

The news didn't sit well with the audience.

"I feel keeping the sign will encourage others to do the same," said Cookie Thatcher, owner of Bay Lavender Trading Company. "What's keeping me from lighting up my whole building with LED lights?"

One person in the audience supported the new sign.

Business owner and Glen Arbor Chamber of Commerce member Patricia Widmayer said the new sign is needed to inform residents and visitors about goings-on in the community.

"I'm the chairman of the Holiday Marketplace and the Pumpkin Fest and we need a digital sign," she said. "The old sign is very difficult to use. It takes a couple of hours in bad weather to figure out if there's enough letters to say what you need to on both sides."

The two-sided sign with a yellow background is manual and when not in use is stored in a utility shed owned by



JEFF HAMILTON took the floor at the Glen Arbor Township meeting urging the board to reconsider its purchase of a new sign.

the township.

Other options are available and should be explored, according to those in attendance.

Former township Zoning Board of Appeals member Dan Semple offered another option.

In a statement read by his wife, Jan, Semple proposed that the township oversee and develop two to three informational kiosks in the new township park, in the Glen Arbor Garden and at the township office.

Semple encouraged the township to seek input from the Glen Arbor Art Center for input and seek cooperation

from the Chamber of Commerce in maintaining and updating kiosk information.

"I'm sure the other ideas could be incorporated into the kiosk idea and involvement of others would be beneficial," he wrote.

Board members voted 5-0 to have supervisor Peter Van Nort assemble a subcommittee with representatives from the GAAC and Chamber as well as residents.

In the meantime, the board voted to turn off the sign on Saturday pending the findings of the subcommittee.

No pact for Glen Lake teachers

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School Board and federated teachers have not come to an agreement.

The district's offer — a 1 percent raise this year; a .75 percent raise for 2019-20 and one-half percent raise in 2020-2021 — has been rejected.

"Given the district's financial status and current spending practices, the GLFT does not understand why the Board appears so intent on reducing current benefits, requiring additional work without equitable compensation and rejecting the GLFT's proposals without serious consideration," Gretzmacher said.

The district provided a "community update" on contract talks Friday via the school website.

The 12-page document provided by the board offers a comparison of hourly compensation for the teachers under the current contract; what that compensation would be in the district's proposed contract, and a third category for total contracted compensation per hour, which includes salary retirement and full-family health benefits.

Currently, the minimum hourly rate without benefits is \$34.96; the median hourly wage, \$51.04 and maximum, \$57.22.

The board's proposed increase of 1 percent in the first year of the contract would bring these hourly wages to \$36.61, \$53.26 and \$57.79, at the three levels respectively.

The board "update" went further to list the hourly rate at minimum, median and maximum, including benefits at \$68.79, \$91.64 and \$97.86 per hour.

Other provisions in the proposed contract have also proven to be stumbling blocks.

These include:

- The addition of once-a-week staff meetings without additional compensation. Currently, just one staff meeting is held per month.

- Elimination of a district-funded "sick bank," which provides teachers additional paid leave once all paid

leave has been exhausted. The teachers would fund the benefit instead, as Superintendent Sander Scott said is customary throughout the region.

• A proposal that if Impact Aid funds fall below \$3 million at any point in the contract, the staff would revert to the pay rate from 2017-18.

Glen Lake receives \$3.2 million a year in the form of Impact Aid from the federal government to "compensate" for lost property tax revenue resulting from the creation of Sleeping Bear Dunes National Lakeshore.

To date, the board's practice has been to hold Impact Aid for a minimum of one year before it is spent.

A graph listing four area school districts in addition to Glen Lake was included in the GLFT response to the board "community update."

Glen Lake's \$14 million fund balance is the highest in the group, which includes Traverse City Area Public Schools (\$4 million); Kingsley (\$3.8 million); Frankfort (\$747,328) and Leland (\$552,831).

Scott the numbers don't tell the whole story.

"What it doesn't show is that these districts level two or three times more than us to pay off bond issues," Scott said. "We use our fund balance for capital improvements, so we don't have to raise taxes."

Glen Lake voters approved a bond issue to pay for technology improve-

ments in May 2012. However, the bonds were never sold, Glen Lake business manager LeAnn Eustice said.

Gary Wellnitz, northern Michigan field representative for the American Federation of Teachers, said stalled contract talks have negatively impacted teaching staff.

"Morale at the school is as bad as I've ever seen," he said. "The last couple of years, there have been sour feelings."

Scott disagreed.

"We have an awesome professional staff. The fact that we have an unsettled contract does have an impact on teachers, but I don't think it's evident to the kids or the community."

"We're willing to keep dialogue going, roll up our sleeves and get the job done."

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