

Campaign

From A1

and available at the Lake County Government Center, show that Sandberg received \$15,819 in donations for the primary election, substantially more than the 11 Cedar Lake primary candidates combined; they collected donations averaging \$1,332 per individual.

Sandberg said Lotton has consistently supported Republican candidates in the county, and as a property taxpayer and citizen of Cedar Lake, he has the right to support campaigns he sees fit. She said the money she has received for her campaign have gone toward mailers and signs, and she will continue to use the money for the November election.

“I encourage anyone interested in my campaign, whether it be plans, goals or finances, to reach out to me,” Sandberg said. “I am happy to have a conversation with anyone. I received a donation and receipted and reported it properly.”

Lotton’s attorney, Timothy Kuiper, said LBL Development’s campaign contribution to Sandberg “acknowledges that the clerk-treasurer and her staff have done a fantastic job managing the town’s finances, and the balance in the town’s checkbook reflects this accomplishment.”

Niemeyer said he believes Sandberg has handled her duties in a transparent and ethical manner.

“There is not a single person that I’ve worked with in government who has conducted themselves with more integrity than Ms. Sandberg,” Niemeyer said. “Jennifer’s leadership has been a major contributing factor to the unprecedented financial standing of the town.”

However, Parker said that when such large sums are funneled into campaigns, the question of where candidates’ loyalties lie rises.

“It used to be you go out and talk to people to campaign,” Parker said. “The biggest donation I remember getting was a couple hundred bucks. People self-funded campaigns back then and would talk to people — try to win hearts and minds. But when you get that kind of money pumped into candidates, how can you hon-

estly say they are representing the people anymore?”

Richard Thiel, a Republican running for nomination for an at-large council seat, said he obtained the reports once available, but multiple people sent copies of the report to him via photo and fax.

“I feel like it does vindicate some people who are in the know and do pay attention,” he said. “They do feel this adds to the issue. If you were to ever go back and watch meetings, a lot of questions go unanswered.”

Thiel said many of the signs and mailers notably promote Sandberg with a group of candidates: Councilman Richard Sharpe, Councilman John Foreman, Councilman Ralph Miller and Councilwoman Colleen Schieben.

“My concern also is that you see where all their campaign signs are — on developers’ properties,” Thiel said. “That combined with a \$15,000 donation given to an uncontested clerk-treasurer raises an eyebrow. It makes you wonder what’s going on here.”

However, Sandberg said there is no foul play afoot.

“Mr. Lotton and/or his company have not submitted any petitions, official plans or applications for development,” Sandberg said. “If Mr. Lotton and/or his company decide to begin that process, he has to first engage the building and planning staff. None of those staff members are politicians and they do not get their direction from Town Council members.”

Sandberg outlined the multistep process for concept plans and rezoning decisions, including multiple meetings, public input, voting and oversight from several individuals and commissions.

“I would like to note that the Plan Commission is made up of four private citizens and three Town Council members,” Sandberg said. “This illustrates the checks and balances present throughout the process of development. The Town of Cedar Lake allows for participation in all public meetings via a Zoom link that can be found on the town’s website. Any interested person can watch any meeting live or archived on the town’s YouTube channel.”

Kevin Toth, Hanover Township trustee, said his first thought



ANNA ORTIZ, THE TIMES

A campaign sign sits on the property at 13621 Morse St., which is owned by John Lotton.

upon learning the information was, “Why would anyone accept this contribution?”

“You are unopposed, it’s a primary and there has been a lot of passion lately in town over development, developers and associations,” he said. “With the current climate in politics across the country, the amounts of money that are being spent on campaigns and the perception that this is how politics work, it is probably a good idea for candidates to avoid these types of questionable situations and contributions.”

During the public comment period at the April 4 Town Council meeting, officials refuted rumors that there were “back-door deals” or special favor toward Lotton, who some residents suspect has plans to increase the density of his developments by requesting rezoning.

Lotton owns three large undeveloped properties in town: 140 acres on the former South Shore Country Club; 57 acres on a former farmhouse property at 13621 Morse St.; and 182 acres known as Bay Bridge at 149th Avenue and Colfax Street. A mass tree-felling has been observed on two of the properties.

Lotton has been involved in controversy in the Region, including lawsuits against the Town of St. John, where he stands as the developer of its largest neighborhood, The Gates of St. John. The town has a 22-page written timeline de-

veloping lawsuits and disputes with Lotton regarding his developments dating to 2018. The disputes range from disagreements over sewer lines to rezoning and density to validity of annexations.

In a December 2021 dispute, a proposed 120-unit development in St. John was rejected by the town’s Planning Commission. Because of its density and design, the development was deemed unsafe, causing the police chief and fire chief to publicly take a stand against it for public safety reasons.

“We feel there are way too many units in such a small piece of land,” Police Chief Steven Flores wrote in a letter to the town. “The number of units in each structure and the proximity they are to each other will create traffic issues within the property itself.”

Parker said he believes more controversy could be ahead for Cedar Lake.

“If you have folks in authority positions making decisions — and it only takes four of them, really — and they don’t do their research on who they are dealing with and go in blind, they don’t see that they are setting themselves up for problems down the road,” Parker said.

In the end, Toth said, the contribution affects trust in public officials.

“Of course this affects public opinion,” he said. “Many people already believe this is how they used to say ‘the sausage is made’

Campaign donations

Candidates for town office in Cedar Lake have raised the following amounts in campaign donations this election cycle.

Town Council

- John Foreman, R-at large: \$2,589
 - Larry Nagy, R-at large, \$2,337
 - Richard Sharpe, R-at large, \$547
 - Richard Thiel, R-at large: \$3,150
 - Chuck Becker, R-4th: \$2,480
 - Jimmy Laud, R-4th: \$1,500
 - Colleen Schieben, R-5th: \$0
 - Ralph Miller, R-4th: \$1,509
 - Jeff Biel, D-at large: \$300
 - Mary Joan Dickson, D-at large: \$150
 - Deborah Mandich-Nowland, D-at large: \$100
- ### Clerk-treasurer
- Jennifer Sandberg, R-at large: \$15,819

in politics, and something like this only reinforces that. People already feel that the developers get too much preferential treatment, they feel that in many ways any of the businesses and companies that work for federal, state and local governments get preferential treatment, and when they see something like this it just supports those beliefs.”

The information also had circulated on social media, where Town Council Democratic candidate Mary Joan Dickson first heard of the contribution before obtaining a copy of the report.

“I have known Jennifer for years. She ran cross country with my daughter,” Dickson said. “She also was a member of Key Club and participated in community service projects. As Cedar Lake’s clerk-treasurer, she serves the position in a professional manner. I personally don’t know how this donation affects the public opinion of our municipal government.”



Cleanup of USS Lead Superfund Site Zone 1 to Begin This Summer

This summer, U.S. Environmental Protection Agency will begin overseeing the cleanup of Zone 1 of the USS Lead Superfund site, which includes the former West Calumet Housing Complex, a portion of Goodman Park and a utility corridor. Soil in these areas is contaminated with elevated levels of lead and arsenic.

The soil cleanup will be conducted by contractors working for Industrial Development Advantage of East Chicago, under close EPA supervision. IDA has informed EPA that it intends to clean up Zone 1 and install the necessary infrastructure to construct an approximately 850,000 square-foot warehouse and logistics center.

You are Invited to a Public Meeting

EPA will host an in-person public meeting on May 10, 2023. In this meeting, EPA and developer Industrial Development Advantage of East Chicago will present the soil cleanup designs, explain how they plan on removing the contaminated soil, safety measures to keep neighboring residents safe, and construction of a logistics center at the site. There will be a questions-and-answers period after the presentation.

Date: Wednesday, May 10, 2023
Time: 5 p.m. – 7 p.m.
Venue: Old Carrie Gosch School, Auditorium
 455 E. 148th St., East Chicago

If you wish to request special accommodations to attend this meeting, please contact Charles Rodriguez at 312-886-7472 or rodriguez.charles@epa.gov.

More information is available at www.epa.gov/uss-lead-superfund-site

La Limpieza de la Zona 1 de USS Lead Comienza Este Verano

Este verano, la Agencia de Protección Ambiental de los EE.UU. (U.S. EPA, por sus siglas en inglés) empezará la supervisión de la limpieza de la Zona 1 del Sitio Superfund USS Lead, que incluye el antiguo complejo de viviendas West Calumet Housing Complex, una parte de Goodman Park y el corredor de servicios públicos. El suelo en estas áreas está contaminado con elevados niveles de plomo y arsénico.

La limpieza del suelo será realizada por contratistas trabajando para Industrial Development Advantage of East Chicago (IDA, por sus siglas en inglés), bajo estrecha supervisión de la EPA. IDA ha informado a la EPA que tiene la intención de limpiar la Zona 1 e instalar la infraestructura necesaria para construir un almacén y centro logístico con una dimensión aproximadamente de 850,000 pies cuadrados.

Usted está Invitado/Invitada a una Reunión Pública

La EPA tendrá una reunión pública y audiencia el 10 de mayo del 2023, en donde la EPA y el desarrollador Industrial Development Advantage of East Chicago (IDA, por sus siglas en inglés) presentarán los diseños de limpieza del suelo, explicaran como se planificará la remoción de suelo contaminado, medidas de seguridad para mantener a buen seguro a los residentes del vecindario, y la construcción de un centro logístico en el Sitio. Tras la presentación, habrá un periodo de preguntas y respuestas.

Fecha: miércoles, 10 de mayo del 2023
Hora: 5 p.m. – 7 p.m.
Lugar: Auditorio de la Antigua Escuela Carrie Gosch
 455 E. 148th St., East Chicago

Si usted desea pedir alguna acomodación especial para atender a esta reunión, por favor contacte a Charles Rodriguez, 312-886-7472 o rodriguez.charles@epa.gov.

Mas información está disponible en www.epa.gov/uss-lead-superfund-site



Lois, Nancy, Sophie Belle, Residents

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