

Kohler Goes to Walker to Influence City of Sheboygan's Proposed Annexation of Town of Wilson

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Records obtained indicate that Kohler attorneys contacted the Governor's office to influence the annexation decision. The Secretary of the Department of Administration (DOA) was enlisted to help. DOA is a state agency which determines if an annexation is in the best interest of the public.

After reading emails from an open records request, Friends of the Black River Forest (FBRF) co-spokesperson Mary Faydash says "This is a blatant abuse of power and trust. The Governor and the Kohler Company have made Kohler's proposed golf course and contentious annexation of the Town of Wilson to the City of Sheboygan a political decision rather than one dependent on law."

Further, the emails showed that Scott Neitzel, DOA Secretary, attended a meeting with Kohler attorneys and the DOA staff who would be writing the opinion. Kohler Co. requested this private meeting attended by the DOA Secretary, DOA staff, Kohler attorneys, Tomczak, Klein, and Westphal and had invited Sheboygan City Administrator, Darrel Hofland, but not any Town of Wilson officials. The only two parties responsible for providing legal arguments on annexation to the DOA were the City of Sheboygan and the Town of Wilson, not the Kohler Co.

Previously, FBRF obtained emails showing collusion by Kohler's attorney Tomczak, who composed letters to the DOA which were then signed by the City attorney.

While the DOA decision is advisory, it carries weight with municipalities because the Department is supposed to be an unbiased, deliberative body which reviews annexation cases for the public's welfare. Some City of Sheboygan Council members have indicated that they consider the DOA's opinion an important factor in their decision whether or not to support annexation.

To the surprise of annexation experts, the DOA determined that this non-unanimous annexation is in the best interest of the public. Town officials on the other hand, call this annexation unwarranted, unnecessary and contentious.

FBRF spokesperson Claudia Bricks after reading the obtained emails, stated, "We hope this information has a serious effect on the City Council members when they discover that this annexation is tainted with morally reprehensible behavior. An earlier records request we obtained showed Kohler's Mike Belot's letter to the Governor asking him to smooth the permitting path for the proposed golf course. Does the City really want to involve itself with a developer of questionable ethics? How many of us could call the Governor's office and get them to push through our pet project? So, I am asking people to go to www.growsheboygan.com and tell their Council members what you think of this unethical behavior. Your comments will be sent directly to the City Council members.

To read the emails obtained through the open records request, go to:

<https://www.dropbox.com/s/lr91637gp3cpzc0/Westerberg%20Request%207142%20Response%20pt%202.pdf?dl=0>