

Attorney general investigating Deer Park meetings

By Eric Peterson Daily Herald

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The Illinois attorney general's office is investigating whether the Deer Park village board violated the state's Open Meetings Act while discussing and voting on a measure to change the village's police service provider from Kildeer to the Lake County Sheriff's Office.

Deer Park Village Attorney Jim Bateman said he is responding to the attorney general's request for more information about three board meetings cited in a complaint by former trustee Maureen Pratscher.

In her complaint to the attorney general, Pratscher questions whether trustees were justified in negotiating the Lake County Sheriff's contract during closed sessions Sept. 19 and 27.

Pratscher also notes that the Oct. 17 meeting agenda that included the cancellation of the Kildeer contract and approval of the Lake County Sheriff's deal was posted on the village website less than 24 hours before the meeting.

Her complaint points out that the Daily Herald published parts of a letter informing Kildeer officials of the decision hours before the vote took place Oct. 17.

Assistant Attorney General Amanda Lundeen, who works in the office's public access bureau, sent the Deer Park board and Pratscher a notice Monday informing them that further investigation was necessary.

Bateman said he is preparing "a complete comprehensive response."

Attorney general's office spokeswoman Natalie Bauer said she couldn't predict the time frame for the investigation.

"We are actively investigating at this point," Bauer said. "We will investigate as long as the issue merits."

Addressing the late posting of the Oct. 17 meeting agenda, Bateman said because Deer Park's website isn't maintained by a full-time employee, its legal obligation to post by a particular time is reduced. In fact, the village clerk was experiencing problems with her computer until the day of the meeting, Bateman added.

He also argued that discussion of the breaking of the village's police contract with Kildeer was allowed in closed session as both a matter of pending litigation and a security issue.

"You can't separate the Lake County contract from the Kildeer contract as pending litigation which is probable or imminent," Bateman said.

Pratscher believes it was improper, in part because when she was on the board trustees discussed and approved the initial contract with Kildeer in open session.

Some Deer Park residents have expressed unhappiness with the cancellation of the Kildeer contract and are asking trustees to reverse the decision

While stressing that she cannot comment on Deer Park specifically, Bauer said that if violations of the Open Meetings Act are found, a board may be required to take a revote.

Lake County Sheriff's deputies began patrolling Deer Park under the new contract on Tuesday.