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# The FREEMAN

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## THEY'RE OUT!

### City administrator ends discussions with Big Top Baseball; cites lack of support from public, council



Rendering provided by Big Top Baseball

Big Top Baseball's proposal to bring a Northwoods League team to Frame Park included plans for a 2,500-seat stadium. City Administrator Kevin Lahner has decided not to continue with the project.

**By Cara Spoto**  
cspoto@conley.net  
262-513-3562

WAUKESHA — Waukesha City Administrator Kevin Lahner has called it quits on a proposal to build bring amateur baseball to Frame Park.

In statement issued Thursday night, Lahner stated that the proposed partnership with Northwoods League developer Big Top Baseball would not be moving forward.

In the statement, Lahner says the administration appreciated the "input and effort from all the individuals who provided their opinions" and would still be pursuing redevelopment efforts in the Whiterock Avenue/East Main Street corridor.

Speaking to The Freeman, Lahner said a lack of public and aldermanic support for the \$4.5 million project prompted the move.

"I think, at the end of the day, there just wasn't enough support for it, from the public and ultimately from the council," said Lahner, adding that the decision to cease moving forward with the project was largely his.

That's something Mayor Shawn Reilly confirmed.

"If Kevin wanted to keep pursuing it I wouldn't have stopped him," said Reilly, adding that he also didn't feel comfortable moving forward with the project given the level of opposition.

"I guess I was surprised that there was so much opposition to it, even with the use of Frame Park," Reilly said.

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**Reaction**  
Oddly enough, opponents and proponents of the project both said they were disappointed by the news.

Scott Anfinson, a member of the Friends of Frame Park, said he was sad Big Top and the city couldn't find a way to develop a stadium elsewhere in Waukesha, while Common Council President Aaron Perry, an early backer of the proposal, said he was disappointed there wasn't a vote on the project.

"It is not the fault of the administration or Big Top Baseball. I understand their position and their needs," said Perry.

But he bemoaned the negativity put forward by some people opposed to the project.

"Based on what I have seen on social media, there has been a small handful of them who have not shown the best version of themselves," he said. "They are going to look at this as a win, and I really hope it doesn't set a precedent."

In a press release issued Thursday evening, Big Top Baseball's president Vern Stenman and its chief operating officer Conor Caloia thanked the city and Common Council for discussing the company's proposal.

"Historically, our franchises and venues have united commu-

nities. Unfortunately, this idea was more divisive than we like to see," the pair said in the joint statement. "We want to be in communities where the residents and elected officials share our vision."

Alderman Vance Skinner, who expressed serious reservations about the city and Big Top's plan, nevertheless was hopeful on Thursday that a baseball team "or something like it" will someday make Waukesha its home.

"I still hold out hope that it's possible. Maybe there is another partner that is willing to look at Waukesha and maybe put up some more of their own dollars," Skinner said.

#### Vocal opposition

News first broke that Big Top was considering Waukesha for its latest baseball franchise this past summer, but administration officials didn't present an official proposal for the \$4.5 million project until December.

Within days a vocal group of citizens calling themselves the Friends of Frame Park raised opposition to the plan, which called for constructing a 2,500-seat outdoor stadium at Frame Park.

The group partnered with Karen Frame McDonald — the great granddaughter of Andrew and Emma Frame — and filed a lawsuit arguing that deed restrictions on the land donated to the city by the Frames prevent it from being leased to a private entity.

The group also pointed to federal land use restrictions that

they say prevent the city from leasing part of the park to a private entity.

On Thursday Lahner called the land use concerns "non-issues."

"We may still move those lawsuits forward to get a judge's ruling," he said. "We are extremely confident about our legal position on those matters."

#### Financing concerns

But land use wasn't the only sticking point for opponents and others reticent about the plan.

The proposed financing for the project, which called for the city to shoulder \$4 million of the \$4.5 million capital investment, raised concerns among some aldermen.

Although the plan called for Big Top to put up \$500,000 of the construction costs and pay the city \$175,000 annually as part of a 20-year lease, many aldermen had qualms about the city's plans to use a tax increment finance district to pay back the debt.

News of Waukesha pulling away from the deal comes two days after the city pulled the consideration of a new financing plan for the project from a committee meeting agenda.

Lahner said Thursday that the administration had been working on a financing plan for the project that didn't include the use of TIF funds when he made the decision to put on the brakes.

"We were very, very confident that it would work," he said.

#### WAUKESHA WATER PLAN

## New Berlin farm spared after pipeline shifts routes

### Residents, local leaders express concerns about all three options through city

**By Hannah Weikel**  
hweikel@conley.net  
262-513-2651

NEW BERLIN — Al Salentine says he couldn't stand the thought of his New Berlin farm — in the family since the 1850s — getting dug up for a water pipeline, so he started making calls.

Salentine's family farm sits on approximately 82 acres of land, shaped into a triangle by National Avenue, Calhoun Road and Beloit Road — all near where the Waukesha Water Utility plans to lay a pipeline that would carry Lake Michigan water from Milwaukee to Waukesha. In an earlier route plan, the utility had considered running the pipeline through Salentine's farm, but he put up a fight and they have since decided the route would "skirt" around the land, he said.

Still, the area around Salentine's farm may see none of the pipeline construction. Three routes are still being considered and a decision won't be reached until later this year, utility officials say. Alternative routes have the pipeline running down Coffee Road or Observatory Road to eventually meet up with Racine Avenue and into Minooka Park, where a water reservoir and pumping station will be built.

At a public information meeting in New Berlin Thursday night, every resident and city official in attendance opposed a different route. Some said the pipeline should avoid Coffee Road and Beloit Road, which were just repaved in the last year or two. Others said National Avenue sees heavy traffic and any construction closures would muck up commutes to and from the city.

But ultimately, the water pipeline isn't being built to help New Berlin, said District 2 Ald. Chuck Garrigues. It's necessary for Waukesha and one of the routes will be picked eventually. Information meetings, like Thursday's in New Berlin, allow the utility to gather feedback on the route options, but a decision will have to be made and there will be some who are unhappy about it, he said.

Garrigues came to Thursday's meeting at New Berlin City Hall with Ald. John Hopkins, Ald. Keith Heun and Council President Kenneth Harendra. They pointed out a railroad route that cuts through New Berlin and takes a straight line to Waukesha.

"We are questioning why they aren't using that railroad," Heun said, adding that it looked as short as the three routes that use county and city roads.

Dan Duchniak, Waukesha Water Utility general manager, said the railroad isn't totally abandoned and the pipeline "can't run parallel to a railroad."

Still, he agreed to look into it and said he appreciates the feedback.

Harendra said even though the railroad has pulled tracks at road crossings in some places, it has the right to start using it at any time.

Waukesha's return pipeline — carrying the city's treated wastewater to the Root River in Franklin — will also go through New Berlin, but that route has already been selected, Duchniak said. A team of researchers and engineers are running tests on the land along the return flow route, and any environmental or other issues could trigger some minor changes in that path, he said.

More public meetings will be held as plans progress, but none have been scheduled yet.



## Wings start playoffs with win over Stoughton ▶ 1B



## Arrowhead, Mukwonago, KM boys all win to stay on top of packed Classic 8 standings ▶ 1B

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#### Fun Things To Do This Weekend

**St. Paul Fish Fry**, 4:30 p.m. to 7:30 p.m. today, St. Paul Parish, S38-W31602 Wern Way, Genesee Depot. All-you-can-eat dinner includes fried fish, baked fish, French fries, baked potatoes, coleslaw, bread, grilled cheese, apple sauce, coffee, and relish tray, as well as one milk and one dessert. Beer, soda, extra milk available for purchase. \$12 for adults, \$6 for children (ages 5-11). <https://stpaulgenesee.net/fish-fry>

**"The Complete Works of William Shakespeare (Abridged),"** 7:30 p.m. today, 2 p.m. and 7:30 p.m. Saturday,

2 p.m. Sunday, Waukesha Civic Theatre, 264 W. Main St., Waukesha. 262-547-0708, [www.waukeshacivictheatre.org](http://www.waukeshacivictheatre.org)

**Prairieville Desperados**, 1 p.m. Saturday, Wern Valley Sportsmen Club, S36-W29657 Wern Way, Town of Waukesha. Give Cowboy Fast Draw shooting a try. Everything supplied. In a heated building.

**Dragons Love Tacos storytime**, 10 a.m. Saturday, Books & Company, 1039 Summit Ave., Oconomowoc. Special dragon storytime. [www.booksco.com](http://www.booksco.com)

**Chinese Lion Dance Show**, 2 p.m. to 3 p.m. Saturday, Golden Gate Restaurant, 1427 E. Racine Ave., Waukesha. Firecrackers, music and distribution of envelopes with "Lucky Money." Free.

**64th annual Pancake Festival**, 7:30 a.m. to 1:30 p.m. Saturday, Waukesha County Expo Center, 1000 Northview Road, Waukesha. Held by Waukesha Rotary clubs. Tickets \$5 in advance from Rotarians and at Waukesha State Bank in downtown Waukesha or \$8 at the door. Children 5 and younger eat free. Gluten-free pancakes available.

**Spring Treasures Craft and Art Show**, 10 a.m. to 4 p.m. Saturday and Sunday, Waukesha County Expo Center Forum, 1000 Northview Road, Waukesha. Admission: \$3, children 15 and under free. \$1 off admission coupon from website, [www.craftproductionsinc.com](http://www.craftproductionsinc.com).

**SummerStage Winter Music Series**, 4 p.m. to 6 p.m. Sunday, Delafield History Center at Hawks Inn, 426 Wells St., Delafield. Chris Hanson Band with Robin Pluer. \$15 tickets, \$13 seniors. Order tickets online at [www.SummerStage-ofDelafield.org](http://www.SummerStage-ofDelafield.org), call at 262-337-1560.

#### WEATHER



**Tomorrow:**  
Chance of snow  
**High 31**  
**Low 17**

See complete forecast on 8A

