



Cops raid Beecher water and sewer district offices for travel records

Posted by Ron Fonger | The Flint Journal September 09, 2009 12:25PM

(This is an updated version of an earlier story.)

BEECHER -- Genesee County Sheriff's Office investigators raided the offices of the Beecher Metropolitan Water & Sewer District today, leaving with four boxes of documents -- at least some of which are tied to a developing travel scandal.

Armed with a search warrant, investigators in marked and unmarked vehicles carried out the seizure starting at about 9:30 a.m., searching for records tied to payments made to the five-member board for conference travel, meals and lodging -- some of which may have been made for expenses board members never actually incurred.

Neither Sheriff Robert Pickell, investigators on the scene, nor Beecher water and sewer officials would comment on the search this morning and the warrant authorizing the raid had not yet been filed in 67th District Court.

The Flint Journal has learned that part of the warrant said police were investigating public corruption, including a 2009 trip to San Diego in which multiple members of the Beecher board of directors may have received reimbursements for "expenses they did not actually incur."

Today's raid comes after a series of stories in The Journal that have detailed conference spending by board members, including reimbursements for filet mignon, alcohol and trips to Sea World at the San Diego conference.

That trip alone cost Beecher water and sewer customers more than \$36,000, part of a five-year spending spree of more than \$150,000 on conference travel, lodging and meals for the five-member board of directors.

Two board members have told The Journal that they were reimbursed for the cost of driving to San Diego even though they never drove to the conference -- amounting to thousands of dollars in reimbursements for expenses they never incurred.

In addition to the mileage reimbursements, board members were paid for 19 days of food and lodging per diems, including days when they apparently were never traveling.

"It's sad it has to come to this," said Beecher resident Jessie Smart Jr., 39. "They (board members) just felt like they could bluff their way out of this but they couldn't..."

"I don't want to see anybody go to jail but a lot of this wasn't up to (ethical) speed," Smart said today as he watched police carry out the search warrant.

Pickell is investigating what may be improper spending by the Beecher board at the request of county Prosecutor David Leyton. Members of a community organization -- Beecher Community Development Council Inc. -- has also also asked attorney general Mike Cox to investigate the spending.

Leyton has said he was concerned by accounts of the conference spending reported by The Journal.

Shortly after sheriff's investigators arrived at the water and sewer district's office this morning, board President Leo McClain and attorney Hiram Grossman also arrived but would not comment.

Grossman said neither he nor McClain would comment on anything while the criminal investigation is ongoing.

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