

# Lake Keesus Surfing Ban: Media Fact Sheet

## Story summary

On June 8, 2026, the Town of Merton Board voted to amend the Lake Keesus ordinance and effectively ban surfing, doing so with little public deliberation at the meeting.[cite:1] The town had previously held public meetings on the issue, but residents who opposed the ordinance say the board offered no evidence-based explanation when it took final action.[cite:1]

The controversy is not only about the ban itself. It is also about process, transparency, and enforcement. Before the vote, the town attorney said ordinances like this may be enforced not only by patrol officers who happen to observe conduct, but also by citizens willing to document neighbors, make statements, and testify in court, noting that “everybody here probably has a phone on them.”[cite:1] Opponents argue that this approach invites neighbor-on-neighbor surveillance and conflict on the lake.[cite:1]

## Why this matters

- The issue combines local government accountability, lake-use policy, youth outdoor recreation, and neighborhood conflict.[cite:1]
- A previously featured local child, Keelyn, who surfs on Lake Keesus year-round, is directly affected by the ban and provides a strong human-interest angle.[cite:1]
- Opponents argue the ordinance is a rigid, one-size-fits-all rule that was adopted without a public explanation of how it addresses the evidence residents submitted in advance.[cite:1]

## Key claims raised by residents before the vote

A detailed email sent to the Town Board before the meeting asked the board to provide a clear, logical, evidence-based reason for amending the ordinance if it chose to do so.[cite:1] That email raised seven main points:[cite:1]

- No clear majority support for a restrictive, one-size-fits-all ordinance.[cite:1]
- Petition growth suggesting public sentiment was still forming, not demanding a ban-style rule.[cite:1]
- No demonstrated surf-specific safety problem in the state accident data cited by residents.[cite:1]
- Erosion concerns tied more to distance from shore and operator behavior than to the label placed on a boat activity.[cite:1]

- No credible evidence of bottom disturbance at the depths residents say are typical at surf distances on Lake Keesus.[cite:1]
- Real-world lake use that residents say does not support claims that surfing “crowds out” other users.[cite:1]
- Concern that the ordinance will create enforcement burden, false complaints, and wasted resources.[cite:1]

### Strongest reporting angles

Angle	Why it matters
Government process	The board made a controversial decision with minimal public explanation at the final meeting stage.[cite:1]
Human impact	A child who surfs nearly year-round on the lake is directly affected by the ordinance.[cite:1]
Enforcement model	The town attorney described citizen documentation and testimony as part of how such ordinances are enforced.[cite:1]
Community division	Residents warned that the rule would create a more divisive lake environment and increase neighbor conflict.[cite:1]
Broader precedent	The issue raises questions about how far local lake restrictions can go without clear public justification.[cite:1]

### Available materials

- Video clip of the final vote.[cite:1]
- Video clip of the town attorney discussing enforcement by citizens with phones.[cite:1]
- Email sent to the Board before the vote outlining evidence-based objections and requesting a clear rationale.[cite:1]
- Social posts and photos showing the family and youth impact of the decision.[cite:1]
- Coalition website with background and updates: [lakecountrywsc.org](http://lakecountrywsc.org). [cite:1]

### Suggested reporter questions

- Why did the board not publicly explain the evidence-based rationale for the ordinance when it voted?[cite:1]

- What specific problem does the ban solve that could not be addressed through guidelines, education, or narrower rules?[cite:1]
- How does the Town expect this ordinance to be enforced in practice, and what safeguards exist against false or mistaken complaints?[cite:1]
- How will the Town distinguish between wake surfing, wake boats, and wake enhancement when residents report neighbors by video?[cite:1]
- What effect will the ordinance have on children and families who use the lake responsibly year-round?[cite:1]

## **Contacts**

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