

Press Memo: Lake Keesus Surfing Ban

Town of Merton approves surfing ban on Lake Keesus after minimal public deliberation

On June 8, 2026, the Town of Merton Board voted to amend the Lake Keesus ordinance and effectively ban surfing on the lake after a final meeting process that opponents say included no meaningful public explanation of the Board's reasoning.[cite:1] The issue had been discussed publicly in earlier meetings, but residents who opposed the ordinance say the final action was taken in seconds and without any evidence-based response to the questions and materials submitted in advance.[cite:1]

The story is about more than a lake ordinance. It raises broader questions about local government transparency, how recreational restrictions are justified, and what happens when a community is told to police itself. Before the vote, the town attorney described how ordinances like this may be enforced not only by patrol officers who happen to witness 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 effectively encourages neighbor-on-neighbor surveillance and will deepen division on the lake.[cite:1]

The human impact is immediate. One of the affected families includes a 12-year-old girl, Keelyn, who surfs on Lake Keesus year-round and had previously been featured in local news for her year-round water skiing and surfing.[cite:1] After the vote, she asked through tears whether she would now be barred from surfing on her own lake even in December when few or no other users are present.[cite:1] That gives the story a strong family and youth-recreation dimension in addition to the policy and governance issues.[cite:1]

Before the meeting, residents sent the Board a detailed email asking for a clear, logical, evidence-based rationale if the ordinance was going to be passed or amended.[cite:1] The email argued that the community was divided, that surfing had not been shown to pose a unique safety problem, that erosion concerns were more closely tied to distance from shore and operator behavior than to the label attached to a boating activity, and that a rigid ordinance would create confusion, false complaints, and enforcement problems.[cite:1] Opponents also argued that voluntary guidelines and adaptive rules led by lake residents would be more effective than a one-size-fits-all restriction.[cite:1]

For reporters, the story offers several compelling angles: a visually strong public meeting clip; a clear accountability question about why the Town did not publicly explain its reasoning; an enforcement model that appears to rely on residents filming and reporting each other; and a sympathetic, previously profiled

child whose outdoor activity is directly affected.[cite:1] The issue also has potential broader relevance as other Wisconsin communities debate lake-use restrictions, enforcement responsibility, and the balance between local control and evidence-based policymaking.[cite:1]

Materials available for media

- Video clip of the final vote.[cite:1]
- Video clip of the town attorney discussing citizen-led enforcement and phone documentation.[cite:1]
- Pre-vote email sent to the Town Board outlining evidence-based objections and requesting a clear rationale.[cite:1]
- Photos and social posts showing the youth and family impact of the decision.[cite:1]
- Coalition website for updates and supporting materials: lakecountrywsc.org. [cite:1]