

EXCLUSIVE: Top Madison-Based DOT Official Met With Contractor Same Day Penalties For Botched Racine Project Were Dropped
By Mark Belling, WISN-AM

The exact same day that the Wisconsin Department of Transportation dropped all penalties against a contractor for a long-delayed Racine County project, the company's owner met in Madison with a top official of DOT.

Transportation officials had earlier claimed the decision to waive previously assessed penalties against Cornerstone Pavers was a local decision made by southeast Wisconsin-based DOT officials, led by DeWayne Johnson, the head of the region.

But a meeting log obtained by me under an open records request shows that Cornerstone owner Chris Cape met with Rebecca Burkel, the deputy administrator of the agency. Burkel is based in Madison. The local DOT project manager had assessed penalties against Cornerstone for the long-delayed re-paving of County MM in Racine County. But those penalties were later waived. We now know the exact day the penalties were dropped, July 12, the head of the contracting company met with a high-ranking DOT official in Madison.

So much for this being a "local" decision as DOT has claimed.

Cornerstone is under fire for its performance on a number of other local projects. The Racine MM deal was such a mess that County Executive Jonathan Delagrave said he hoped Cornerstone would never do another job in Racine County. The City of Racine removed Cornerstone from its list of approved contractors. Cornerstone is owned by members of the same family that owned James Cape and Company, a company that went out of business after a state investigation into bid rigging.

DOT spokesman Michael Pyritz earlier told me the penalties against Cornerstone were dropped after DOT officials determined the delays on the project were not necessarily the contractor's fault. The decision to drop the penalties infuriated Delagrave and other Racine officials and was blasted by Assembly Speaker Robin Vos.

The decision to drop the penalties occurred after Craig Thompson was named by Governor Evers to head DOT. Thompson is the former head of an organization that lobbies for road builders.

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