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FEATURED

## FBI investigating former village manager

RICHARD TAMBORRINO Special to The Citizen

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Editor's note: This story has been corrected to state then-Islamorada Village Planning Director Dan Gulizio and then-Assistant Planning Director Jennifer DeBoisbriand approved a conditional use change regarding SD Marine.

There are substantiated reports that the FBI has been conducting an investigation in Islamorada on former village manager Ted Yates for about two months, related to a parallel investigation being conducted in Twinsburg, Ohio.

According to one source who requested anonymity, FBI agents showed up at Islamorada Vice Mayor Sharon Mahoney's retail flower shop, Enchanted Florist, not to investigate her, but to gather information on Yates while he served in the village.

It's not always customary for the FBI to give local law enforcement a heads-up about potential federal investigations in their jurisdictions, and Monroe County Sheriff Rick Ramsay confirmed by phone he was not afforded that courtesy and regretted that lack of communication.



Yates

But Ramsay has since received reports that the FBI had spoken to multiple Islamorada Village Council members about Yates. He added that while he'd also heard feedback from some residents that these may have been "fake" agents, he was able to confirm their presence after speaking with the FBI field office in Miami. No additional details of the FBI investigation were provided to Ramsay by that office.

FBI agent Scott Curley, who was reached by phone, declined to comment regarding any pending investigations, although it was confirmed by two village residents that he was one of the agents who visited Mahoney.

Mahoney, who initially chose to refuse comment on that visit, did end up acknowledging that the agents were "nice and courteous" during their visit. Another source said that the FBI visit occurred on Jan. 24.

Yates was the former mayor of Twinsburg, a suburb of Cleveland, prior to moving to the Upper Keys. Yates accepted the village manager post in Islamorada in July 2022. His final day on the job in Twinsburg as mayor was July 1. Yates served as Twinsburg's mayor and public safety director from January 2015 to July 2022 and was a Twinsburg city council member from 2009 to 2015.

Another confidential source believed Yates he is being investigated for his alleged role in approving zoning changes that benefited local developers in Ohio. In May 2022, its city council was deliberating action on their planning commission's recommendation to approve a site plan called Project Gumbo.

According to the Akron Beacon Journal, Twinsburg's planning panel favored the developer's site plan that month, which drew intense opposition from residents who had maintained the proposed building of two large spec warehouses would negatively impact their lives and possibly reduce their property values.

Also, according to the newspaper, several residents “accused the city of not following the charter and zoning regulations, especially with regard to the city’s height restrictions for buildings.”

There appear to be similarities between Yates’ purported actions in Twinsburg to those that allegedly predated his exit from the village. A lawsuit levied against the village by former Planning Director and Development Services Director Dan Gulizio, who Yates fired in May 2023, is still pending and Yates is named in a companion suit.

The suit states that, prior to Gulizio’s termination, Yates had been pressured by certain council members to terminate Gulizio because of their frustration with the Planning and Development Services Department’s refusal to approve permits for certain council members and some within the local development community.

Yates’ contract wasn’t renewed last August, in part because of the highly criticized firing of Gulizio, who was regarded by many within the village as a capable planning director. Council members Henry Rosenthal and Elizabeth Jolin and Vice Mayor Sharon Mahoney, who all voted not to renew Yates’ contract, also said Yates did not afford them the same level of responsiveness and respect as he did Mayor Buddy Pinder and Councilman Mark Gregg, who both voted to retain him.

After he left the village, Yates was hired as general manager of SD Marine Group, which subsequently received approval for a major conditional use change that was initiated while he was still village manager.

Gulizio denied the group’s initial application since SD Marine Group did not have enough commercial Building Permit Allocation System (BPAS) credits needed for the land-use change. To accumulate enough, the village would have had to award its entire inventory of commercial BPAS credits to SD Marine, which the council wanted to avoid.

So, Yates asked Gulizio and current Planning Director Jennifer DeBoisbriand to alter the calculation of how much commercial BPAS square footage SD Marine was required to have for the major conditional use change. And although Gulizio disagreed with the calculation, both Gulizio and DeBoisbriand approved the change.

The resulting rezoning increased the value of that property significantly.

Yates did not respond to multiple messages left at his workplace for comment on this story before press time.

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