

Islip Employees Under Investigation for Misuse of Town Vehicles

April 2, 2009 • Staff •

ISLIP, NY – The Town of Islip's public works commissioner said he resigned Mar. 31 for misusing his town-issued vehicle, making regular trips on summer and fall afternoons to a Port Washington golf course, reported [Newsday](#).

Islip officials now are investigating other managers in the department and announced Tuesday that they will change the way commissioners' GPS records are monitored.

Commissioner Stephen W. Lapham reportedly submitted his letter of resignation after *Newsday* submitted Freedom of Information requests for GPS records on his vehicle, and the town's former GPS manager blew the whistle on his former boss two days after resigning himself.

The GPS manager, Steve Hicks, resigned Mar. 27 because he said he felt managers in the department chafed against his doing his job.

He told Islip Supervisor Phil Nolan about the golf trips on Sunday. Hicks, who was responsible for monitoring data from the GPS devices installed in town cars and trucks, said he did not alert the supervisor earlier because he feared retribution.

Interviewed by *Newsday*, Lapham said he had played golf on town time, on weekday afternoons on his way home from work.

"Unfortunately I made a mistake, and I had to pay for that mistake," he said. "I didn't think I was doing anything wrong. I come from the private sector, so I'm sure I had lessons to learn in the public sector."

Lapham, who was on call 24 hours a day for snowstorms, flooding and other emergencies, said he always put in at least 35 hours per week.

The town is also investigating the GPS records of deputy commissioner Joseph Boccio. Records show Boccio used his town vehicle to go golfing with Lapham on Aug. 25 and three days later drove it to the funeral of Phil Dejana, a former colleague of Boccio,

Lapham, and Nolan at Dejana Industries, a municipal services contractor.

Boccio said he went golfing that day at the invitation of his boss and attended the funeral on behalf of the town. Nolan said he had not authorized Boccio to use his town car for that, adding that he had attended Dejana's wake using his personal car.

2009

Newsday's investigation also found that Lapham and other public works managers had removable magnetic Islip Town seals on their cars, rather than the permanent ones mandated by the town board last April. Town officials replaced those seals Tuesday with permanent ones. OH MOST CERTAINLY NOT TRUE: 10 years later

still
magnetic seal

Town of
Islip



2019 magnetic seal

10 years after this story!



Lapham, Boccio, and fleet service manager Tom Martin said the **removable seals had been used** to observe workers and contractors without being recognized.

Because of Hicks' reticence to report his superiors, the supervisor's office will now monitor the GPS records of commissioners and other officials, Nolan said.

Nolan, who appointed Lapham in November 2007, called him a "hard worker" with 25 years' experience.

"It's a huge loss," he said.

Islip's Checking Its Pocket With G.P.S. Units in Cars

By Nicole Cotroneo Aug. 5, 2007

WILL employees of the Town of Islip who drive government vehicles have more incentive not to misuse them when Big Brother is riding shotgun?

Islip has begun installing global positioning systems in its 614 town-owned licensed vehicles, including ones driven by public works employees, code enforcement investigators, management personnel and Town Board members. Philip Nolan, the town supervisor, said the devices would help keep tabs on the vehicles while reducing fuel expense.

“Management controls of assets are very lacking here,” said Mr. Nolan, a Democrat who ended the Republicans’ three-decade hold on the supervisor’s position last November. “You have to generate data, and you have to then look at the data. I know this kind of system makes sense.”

While Mr. Nolan said he had not seen evidence that employees had abused their car privileges, “there has always been anecdotal information circulating.”

Islip’s setup is more extensive than the one that the Town of Brookhaven hopes to begin soon with G.P.S. units in 200 of its 650 town-owned vehicles. Brookhaven has budgeted \$250,000.

Unlike the Islip plan, Brookhaven’s would not include elected officials, but would be for officials like fire marshals, public safety officers and waste management inspectors.

Brookhaven’s push for G.P.S. units follows a study of the use of town-owned vehicles over the past 18 months that estimated that 500,000 miles were clocked by drivers on arbitrary or unauthorized assignments, said Tom Burke, a town spokesman.

“Upon taking office, we determined the policies and procedures that governed the use of vehicles were either nonexistent, loosely enforced or absolutely outdated,” he said. “People

were using autos for commutation purposes that perhaps should not have been. There was heavy gas credit card use, which was not tracked with the actual mileage on the car.”

As a result, Brookhaven is having employees fill up at a town service center, not commercial gas stations, to reduce costs.

Mr. Nolan said the G.P.S. units for Islip were the first of a series of reforms involving town-owned vehicles that he intended to introduce, but he said the rest would not be announced for a few weeks.

The town does not know how much unauthorized mileage there may have been in the past because there was not sufficient record-keeping, a town spokeswoman said. But close monitoring of mileage and gasoline use will deter unauthorized use and identify any misuse, she said.

A G.P.S. manager will monitor the data from the units daily, Mr. Nolan said, randomly selecting vehicles to match where they have gone to what the drivers were scheduled to do that day. If there appears to be a discrepancy, an investigator will be dispatched to do a field check, he said.

Once all the systems are in place, around mid-August, the town will monitor vehicles in real time, the town said.

Mr. Nolan said he had a G.P.S. unit installed in his government car. “If you have to lead, then you should do it by example,” he said.

Councilman Christopher D. Bodkin, who had a unit installed in his vehicle in early July, said he supported use of the tracking system.

“It’s a public vehicle,” he said. “This maintains that it’s being used for public use and not being driven to Atlantic City on the weekend.”

But Councilman Steven J. Flotteron said Mr. Nolan was sending the wrong message to employees by tracking their every move. “He’s treating all the employees like criminals,” he said. “They’re not going to want to work if they feel uncomfortable and paranoid.”

Mr. Flotteron, who has chosen not to drive a government vehicle, said the \$89,000 spent on the G.P.S. program would have been better spent on improving roads. (Islip arranged a deal with 184 free devices and the rest for 99 cents each.)

MR FLOTTERON FAILED TO TELL THE TAXPAYERS HE GETS \$ IN HIS PAY CHECK INSTEAD!

“I’m not saying G.P.S. is bad,” he said. “But that’s what we have foremen for.”

Mr. Nolan said the issue was not only tracking potential abuse. Currently 169 town vehicles are driven home each night, and he

said that is too many because of fuel and maintenance costs. Fuel costs about \$1 million a year, he said.

“There’s got to be a reason for them to have that orange-and-blue truck in front of their house,” Mr. Nolan said. “Fire marshals have equipment in their vehicles that they need to respond to fires. There is a good reason for them to drive their vehicles home.”

The G.P.S. manager, Steve Hicks, has experience as a systems analyst for the Internal Revenue Service. He was also the voluntary treasurer for Mr. Nolan’s campaign. The position’s salary comes out of the supervisor’s budget, which was set before he took office, Mr. Nolan said.

The vehicle fleet is “an expensive set of resources,” he said, and the G.P.S. units — plus equipment used to record fuel expenditures — will help the town manage these resources “more effectively.” While Mr. Nolan could not estimate the savings, he said he expected them to be substantial.

But Mr. Flotteron maintained that Mr. Nolan had another motive for using tracking technology. “This is an ‘I gotcha’ thing,” he said.

HOW SAID A REMARK!