



THE PLAIN DEALER



SUPER LOCAL

AURORA'S A.J. BARNER, GLENVILLE'S COBY BRYANT AND ST. EDWARD'S MONTORIE FOSTER JR. OF THE SEATTLE SEAHAWKS BECAME SUPER BOWL CHAMPIONS ON SUNDAY NIGHT. C1

LAKE ERIE

Winds crack open a cold one



VIIRS satellite imagery shows a massive crack that formed on Lake Erie on Sunday. NOAA

Gusty winds create an 80-mile fracture in Lake Erie's frozen surface — from Canada to west of Cleveland.

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A massive crack more than 80 miles long split Lake Erie's ice cover over the weekend as strong winds pushed and pulled at the lake's frozen surface.

The break, which could be seen from satellite imagery, stretched from Port Burwell, Canada, to west of Cleveland. It developed over just a few hours as wind stress cracked open what had been a single continuous ice sheet covering much of the lake, according to WTOL meteorologist Chris Vickers.

Gusty winds swept across the Great Lakes Friday and Saturday, shifting Lake Erie's ice southward and opening areas of water along the Canadian side.

THE CRACK

Those same winds also forced ice into the south shore, where it piled up in places along the Ohio coastline.

Despite its striking appearance, large cracks are a known feature when Lake Erie is heavily frozen. When winds shift direction or ease, broad sheets of ice can drift, collide or pull apart, creating long openings even during prolonged cold.

ICE COVERAGE NEAR RARE TERRITORY

The fracture comes as Lake Erie remains close to a rare milestone. As of Sunday, the lake was about 95% ice-covered, according to the NOAA Great Lakes Environmental Research Laboratory.

Lake Erie has reached 100% ice coverage only three times since record-keeping began in 1973, most recently in February 1996.

Although Arctic air has dominated the region for much of late January and early February, wind has played a critical role in preventing the lake from fully sealing over. Gusty conditions can fracture consolidated ice and reopen pockets of water even as

temperatures remain well below normal.

Whether Lake Erie briefly reaches full ice coverage may hinge on a very narrow window before warmer temperatures and a shift toward southerly winds this week — including a brief warmup along the Ohio shoreline that could push highs near 40 degrees — reduce the chances of a complete freeze.

"Signs point towards a bit of a warmup in mid-February that may limit the chances of completely freezing," AccuWeather Great Lakes expert Brandon Buckingham said.

WHAT HAPPENS NEXT

Extensive ice coverage can influence spring weather around the Lake Erie by delaying shoreline warming, particularly for communities closest to the water.

Strong winds also can shove ice into ridges along the shoreline, creating hazards in vulnerable coastal areas even as the lake appears largely frozen.

The Advance Local Express Desk uses AI tools to assist in producing content, which is reviewed and edited by staff.

CUYAHOGA COUNTY

If sheriff sues, it could cost taxpayers at least \$100K

Estimate is for legal fees, and does not include the county's own expenses.

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How much would it cost if the sheriff follows through on his threat to sue the county over Executive Chris Ronayne attempts to take over his fiscal operations?

At least \$100,000 — and that doesn't include the county's expenses.

That's the current maximum price listed in the contract agreement for Isaac Wiles Burkholder & Miller, LLC., to represent Sheriff Harold Pretel in "litigation to be brought against certain other county officers regarding issues concerning the sheriff's department," the application to employ outside legal counsel shows.

Prosecutor Michael O'Malley filed the request with the Cuyahoga County Clerk of Courts office on Feb. 2. Presiding Judge Michael P. Shaughnessy approved it the same day.

The agreement allows the firm to start charging \$375 per hour for legal services, up



Cuyahoga County Sheriff Harold Pretel has been approved to spend up to \$100,000, so far, on litigation to challenge Executive Chris Ronayne's attempts to take over his fiscal operations. Ronayne would also need to hire outside counsel, the potential cost of which is not yet known. *Kaitlin Durbin, cleveland.com*

to \$100,000, with the understanding that if additional work is required beyond that amount, it will be negotiated at that time.

The two attorneys handling the case, Aaron Glasgow and Scott Sheets, outlined

a budget for how the \$100,000 could be spent. It included estimates of:

- 25 hours, or \$9,375, on case assessment and development, including initial investigation and legal research.
- 35 hours, or \$13,125, on pre-trial pleadings and motions, which will also involve more research.
- 80 hours, or \$30,000, on discovery, including document preparations, depositions and motions.
- 25 hours, or \$9,375, on alternative resolutions, which could include mediation or settlement.
- 100 hours, or \$37,500, on a trial, including preparation, preparing witnesses, filing motions and time in court.

The estimates total \$99,375.

Pretel approved the terms and the estimate Jan. 20, court documents show. Cleveland.com reached out to Pretel on Monday to see if any work has yet been charged.

If a lawsuit is filed, the county would also have to hire outside legal counsel. O'Malley normally represents the county in all legal matters but he has said his office cannot be involved because he represents the sheriff's department in other matters and it would be a conflict of interest.

SEE LITIGATION, A2

LEAD SAFETY CLEVELAND

Ohio claws back

\$3.3M in grant money meant for lead removal

The city had a deadline to use \$4.9 million in funds and only used \$1.6 million.

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Cleveland will lose \$3.3 million in grant money that was meant to help remove sources of lead from homes because the city failed to spend the money fast enough.

The money was part of a \$4.9 million grant administered by the Ohio Department of Development. Cleveland was allowed to use the funds to remove old windows and doors coated with lead paint, a common source of lead poisoning in homes.

But the grant came with a Feb. 28, 2026 spending deadline. And over the past two years, Cleveland has struggled to spend the money, Tom McNair, Cleveland's chief of integrated development, told City Council Monday afternoon.

As Cleveland allocated just \$1.6 million with the looming deadline, state officials are clawing back the rest of the money and will reallocate it to other communities that have moved faster, McNair said.

"They were not willing to risk the idea of these funds not being spent," McNair told council.

Cleveland's grant was part of a larger swath of American Rescue Plan Act dollars that Ohio had received and gave out to communities across the state to remediate lead.

Because they're federal dollars, they could be clawed back by the U.S. Treasury if they are spent by 2026's end. State officials, according to McNair, don't want to risk that happening.

Ohio Department of Development Spokesperson Mason Waldvogel said Cleveland was among a few communities who had funding clawed back. Columbus also had more than \$3 million left unspent, he said.

Waldvogel said Summit, Mercer, Medina and Delaware counties will also have funds taken back though those amounts are "significantly smaller."

The state did not say where it would reallocate the funds.

"When it became clear they wouldn't be able to use the full \$4.9 million before the end of the grant period, we made the decision to reallocate the remaining \$3.28 million to other communities — ensuring that these dollars are put to use in Ohio," Waldvogel said.

Councilman Kevin Conwell said the state was essentially punishing Cleveland for not hitting its benchmarks.

"They want to give it to someone else who's going to execute on their projects, that's what they're really saying," Conwell said.

SEE LEAD SAFETY, A2

WASHINGTON

Maxwell stays mum

Ghislaine Maxwell, the longtime companion of Jeffrey Epstein, declined to answer questions from House lawmakers in a deposition Monday. A6

ARIZONA

Armchair detectives

The desperate search for Nancy Guthrie, mother of "Today" show host Savannah Guthrie, has become the latest investigation to pique widespread interests of online armchair detectives. A7