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Deadwood commissioner pleads no contest to misdemeanor charges

Pioneer staff reports

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DEADWOOD — Deadwood City Commissioner Blake Joseph entered a plea of no contest to two misdemeanor charges, careless driving and failure to appear, in 4th Circuit Court Monday afternoon.

Joseph's trial for careless driving, a Class 2 misdemeanor, was rescheduled three times before he appeared in court this week. Joseph did not have an attorney present; he opted to represent himself Monday.

Joseph told the judge he intended to enter no contest pleas for both charges and that he was ready to "take sentencing."

"I entered a plea of no contest to resolve the matter from the 2024 incident. For me it's about closure and moving forward. My focus is, as it always has, to remain serving the common good of Deadwood with transparency and accountability. That's really where my intention was," Joseph told the Pioneer.

"I certainly have no issue with a no contest plea," Judge Chad Callahan said during the court proceedings in Deadwood.

After accepting Joseph's pleas, Callahan sentenced Joseph to pay approximately \$500 in fines for court costs, about \$200 for the careless driving charge, and almost \$300 for the charge of failure to appear. Callahan also imposed a 30 day suspended jail sentence. As long as Joseph pays his fines on time, he will not serve any time behind bars. Joseph was also ordered to obey all laws for the next year.

Joseph was charged with careless driving and traveling through a roadblock, after he allegedly struck a Deadwood firefighter with his vehicle while the firefighter was manning a roadblock during the Days of '76 Parade on July 27, 2024. Several firefighters were present in the courtroom on Monday.

Joseph submitted a plea of not guilty to careless driving on Oct. 28, 2024. The traveling through a roadblock charge was dropped by the state's attorney on May 13, 2025.

The remaining matter was set for trial on March 5.

That trial date was moved after Joseph requested a continuance.

Joseph told the court he wanted the date moved so that he could attend a celebration of life for songwriter and comedian Gordy Pratt. Pratt's celebration of life was actually scheduled for April 5.

The trial was continued a second time after Joseph's attorney, Greg Sperlich, withdrew as Joseph's legal representation on May 9. Sperlich cited a "breakdown in communication."

The trial was moved to July 2.

Joseph did not appear at his trial in July, and a bench warrant was issued by Callahan — that bench warrant was followed by the formal charge of failure to appear, which is a Class 1 misdemeanor.

The Pioneer asked Joseph if he regretted not pleading guilty to the careless driving charge sooner.

"I think I would come to the conclusion that I don't look at it in terms of regret. I made a choice, resolved the matter. It was efficient, so I could stay focused. People in Deadwood are really suffering right now. ... My priority is moving forward, and not looking back," Joseph said.

He added that he does not admit any guilt.

A no contest plea is generally entered when a defendant does not admit guilt, and does not contest the charge. When a defendant pleads no contest, they give up their right to remain silent, and their right to a trial.

“(What) I want readers to know is simple. I take responsibility. I’ve resolved the matter, and my focus is serving Deadwood. And the focus is stability, accountability, and respect for people who put the trust in me,” Joseph said.

A petition, calling for Joseph’s recall as Deadwood City Commissioner was filed with the Deadwood Finance Officer Jessica McKeown on Friday. She was verifying signatures Monday, but has not completed the task by press time.

Joseph was cited for possession of an open container of alcohol in a motor vehicle, a Class 2 misdemeanor, in August. According to court reports, Blake Joseph was pulled over shortly before 1 a.m., near 68 Main St., by Officer Keegan Holzapfel. He was allegedly driving 58 miles per hour in a 45 mile per hour zone.

Joseph was given a warning for his speed and cited with a Class 2 misdemeanor for possessing the open container. It came with a \$132.50 fine — which he paid.

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