

Stories of 2022: Etna Township Trustees consumed by bickering, infighting



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Newark Advocate

In 2021, Etna Township residents voted for change by ousting two incumbent trustees and bringing in two newcomers. But the change wasn't exactly what some had in mind.

The new board members, Mark Evans and [Rozland McKee](#), along with incumbent Jeff Johnson spent much of 2022 fighting on matters big and small — from [whether to hire a full-time township administrator](#) to [the township hall décor](#).

One township resident told the Advocate earlier in the year that the behavior was [more akin to that of elementary school children than elected officials](#).

"I feel like everybody wants to be on a team," said resident Rachel Zelazny. "Instead of, like, actually having a discussion or conversation and just being open like 'Hey, what's best for the community?' It's 'Well, I'm right, you're wrong.'"



In the first meeting of 2022, Township Fiscal Officer [Walter Rogers announced his retirement](#) after 12 years in office. He stayed in the position until the end of January and then the trustees appointed [Julie Varian on Jan. 24](#). She's fulfilling the rest of Rogers's unexpired term that ends March 31, 2024.

The board members had numerous discussions [from February to April about potentially hiring a township administrator](#), with Evans in favor of hiring a full-time employee while Johnson and McKee wanted to contract with a consultant.

[In a tense April 19 meeting](#), McKee and Evans argued over a contract with William Vance of WMV, LLC, a consulting firm that provides local government administration, before it was ultimately approved in a 2-1 vote, with Evans voting against the contract.

Later in the same meeting, Johnson and McKee voted for McKee to replace Evans as president of the board. She said at the time it was because Evans continued to dominate meetings.

"You just badger your colleagues, myself, I see you do it to Jeff and it's a constant. You talk about what happened back, way back, with the other board," she said. "You badger me on a regular basis. You question us like we're your children. They don't even know the emails you send. We won't even bring those up."

She added that Evans would send her and Johnson nasty emails like they were his subordinates.



Clashes continued throughout the [spring and summer](#) over matters such as which trustee would serve as the point person for the [comprehensive plan committee](#), [the location of an annual fireworks display](#) and [access to emails](#).

A more recent spat is over the township's security cameras after footage showed McKee and Vance covering the cameras with a plastic bag and piece of paper on Oct. 19.

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McKee [told the Advocate in November](#) that she covered the cameras because she and township staff learned that day Evans had access to system and was surveilling the building and staff members.

The township paid \$9,260 to install the security camera system in September. It was disabled a month later.

The system was turned over to Kevin Wolfe, a loss prevention executive with the Westerville-based private investigations firm WhereWolfe Intelligence, who [shared during the Dec. 6 meeting](#) that Evans logged into the system 140 times. Wolfe said the more than 500 actions that appeared in the system's activity log, 446 of them were from Evans.

Wolfe was unable to determine if audio had been enabled on the cameras. In the Dec. 6 meeting, McKee and Johnson approved contracting with State Security for \$920 to do further investigation to determine if audio was enabled and recorded. McKee said after the Dec. 20 that the trustees should get an update on the matter in the new year.

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