

McMurray accused of mismanaging Grand Island's Facebook page

By [Stephen T. Watson](#) | Published September 25, 2018 | Updated September 25, 2018

Grand Island Supervisor Nate McMurray agreed to shut down a town Facebook page after a Town Board member objected to how his office manages the site.

Critics say the Democratic supervisor or his staff improperly removed unwanted comments from the page, blocked people from seeing or contributing to the page and shared posts boosting McMurray's run for Congress. Republican Councilman Michael Madigan said McMurray's actions opened the town up to a lawsuit on constitutional grounds. "And in no way is this personal," Madigan said. "I just know that we need to get this under control and under appropriate administration and follow appropriate guidelines going forward. That's it, period." McMurray, for his part, defended his office's management of the page – [Town of Grand Island, NY - Office of the Supervisor](#) – and said any posting of political material was unintentional.

Madigan recently introduced a board resolution that would have stripped control of the page from McMurray.

Last week, the Town Board referred the issue to an advisory committee, which will recommend a better way to operate the page. McMurray agreed to stop posting on the Facebook page until then, and said he's more than willing to share in its oversight. "If the town wants to take it over, create a procedure for how it's managed, go ahead. But I'll tell you what, it's not easy to manage," McMurray said. "It's been a good resource for a lot of people who want information about the day-to-day activities of the town." McMurray said his office started the Facebook page shortly after taking over as town supervisor in 2016.

Initially identified as the Town of Grand Island, NY page, McMurray primarily used it to share news about town events, notices about taxes and warnings about traffic tie-ups on the Niagara Thruway. He also tries to rally residents to action, with regular recent posts about the Tonawanda Coke plant that the federal government says is a source of pollution. The page has 2,300 followers now.

Madigan said McMurray – or someone in his office – has periodically removed comments that contrast with his position on an issue. Also, he said the supervisor's office has regularly [blocked people from the page](#), although he doesn't know the total number. And, he said, McMurray at least twice has posted campaign-related items on the page. Madigan offered two examples, from February and April, when the official Grand Island page shared posts from McMurray's campaign page. "A number of residents had complained about that," Madigan said. "Finally it's reached a threshold where we have to act."

McMurray, in response, said it's difficult to manage public comments and posts on the site in real time. He said he has temporarily blocked people – he called it sending them to "timeout" – for objectionable posts. However, McMurray said, "If something was deleted in an accident, or something was banned or someone was banned inappropriately, it's a pretty easy fix." He said he's aware that he can't get into judgment calls about what's acceptable, so he had decided to turn off all comments even before Madigan filed his resolution this month.

As for any political posts, McMurray said on occasion he may have taken a link – such as a Buffalo News article – initially posted on his campaign account and shared it again through the official town page. "We've never used that for political purposes. It's so wrong and hurtful and manipulative of the public, I can't believe he'd say it," McMurray said. McMurray did change the name of the page to make it clear that he's responsible for content on the site. But Madigan said the name change doesn't change anything because the site still represents the town.

"And when you're talking about possible lawsuits against the town, he's not looking out for the best interests of the town," Madigan said. "And that's very disappointing." Some Twitter users, in fact, sued President Trump after he blocked them on the site.

"If you classify this as a government actor acting in an official capacity and this is a way for citizens to petition the government, receive information from the government, then the blocking becomes problematic," said Mark Bartholomew, a University at Buffalo law professor who studies internet law. "It's treading on the First Amendment rights of people in the political locality."

Madigan's resolution sought to unblock everyone, limit editing of comments to those employing "truly crude and inappropriate language," give Town Board members the ability to administer the site and limit future posts to information about standard town operations and events.

The Town Board last week agreed to ask the town's Technology Advisory Board to suggest a formalized social media policy for the town. McMurray said he won't post anything more on the Facebook page in the interim. The last post, from Sept. 17, asks for the public's help in shutting down Tonawanda Coke.

For now, the town will share updates through [its website](#), also controlled through the supervisor's office.