

'Lost touch with reality.' 'Foolish.' 'Coward.' Splash pad divides Grand Island Town Board

[Stephen T. Watson](#) Buffalo News Story, June 23, 2026

Grand Island has seen some big arguments over big questions, such as whether the town should let Amazon construct a massive warehouse on the island. The latest project making waves is far smaller, but the debate is no less intense.

Town Supervisor Peter Marston Jr. and Town Board members have spent two months skirmishing over the fate of a splash pad. Town Board members say town employees signed off on buying the equipment for the splash pad without Town Board approval. And, the board members said, Marston should have kept them updated on the status of the splash pad.

Marston said Town Board members should have known what was going on with the splash pad, which had been in the works for years. Town Board members last month paused the splash pad contract as they sought further details on the project cost and the approval process.

Marston then sent an email saying the board had "lost all touch with reality," and promised to stop attending meetings until they admitted they were wrong. He missed one after sending this message, for what he said were health reasons. Days later, the board approved the splash pad contract, and Marston said he is ready to put the saga behind him.

"I think they were just a little bit unplugged from it, maybe, and not paying attention to what was going on," Marston said of the Town Board in an interview.

"And I think they got a little sticker shock. So, they looked into it a little bit more, and they're like, 'Well, it's still a great deal for our town, and we need to move forward.' So, they did." However, several board members want a deeper look into what happened, and how, to avoid any future issues over how taxpayer money is used. "How many things are happening that we don't know about? That's the lack of confidence that I have now in how things operate here," Board Member Jose Garcia said May 11.

The splash pad would be built in Veterans Park, near the Miracle League of Western New York's adaptive baseball field and playground, and not far from the town library branch. The field for ballplayers with disabilities opened at the town-owned park in 2011.

Ten years later, the Miracle League received \$1.1 million in American Rescue Plan Act funding, a grant awarded through Erie County, to pay for improvements to the organization's field and playground and for an accessible splash pad. After the renovations to the facility were finished, the organization had \$477,000 in grant money left over for the splash pad. The town also had \$220,000 left from a bond taken out in 2024 to cover shortfalls in funding for the splash pad and facility improvements. The Town Board approved this borrowing, but hadn't voted to purchase the splash pad materials.

Pad paused

That is why, some Town Board members said at the May 4 Town Board workshop, they were surprised to learn a town employee had signed a purchase order for the splash pad equipment with a vendor, Vortex Aquatic Structures International, even though the leftover money didn't cover the full project cost. "When did we order it? Did we vote to order it without knowing the final cost?" Board Member Dan Kilmer said. "I don't remember voting on that." "I'm still a little confused. I know you were giving us numbers. I thought we were getting the numbers so that we could decide if we wanted to buy the splash pad," Garcia added. "I didn't know that we bought the splash pad." "I'll do a little more research on how we got to where we are, and then we'll go from there," Marston replied.

One week later, board members called a special work session to further discuss the splash pad. Marston did not attend the May 11 special meeting, nor the May 18 regular meeting, because he was on vacation. On May 11, board members got deeper into the splash pad numbers. The \$477,000 in grant money, plus the \$220,000 borrowed by the town, added up to \$697,000.

The splash pad itself costs \$708,000 to purchase and install. Connecting water, sewer and electricity to the pad adds about \$75,000, bringing the cost to just under \$783,000. This leaves a gap of about \$85,000 that, Deputy Supervisor Tom Digati said, the town could bridge by tapping money in a fund that holds recreation fees paid by developers.

"For 780,000-ish dollars we could have a functional splash pad that doesn't have \$300,000 worth of extra concrete work. The bathrooms aren't done, but it would function as a splash pad," Digati said. Town Board members also discussed the possibility of new grant money, or a private donor, covering additional costs for the splash pad and related work at Veterans Park. The four Town Board members then voted to pause the contract with the vendor, [a step first reported by Niagara Frontier Publications.](#)

Supervisor not happy

Seventeen days later, Marston wrote in an email that the Town Board had received, but not replied to, an email from Chris Dann, the town's assistant municipal engineer, noting project cost overruns. Instead, Marston complained, when he directly raised the issue with board members, they launched an "investigation" into his mishandling of the splash pad.

"The only mistake I made was doing my job. In my opinion, the Town Board has lost all touch with reality," Marston wrote. "When the Town Board publicly admits their wrongdoing and explains their path forward, I will return to attend public meetings. Until that happens, I will remain absent and work on daily needs of the town."

Digati responded that he thought Marston was trying to make the board look "foolish" and vowed to read his email at the next board meeting if Marston didn't

show, a step Digati didn't end up taking. Kilmer replied that the supervisor was "a coward right to the end." And Garcia acknowledged receiving the email from Dann, but said it wasn't clear from the message that an employee had, in fact, signed a purchase order, and it didn't include needed details. Dann referred a reporter to a representative from his union, CSEA Local 1000, which declined comment for the article.

Board doesn't want repeat

After further debate, the Town Board on June 1 voted 3-1, with Marston absent, to approve the splash pad purchase order. Kilmer was the only no vote. "I'm not against a splash pad. I'm against using taxpayers' money if we don't have to," Kilmer said, urging the board to wait until a possible donor commits to a specific contribution level. But Board Member Rhonda Diehl said she was worried the town would lose the grant money if it didn't spend it this year. "That's my number one concern," she said.

Marston attended the June 15 meeting. At the workshop, Kilmer pressed him on what he knew, and when, about the splash pad. "It's not something to just glaze over," Kilmer said. "I know you want to burn somebody at the stake, for every ounce of blood they have, I get it," Marston said.

In an interview following the meeting, Kilmer said he wants the State Comptroller's Office to look into how the town ended up signing a contract with a vendor without Town Board approval. "It's an unauthorized, illegal expense of taxpayers' money," Kilmer said. Diehl said she supports an investigation into what happened, though not necessarily to place blame on a specific person. "The way I protect taxpayers is to make sure that we are fiscally responsible, and that includes that we do things in the right manner and we follow process," she said.

Marston, for his part, denied that he missed Town Board meetings because he was "protesting." But he said he wasn't happy to be blamed by the Town Board, when he was the one who brought the potential funding shortfall to their attention, and he is eager to move on. "I'm trying to go forward for the greater good of the town here," Marston said.