

## Lopatcong Township mayor's post of 10 commandments of civility draws rebuttal from resident

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**Lopatcong Township** Mayor Tom McKay's attempt to remind people how to behave at council meetings prompted a resident issue her own 10-point rebuttal.

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These screen grabs show the 10 commandments of civility Lopatcong Township Mayor Tom McKay posted in the municipal building, left, alongside a response from resident Kathryn Devos.

Courtesy Images

**McKay** said he posted "The Ten Commandments of Public Civility" in the lobby of the municipal building early last week. He removed them Friday after resident **Kathryn Devos** on Wednesday posted what he called "hateful" comments about him in response.

Devos' posting was also removed.

Township Councilwoman Donna Schneider called Devos' response derogatory to her.

"Kathy Davos is entitled to her own opinion," Schneider said. "However, our attorneys deemed her notice that she placed in the municipal meeting room as inappropriate and that's why it was taken down."

McKay said meetings seem to be "a bit unruly," so he sought the guidance from the New Jersey League of Municipalities concerning how people should behave.

Devos said she posted her signed letter to residents with the clerk's permission because of McKay's "hypocrisy." She alleged in her letter to residents that McKay is "rude and brutish" and has an inability to control his temper during council meetings.

"The environment, the feeling in the room is unpleasant, and that's not our town," Devos said. "Have we had heated discussions? Of course. I've been part of them before. They're not contentious. They're a give and take of everybody's opinion, and we walk away friends."

She said that's no longer the case. Now, people leave with enemies they didn't intend to make, she said. Devos chairs the rent leveling board and supported **Council President Lori Ciesla** in her run for mayor in the last election.

**At the Feb. 4** meeting, resident Ed Schuster criticized McKay for slamming the gavel down so hard it sounded like

a gunshot. McKay also told Councilwoman Maureen McCabe to shut up.

Republican candidate Tom McKay said he's trying to bring civility to somewhat unruly Lopatcong Township Council meetings.

Courtesy photo

McKay said council meetings "could go better," and he's working toward improving that.

"I don't want people screaming and yelling and all the stuff like that. I just want to get the business of the township done," he said.

The message was meant for everybody, McKay said, which is why he hung it in the lobby of the municipal building. McKay also emailed the four-page article to all of council with certain parts highlighted.

The highlighted portions include definitions of civility, the negative impact of "high-pitched vitriolic rhetoric," and remembering that local officials are less politicians and more public servants to encourage conversations rather than arguments.

A line in the document that indicates "the chair's exercise of control over a public meeting is not an example of tyranny; it is the key ingredient to successful dialogue" is also highlighted.

Ciesla, the council president, said she felt as though the mayor found the document as a way to justify his behavior.

"It's just not the way to build bridges with people. Whether you like them or not, you have to be professional and show respect ...," Ciesla said. "He was not exercising control. He actually lost control."

McKay said he doesn't understand why his note got the reaction it did. The rules he posted include not interrupting a colleague mid-sentence or resorting to "zingers" designed solely to embarrass someone.

"It's just civility. Why anyone would object to it, I can't imagine," McKay said.

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