



Online Ethics Center
FOR ENGINEERING AND SCIENCE

Conflict of Interest Serving on a Government Committee

Author(s)

Michael Pritchard

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Description

Residents in Barker Township strongly oppose the proposed site for the landfill. A very large number opposed the reappointment of Matthews and Parkinson. Now a petition demanding the recall of Matthews and Parkinson has been signed by several hundred township residents. They claim that both Matthews and Parkinson are involved in a conflict of interest.

Abstract

This case is one of thirty-two cases which address a wide range of ethical issues that can arise in engineering practice provided by the Center For the Study of Ethics in Society, Western Michigan University.

Body

Mark Matthews and David Parkinson have just been reappointed members of the Madison County Solid Waste Management Planning Committee. Committee members are appointed by the county board. State law requires that the seats

Matthews and Parkinson occupy be held by a solid waste industry representative and an expert in solid waste, respectively. Matthews is president of Efficient Disposal Service, and Parkinson is an engineer who specializes in solid waste disposal. Madison County has a population of approximately 300,000, with 95,000 living in Madison City. Rural Barker Township is the least populated township in the county, with approximately 500 residents.

Prior to the reappointments, Efficient Disposal developed a proposal that Barker Township be the site for a county landfill. Although not involved in the development of this proposal, Parkinson has provided consulting services to Efficient Disposal in the past.

Residents in Barker Township strongly oppose the proposed site for the landfill. A very large number opposed the reappointment of Matthews and Parkinson. Now a petition demanding the recall of Matthews and Parkinson has been signed by several hundred township residents. They claim that both Matthews and Parkinson are involved in a conflict of interest.

Neither volunteers to resign. Matthews says he always makes it very clear to other Planning Committee members when he is acting as a committee member and when he is speaking as developer of the landfill site. He says he does not vote on sites he is developing. Parkinson's response is that he serves at the pleasure of the County Commission: "I will do what they think is best. If they think there is a conflict of interest, I'll resign."

Two groups are primarily responsible for mounting the recall campaign. Concerned Citizens of Barker and the Barker Association for Rural Ecology both complain that the County Board should have found other individuals to serve on the Planning Committee. Although there were no other candidates for the two positions, the groups object that the County Board did not advertise that the positions were open.

Discuss the ethical issues this set of circumstances raises. What do you think David Parkinson should do? Explain.

Notes

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Contributor(s)

Michael Pritchard

Editor(s)

Michael Pritchard

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