**ETHICS ORIENTATION GUIDE FOR NEWLY ELECTED OFFICIALS**

The following are questions involving ethical considerations likely to be encountered by elected officials. This information is provided as a guide to expected behavior and standards of conduct for elected officials.

1. **Whom do I represent and what interests should I consider?**

Essentially, you represent those who elected you. You should primarily act in the best interests of those you represent. However, you should work to strike a balance in considering the following:

* The interests of your constituents as a group
* The interests of your community as a whole
* Regional and national interests

While you should consider you own personal opinions and values, you are not there to advance your own personal or political interests or those of family and friends.

1. **What do I owe to those who supported and elected me?**

You owe them thoughtful representation and consideration of their best interests. You do know owe them:

* + Favoritism or any other preferential treatment
  + Any jobs or appointments
  + Political IOUs
  + Retaliation against those that did not support you

1. **Now that I am elected, with whom can I meet and what can I talk about?**

You must adhere to both the spirit and requirements of the open meeting and records laws when meeting with or talking to other governing body members. You should avoid meeting, on your own accord, with the following to discuss government business:

* Vendors and contractors bidding on government work
* Union leaders negotiating contracts
* Developers with issues or projects before the government
* Petitioners or special interest groups

1. **How do I identify and deal with personal conflicts of interests?**

Conflicts of interest arise when others “perceive” you to have a bias based on certain relationships or interests. You should disclose and make transparent all potential relationships that might be considered a conflict including:

* Business ownership or stock holdings
* Employment relationships
* Family relationships
* Personal relationships
* Partisan political relationships

While you are not expected to resign positions or void yourself of all conflict of interest relationships, you are expected to:

* Disclose all potential conflicts of interest
* Abstain from discussing, debating, and voting on issues where a perceived or actual conflict exists
* Refrain from publicly and privately putting pressure on others involved

1. **How do I develop and present my positions on issues?**

You should consider due process before developing your position. Your position should consider:

* The facts
* Expert-based recommendations from staff and consultants
* The various public interests noted above
* Concern for the common good

When presenting your position, you should:

* Feel comfortable in expressing your position and the “basis” for your position.
* Recognize that there is nothing wrong with making an honest change in position.
* Express your position with civility and respect, not in anger or with name-calling.

You should not let the potential for political gain affect your position and you should refrain from expressing positions on or debating issues where you have a conflict of interest.

1. **What standards of conduct apply to my public life as an elected official?**

You should commit yourself to the following values:

* Integrity
* Honesty
* Fairness
* Hard work, quality, and excellence
* Due care and consideration
* Civility and respect

You should be willing to express the truth even when it is uncomfortable, be willing to withstand undue pressures to influence your vote, and resist temptation to take advantage of your position.

You should not misuse information available to you through your position for personal gain. You should your protect the confidentiality of information that is discussed in executive session, but advance the transparency of all other information and actions.

1. **Can I use my power and position in other parts of my life?**

Your power and position should be limited to representing the best interests of your constituents and community. You should not use your power and position to:

* Benefit your business or profession
* Benefit your other personal interests
* Seek employment or positions for family and friends
* Do favors for family and friends
* Do favors for your charities or other associations
* Put pressure or undue influence on others

You should not use the government title, seal, or letterhead to express or advance a personal position.

1. **What gifts or perks can I accept as an elected official?**

Because all gifts can involve the perception of giver expectations of receiving something in return, most gifts should not be accepted. You should also never solicit gifts, favors, or anything of value from those involved with government business or interests. There is no such thing as “perks of the position.”

See your specific code of conduct for specifics on acceptable an unacceptable gifts.

1. **How should I respond to those who seek my assistance, including “friends of the government”?**

Friends of the government are special interest groups or individuals with a present or past relationship with the government. Like any special interest group or individual, you should expect them to lobby you for support of their position. You should listen to their requests and issues, and indicate you will consider their interests and requests through the appropriate government process.

Avoid:

* Making promises you cannot fulfill
* Making deals (you scratch my back, I’ll scratch yours)
* Building you own political IOUs

1. **How should function if I am a minority opinion?**

While harmony in positions among governing body members is positive to presenting and promoting issues, you should never feel compelled to give up your independence and join the majority voting bloc position. As long as your position is factually based and not motivated by personal interests, you should express your position and the basis for that position, even if it is in the minority.

1. **What level of respect and civility is expected of me in dealing with other governing body members, management and staff, and citizens?**

Civility and respect involve application of the golden rule – *treat others as we wish to be treated.* Public service demands that we respect the opinion and rights of others even when they conflict with our own. As an elected official, you are likely to be both praised and criticized at times. In dealing with criticism and opposing views, civility puts respect and the common good ahead of our personal rivalries and irritations.

You should apply civility by exercising the following:

* Listen to and respect opposing views. Avoid disapproving looks and expressions such as rolling your eyes, shaking your head in disagreement, grimacing, and similar signs of lack of respect.
* Exercise self-control. If you oppose or disagree, make your arguments on the merits of the case rather than engaging in personal attacks.
* Don’t express satisfaction at the misfortune of others.
* Follow parliamentary procedures during the conduct of meetings.
* Demand the same civility from other elected officials, staff, and citizens.

1. **How do I deal with the press and media?**

You should understand that the press and media are a part of the transparency process and should be respected as such. However, when dealing with the press or media, you should:

* Respect confidentiality of executive sessions and issues
* Ensure your comments are factually-based
* Keep colleagues and staff informed
* Clearly label your views versus the government’s views
* Avoid using the press and media to advance your personal position
* Accurately characterize any opposing views or positions