



**POLICY AND PROCEDURE**

CITY OF VANCOUVER WASHINGTON	INDEX			
	Administrative/Council/City Manager			
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City Council Code of Ethics and Conduct	Supersedes 7/18/11	Prepared by: [City Manager]	Approved by: [Mayor]	

**1.0 Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to establish a formal code of ethics by which Councilmembers will conduct themselves while serving on the Vancouver City Council.

**2.0 Organizations Affected**

City Council/City Manager

**3.0 References**

City Council Resolution M-3268, December 20, 1999  
 City Council Resolution M-3741, July 18, 2011  
 City Council Resolution M-4157, December 13, 2021

**4.0 Declaration of Policy**

It is essential to the proper administration and operation of the City of Vancouver that the City Council be and give the appearance of being independent and impartial; that elective office with the City of Vancouver not be used for personal benefit; and that the public have confidence in the integrity of the City. In recognition of these goals, the City has adopted this Code of Ethics, which is applicable to all members of the City Council.

The purpose of this Code is to establish standards of ethical conduct applicable to the City Councilmembers, including the Mayor, in the discharge of their duties by prescribing essential restrictions against conflict of interest and other conduct not consistent with good ethical practices while not creating unnecessary barriers to public service. To that end, Councilmembers should not be denied the opportunity available to

all other community members to acquire and maintain private economic interests, except in circumstances in which a conflict of interest would reasonably result.

It is required that all Councilmembers comply with the law and all other applicable rules and regulations governing the conduct of public officials. The standards in this Code shall not preclude other standards required by law including but not limited to, Ch.42.23 RCW- Code of Ethics for Municipal Officers-Contract Interests, Ch. 42.20 RCW- Misconduct of Public Officers and Ch. 42.36- Appearance of Fairness. Nothing in this Code of Ethics shall be construed to limit full compliance with applicable federal and state laws and applicable rules and regulations governing the conduct of public officials now existing or hereinafter enacted.

## **5.0 Avoidance of the Appearance of Impropriety**

All members of the City Council should conduct their official duties with integrity and impartiality and in a manner that avoids even the appearance of impropriety or a conflict of interest between public duties and private interests.

No Councilmember shall, by their conduct or participation in activities, give reasonable basis for the impression that any person can improperly influence the Councilmember or unduly enjoy the Councilmember's favor in the performance of official City actions, or that the Councilmembers is affected in the performance of the official act or actions by the kinship, rank, or association with any person.

### **Example:**

A Councilmember actively pursues the award of a city contract to a company owned by a close friend. Such activity gives the appearance of impropriety and should be avoided.

## **6.0 Standards of Ethical Conduct**

### **A. Personal Interests in Contracts Prohibited**

No Councilmember shall participate in their capacity as a councilmember in the making of a contract in which the Councilmember has a personal interest, direct or indirect, or performs in regard to such a contract some function requiring the exercise of discretion on behalf of the City. Except, that this prohibition shall not apply where the councilmember has only a remote interest in the contract as defined in RCW 42.23.040 and summarized below and where the fact and the extent of such interest is disclosed and noted in the official minutes or similar records of the City prior to formation of the contract and thereafter the City Council authorizes, approves, or ratifies the contract in good faith by a vote of its membership without counting the vote or votes of the Councilmember(s) having the remote interest

For purposes of this section, a "remote interest" means:

1. that of a non-salaried officer of a non-profit corporation;

2. that of an employee or agent of a contracting party where the compensation of such employee or agent consists entirely of fixed wages or salary;
3. that of a landlord or tenant of a contracting party;
4. that of a holder of less than one percent of the shares of a corporation, limited liability company or other entity which is a contracting party.

**B. Personal Influence in Contract Selection Prohibited.**

No Councilmember shall influence the City's selection of, or its conduct of business with, a corporation, person, or firm having or proposing to do business with the City if the Councilmember has a personal financial interest, direct or indirect in or with the corporation, person, or firm, unless such interest is a remote interest as defined in RCW 42.23.040 and summarized herein and where the fact and extent of such interest is disclosed and noted in the official minutes or similar records of the City prior to formation of the contract and thereafter the City Council authorizes, approves, or ratifies the contract in good faith by a vote of its membership sufficient for the purpose without counting the vote or votes of the Councilmember(s) having the remote interest.

**Example:**

A Councilmember is requested to vote to award a contract to a company that employs the Councilmember. If the Councilmember has a beneficial interest in the contract either direct or indirect such as through a business profit sharing plan, the contract cannot be approved. If the Councilmember has no such interest and/or is subject to the remote interest rule, the Councilmember must disclose their interest and abstain from voting. Further, the Councilmember may not attempt to influence the votes of other Councilmembers. Questions regarding these kinds of situations should be directed to the City Attorney for review.

**C. Disclosure of Confidential Information**

A Councilmember shall not disclose or use any confidential, privileged, or proprietary information gained by reason of their position for a purpose other than a City purpose; provided, that nothing shall prohibit the disclosure or use of information which is a matter of public knowledge, or which is available to the public on request. Information obtained during Executive Sessions is deemed confidential.

**Examples:**

A Councilmember purchases land with advanced, undisclosed knowledge of the route of a new transit line that, when completed, will substantially increase the value of the land. The Councilmember's purchase of the land based on "inside" information violates this section off the Code of Ethics.

While having a conversation with Union leadership, a Councilmember discloses information discussed during Executive Session about labor negotiation strategy. The Councilmember's conduct violates this section's prohibition against disclosing information discussed in Executive Session.

D. Acceptance of Compensation, Gifts, Favors, Rewards, or Gratuity Prohibited.

1. City Councilmembers may not, directly or indirectly, give or receive, or agree to give or receive, any compensation, gift, favor, reward, or gratuity for a matter connected with or related to the officer's performance of official duties for the city. Prohibited conduct includes, but is not limited to, the following:

- a. Accepting cash or other cash equivalents such as gift cards or gift certificates regardless of value except as part of an internal, recognized, and sanctioned city incentive program.
- b. Accepting gifts, gratuities, loans, entertainment or other items of value from anyone with whom the city regularly transacts business, who has or seeks a contract with the city, or who desires other official action from the city.
- c. Giving, offering or promising anything of value to a customer, a potential customer, or a financial institution in connection with any transaction or business that the city may have with that customer, potential customer, or financial institution.
- d. Misusing confidential city information or disclosing such information to any individual who does not have a need to know the information.
- e. Using the city's name, account or credit to purchase merchandise for personal use

2. Exceptions. The prohibition regarding accepting compensation, gifts, or rewards shall not apply to:

- a. Receiving items from family members or friends where it is clear beyond a reasonable doubt that the gift was not made to gain or maintain influence;
- b. Receiving items exchanged equally among Councilmembers at a social event hosted or sponsored by an officer of the city for other officers or employees of the city.
- c. Receiving items of nominal value provided for advertising purposes such as pens, calendars, or items received at a conference;
- d. Payment by a governmental or non-governmental entity of reasonable expenses incurred in connection with a speech, presentation, appearance or trade mission made in an official capacity. Reasonable expenses are limited to travel, lodging and subsistence expenses incurred the day before through the day after the event;
- e. Payment of fees and reasonable travel expenses for attending seminars or educational programs sponsored by a government or *bona fide* non-profit professional, educational, trade or charitable association or institution. Reasonable expenses are limited to travel, lodging and subsistence expenses incurred the day before through the day after the event;
- f. Discounts available to the individual as a member of a group, occupation or similar broad-based group;

- g. Awards, prizes, scholarships or other items provided in recognition of academic, sport, or scientific achievement;
- h. Attendance of the Councilmember at a hosted meal where official attendance by the Councilmember as a city representative is appropriate;
- i. Campaign contributions that are in compliance with Chapter 42.17 RCW.

**Example:**

The Anyname Company has submitted a bid on a City project. The President of Anyname approaches a City Councilmember and promises that if their firm is the successful contract bidder, they will buy supplies from a firm owned by the Councilmember. The Councilmember promises to use their position to secure the contract for Anyname. Such actions are a violation of this section of the Ethics Code.

E. Certain Employment Prohibited.

No City Councilmember shall engage in or accept employment or render services for any employer when such employment or service creates a conflict of interest with a duty owed to the city or conflicts with the proper discharge of official city duties.

**Example:**

A Councilmember, who is also a real estate agent, represents a client who is in competition with the City for a parcel of land. The Councilmember is in violation of this section of the Code of Ethics.

F. Personal Interest in Legislation Prohibited.

No City Councilmember shall benefit either directly or indirectly from any legislation or have a financial interest in any legislation coming before the City Council nor participate in discussion with or give an opinion on such legislation, unless such interest is a remote interest as defined in this section and where the fact and extent of such interest is disclosed and noted on the record of the Council, or similar records of the City prior to consideration of the legislation by the City Council. City Councilmembers' participation in the enactment of legislation shall be governed by Ch. 42.23 RCW- the Code of Ethics for Municipal Officers and Ch. 42.36 RCW- The Appearance of Fairness Doctrine. City Councilmembers shall not be prohibited from participating in the adoption of legislation when the Councilmember has only a remote interest in the legislation as defined in this section, which has been disclosed, and the legislation is applicable to the general public and not of specific or unique benefit to the Councilmember. Questions regarding these kinds of situations should be directed to the City Attorney for review.

G. Improper Use of Position Prohibited.

A Councilmember shall not knowingly use their office or position to secure personal benefit, gain or profit, or use their position to secure special privileges or exceptions for themselves, or for the benefit, gain, or profits of any other persons.

H. Improper Use of City Personnel Prohibited.

A Councilmember shall not employ or use any person under their official control or direction for personal benefit, gain, or profit.

I. Improper Use of City Property Prohibited.

A City Councilmember shall not use city-owned vehicles, equipment, materials, money, or property for personal or private convenience or profit. Such use is restricted to those city services that are available to the public generally, for the authorized conduct of official business or for such purposes and under such conditions as are approved by the city council, city manager or designee.

A Councilmember shall not utilize the City's name, letterhead or logo for the purpose of endorsing any political candidate, business, commercial product, or service.

**7.0 Harassment Prevention**

A. Policy: harassment prohibited.

The City of Vancouver is committed to providing a diverse work environment free from discrimination and harassment where all people are treated, and are expected to treat others, with dignity and respect. The City does not condone or tolerate discriminatory, harassing, retaliatory, intimidating, offensive, or disrespectful conduct. Councilmembers have a responsibility to assist in this commitment by modeling appropriate conduct, and refraining from engaging in harassing conduct directed at an individual because of their race, religion, color, national origin, pregnancy, military status, age, gender, sexual orientation, marital status and/or the presence of any physical or mental disability and/or any other status protected by law. Such harassing conduct is strictly prohibited. Any conduct which may be construed as retaliation against an individual because they made a complaint of harassment is also strictly prohibited.

B. Definitions and Guidelines.

1. "Harassing Conduct." As a general rule, harassing conduct includes behavior that is demeaning, insulting, offensive or intimidating. It can include verbal conduct such as unwanted sexual or racist comments; non-verbal behavior such as suggestive looks; and physical behavior such as pats, squeezes or brushing against someone's body. The conduct will be considered harassing and a violation of this policy if it is offensive or unwelcome, even if the conduct was not intended to be harassing.

Harassing conduct can take many forms. It can include:

- Demeaning, insulting, intimidating, or sexually suggestive written, recorded or electronically transmitted messages;
- Using demeaning or inappropriate names or labels that others find offensive;
- Making vulgar comments, using profane language, using indecent gestures or discussing sexual activities;
- Unwanted physical contact or conduct of any kind, including sexual flirtations, touching, advances, or propositions;
- Verbal abuse of any kind;
- The display of demeaning, insulting or sexually suggestive objects or pictures, including nude photographs;
- Blaming victims of harassment for causing the problem; or
- Continuing offensive behaviors after one has objected to that behavior.

2. “Retaliation.” Retaliation is any action taken to punish an individual for making a complaint of harassment or to obtain revenge for making the complaint is retaliation, even if the complaint is unfounded.

Examples of retaliatory conduct include any of the following when made for making a complaint of harassing conduct:

- Harassing or intimidating an individual in any way;
- Making or encouraging unjustified disciplinary action;
- Directly or indirectly encouraging others to retaliate against an individual who has made a complaint of harassment; or
- Making or encouraging any action which is detrimental to the employee’s job such as a demotion, a poor performance evaluation, or making it difficult for the employee to perform job duties.

This Policy applies equally to all Council members regardless of whether they are working inside City Hall or within the community.

## **8.0 Impermissible Conduct After Leaving City Office**

A. Disclosure of Privileged, Confidential, or Proprietary Information Prohibited.

No former City Councilmember shall disclose or use for their personal gain or that of any other person any privileged, confidential, or proprietary information gained because of their City office .

B. Participation in City Matters Prohibited.

No former City Councilmember shall, during the period of one year after leaving office:

1. Assist any person in matters involving the city if, while in the course of duty with the city, the former Councilmember was officially involved in the matter, or personally and substantially participated in the matter, or acted on the matter; or.
2. Represent any person as an advocate in any matter in which the former Councilmember was involved while a Councilmember; or
3. Participate as or with a bidder, vendor, or consultant in any competitive selection process for a city contract in which he or she assisted the city in determining the project, or work to be done or the process to be used.

## **9.0 Violation of the Code of Ethics**

Any person who has information that a Councilmember may have violated the Code of Ethics shall provide that information in writing to the City Council and the City Manager. The written complaint must be based substantially upon the personal knowledge of the complainant and signed by the person filing the complaint. No action will be taken on any complaint which is filed later than three (3) years after a violation of the Code of Ethics is alleged to have occurred.

Upon receipt of the complaint, the City Council, and/or the City Manager shall provide it to the City Attorney who shall promptly review the information and determine whether the complaint, on its face, alleges facts that, if true, would substantiate a violation of the Code of Ethics and shall report back to the Council in writing. The City Council at its next regular meeting, shall review the City Attorney's report and make a determination as to whether or not the Council shall refer the allegation(s) to a Hearings Examiner designated by the Council to conduct an investigation.

If so referred, the Hearings Examiner shall conduct an investigation of the complaint and prepare written findings and conclusions within sixty 60 days of the date the complaint was received by the City unless an extension is granted by the Council. The Councilmember accused of the ethics violation shall have the right to review any and all information obtained as a result of the investigation and shall have the right to respond in writing to the complaint which information shall be reviewed and taken into consideration by the Hearings Examiner.

Upon completion of the investigation, the Hearings Examiner shall issue an advisory report to the Council for its consideration as well as to the City Manager and City Attorney. The report shall set forth findings and conclusions demonstrating whether or not, based on a preponderance of the evidence, the councilmember has violated the Code of Ethics.

Within 5 (five) business days of the receipt of the report, the City Manager shall provide copies of the report via certified mail to the complaining party and to the Councilmember against whom the complaint was filed at their last known addresses.



Within fifteen (15) business days of the receipt of the report, the Council (excluding the accused Councilmember) shall convene to review the alleged violation and the report and take action. Action may include the following: 1.) dismissal of the complaint on the basis that no violation of the Code of Ethics has occurred; or 2.) remand to the Hearings Examiner to obtain additional information in order for the Council to decide whether a violation has occurred; or 3.) a determination that by a preponderance of the evidence, a violation of the Code of Ethics has occurred in which case the Council shall adopt written findings, conclusions and appropriate sanctions as forth herein.

Adoption of the findings, conclusions and sanction(s) by the City Council shall be by majority vote; provided that the Councilmember accused of the violation shall not vote on any matter involving that member; and provided further that in the event the Mayor is accused of the violation, the Mayor Pro Tempore shall act in the Mayor's stead.

Within 5 (five) business days thereafter, the City Manager shall provide copies of the Council's findings, conclusions and sanction(s) via certified mail to the complaining party and to the Councilmember against whom the complaint was filed at their last known addresses. No final disposition of the matter will be implemented for a period of 10 (ten) days to allow the Councilmember against whom the complaint was filed to request a review of the Council's decision. Such a request shall be submitted to the City Manager in writing and shall state the reasons for their objections and request a review of the action taken. The Council shall review the action taken in light of the findings and conclusions and request for review and may take whatever further action, if any, appears appropriate under the circumstances. The action of the Council shall be final and not subject to further review or appeal except as may otherwise be provided by law.

Action by Council may take any of the following sanctions:

1. Admonition. An admonition shall be verbal non-public statement made by the Mayor to the member.
2. Reprimand. A reprimand shall be administered to the Councilmember by letter. The letter shall be prepared by the City Council and shall be signed by the Mayor.
3. Censure. A censure shall be a written statement administered personally to the member. The individual shall appear at a time and place directed by the City Council to receive the censure. It shall be given publicly, and the member shall not make any statement in support of or in opposition thereto or in mitigation thereof. A censure shall be deemed administered at the time it is scheduled whether or not the member appears as required.
4. Other sanctions. Any sanction imposed under this Code of Ethics is in addition to and not in lieu of any other penalty, sanction or remedy which may be imposed or sought according to law or equity, including, but not limited to:

- (a) Declaration of vacancy by City Council pursuant to Charter Sections 2.02 or 2.06.
- (b) Voiding of a contract entered into in violation of Charter Section 11.07 (Personal Interest)
- (c) Forfeiture of office for violation of Charter Section 11.07 (Personal Interest)
- (d) Civil penalties of \$500 and possible forfeiture of office pursuant to RCW 42.23.050.
- (e) Removal or recall from office pursuant to state law.
- (f) Removal from leadership positions, boards and commissions and other official positions or duties that do not conflict with Washington statutes.
- (g) Initiation of appropriate civil actions against any person member who violates this Code.
- (h) Injunctive relief to ensure that violation of this Code or of other provisions of law cease and desist.

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