

CITY OF BONITA SPRINGS CODE OF CONDUCT FOR ELECTED OFFICIALS

The Three Rs of Bonita Springs Government Leadership: Roles, Responsibilities and Respect

The City Charter provides information on the roles and responsibilities of Councilmembers, the Deputy Mayor and the Mayor. The Florida Code of Ethics for Public Officers and Employees provides guidance on ethical issues to ensure that City Council conducts themselves independently and impartially, not using their office for private gain. There is also an Administrative Code for conducting meetings, but until now, what has not been clearly written down is a Code of Conduct for Bonita Springs City Councilmembers.

The Code of Conduct is designed to describe the manner in which Councilmembers should treat one another, city staff, constituents, and others with whom they come into contact with while representing the City of Bonita Springs. It reflects the work of the City Council with defining more clearly the behavior, manners, and courtesies that are suitable for various occasions. The City Council also considered a wide variety of policy changes and clarifications designed to make public meetings and the process of governance run more smoothly.

The contents of this Code of Conduct includes:	Page
A. Overview of Roles and Responsibilities	2
B. Policies and Protocol Related to Conduct	4
C. Council Conduct with One Another	5
D. Council Conduct with City Staff	6
E. Council Conduct with the Public	8
F. Council Conduct with Other Public Agencies	9
G. Council Conduct with Advisory Boards	10
H. Council Conduct with the Media	11
I. Sanctions	12

The constant and consistent themes through all of the conduct guidelines are dignity and respect. Councilmembers experience stress in making decisions that impact the lives of the citizens. At times, the impacts of the entire community must be weighed against the impact of only a few. Despite these pressures, elected officials are called upon to exhibit appropriate behavior at all times. Demonstrating respect for each individual through words and actions is the touchstone that can help guide Councilmembers to do the right thing in even the most difficult situations.

A. Overview of Roles and Responsibilities

Other resources that are helpful in defining the roles and responsibilities of elected officials can be found in the Bonita Springs City Charter, Ordinances and Administrative Code and in the Handbook for Municipal Elected Officials, published by the Florida League of Cities.

MAYOR (City Charter §18)

- Elected “at-large” for a four-year term
- Recognized as head of the City Government for all ceremonial purposes
- Preside over meetings of the City Council
- Has same speaking and voting rights as any other member
- Shall in no case have the power to veto
- Executes and authenticates legal instruments requiring signature
- Leads the Council into an effective, cohesive working team

DEPUTY MAYOR (City Charter §18 And 21)

- Elected by the City Council at the first meeting following a new election.
- Performs the duties of the Mayor if the Mayor is absent, unable to fulfill duties, ceases to be qualified or is removed from office.
- Relinquishes City Council seat when serving as Mayor, assuming the duties of Mayor, unless more than 180 days from next election (then a Special Election).

ALL COUNCILMEMBERS (City Charter §12)

All members of the City Council, including the Mayor and Deputy Mayor, have equal votes. No Councilmember has more power than any other Councilmember, and all should be treated with equal respect.

All Councilmembers should:

- Fully participate in City Council meetings and other duly advertised public meetings while demonstrating dignity, respect, kindness, consideration, and courtesy to all.
- Prepare in advance of meetings and be familiar with issues on the agenda. Address clarifications prior to meeting with applicable staff.
- Be respectful of other people’s time. Stay focused and act efficiently during Council meetings or other City related meetings.
- Serve as a model of leadership and civility to the community.
- Inspire public confidence in Bonita Spring’s government.
- Provide contact information with the City Clerk in case of an emergency or an urgent situation arises while the Councilmember is otherwise not available.
- Demonstrate honesty and integrity in every action and statement.

- Follow Federal, State and Municipal Laws guiding public officials, including, but not limited to, Honest Services Act, State Ethics, Sunshine and Public Records Law, Administrative Code for City Council meetings, Communications Policy, etc.

B. Policies and Protocol Related to Conduct

1. Ceremonial Events – City Charter §18 designates the Mayor to serve as the designated City representative. If the Mayor is unavailable, then City staff will determine if the event organizers would like another representative from the Council.

2. Correspondence Signatures - Councilmembers do not need to acknowledge the receipt of correspondence, or copies of correspondence, during Council meetings (exception: zoning ex parte contact). City staff will prepare official letters in response to public inquiries and concerns. These letters will carry the signature of the Mayor or the appropriate City staff.

3. Endorsements of Candidates - Councilmembers have the right to endorse candidates for all Council seats or other elected offices. It is inappropriate to mention endorsements during Council meetings or other official City meetings or functions.

4. Intergovernmental Relations – Generally, City Charter §18 designates the Mayor to represent the City in intergovernmental relationships (the exception are designated liaisons). The Council values intergovernmental relations with neighboring communities and other entities. As a result, Councilmembers should make a concerted effort to attend scheduled meetings with other entities to further promote intergovernmental relations.

5. Legislative Process - The City generally follows Roberts Rule of Order for meeting management. See the Administrative Code for City Council meetings.

6. Public Meeting Hearing Protocol - The Mayor will open the public meetings, following the Rules of Procedure for City Council meetings. The Mayor has the responsibility to run an efficient public meeting and has the discretion to modify the public hearing process in order to make the meeting run smoothly. Councilmembers should withhold comment during the public hearing portion of the meeting until the conclusion of the public's portion of the hearing. Councilmembers should refrain from arguing or debating with the public during a public hearing and shall always show respect for different points of view.

7. Travel Expenses (City Charter §19, Bonita Springs Ordinance No. 00-12) - May receive reimbursement of actual expenses while performing their official duties. Councilmembers who travel on official City Business either in-state or out-of-state. Such travel shall include attendance at conferences, seminars, and training sessions on behalf of the City. The City shall pay reasonable expenses for registration fees, lodging, meals, transportation, and allowable miscellaneous expenses for the Councilmember only. (City Council are responsible for spouse or others travelling with the Council member). All travel expenses will be handled in the same manner and consistent with the provisions of state law and ordinances.

C. Council Conduct with One Another

Councils are composed of individuals with a wide variety of backgrounds, personalities, values, opinions, and goals. Despite this diversity, all have chosen to serve in public office in order to preserve, protect and enhance the present and the future of the community. In all cases, this common goal should be acknowledged even as Council may “agree to disagree” on contentious issues.

IN PUBLIC MEETINGS –

1. Practice civility, professionalism and decorum in discussions and debate - Difficult questions, tough challenges to a particular point of view, and criticism of ideas and information are legitimate elements of a free democracy in action. This does not allow, however, Councilmembers to make belligerent, personal, impertinent, slanderous, threatening, abusive, or disparaging comments. No shouting or physical actions that could be construed as threatening will be tolerated. Councilmembers should conduct themselves in a professional manner at all times, including physical appearance.

2. Honor the role of the Mayor in maintaining order - It is the responsibility of the Mayor to keep the comments of all persons, including but not limited to, the Councilmembers on track during public meetings. Councilmembers should honor efforts by the Mayor to focus discussions on current agenda items. If there is disagreement about the agenda or the Mayor’s actions in refraining staff, public or Councilmembers from speaking, those objections should be voiced politely and with reason.

3. Avoid personal comments that could offend other Councilmembers - If a Councilmember is personally offended by the remarks of another Councilmember, the offended Councilmember should make notes of the actual words used and call for a “point of personal privilege” that challenges the other Councilmember to justify or apologize for the language used. The Mayor will maintain order of this discussion.

4. Demonstrate effective problem-solving approaches -

Councilmembers have a public stage to show how individuals with disparate points of view can find common ground and seek a compromise that benefits the community as a whole.

5. Be punctual and keep comments relative to topics discussed -

Councilmembers have made a commitment to attend meetings and partake in discussions. Therefore, it is important that Councilmembers be punctual and that meetings start on time. It is equally important that discussions on issues be relative to the topic at hand to allow adequate time to fully discussed scheduled issues. If a Councilmember has an item requested to be on the agenda, it is important they set the example by providing timely written materials.

IN PRIVATE ENCOUNTERS

1. Continue respectful behavior in private - The same level of respect and consideration of differing points of view that is deemed appropriate for public discussions should be maintained in private conversations.

2. Be aware of the insecurity of written notes, voice and text messages, and e-mail - Technology allows words written or said without much forethought to be distributed wide and far. The Public Records Law mandates that any material made or received by an agency in connection with official business be used to perpetuate, communicate or formalize knowledge is a public record, and unless exempt, must be turned over to someone requesting to see that material. Before you create a document, ask yourself: Would you feel comfortable to have this note faxed or PDF'd to others? How would you feel if this voicemail message was played on a speaker phone in a full office? What would happen if this email message was forwarded to others? Written notes, voicemail messages and email related to City business are public communication subject to disclosure.

3. Even private conversations can have a public presence - Elected officials are always on display – their actions, mannerisms, and language are monitored by people around them that they may not know. Lunch table conversations will be eavesdropped upon, parking lot debates will be watched, and casual comments between individuals before and after public meetings noted.

D. Council Conduct with City Staff

Governance of a City relies on the cooperative efforts of elected officials, who set policy, and City staff members, who implement and administer the Council

policies. Therefore, every effort should be made to be cooperative and show mutual respect for the contributions made by each individual for the good of the community.

1. Treat all staff as professionals - Clear, honest communication that respects the abilities, experience, and dignity of each individual is expected. Poor behavior towards staff is not acceptable.

2. Limit contact to specific City staff - Questions of City staff and/or requests for additional background information should be directed to the City Manager, City Attorney, or Department Heads. The City Manager should be copied on or informed of any request.

Requests for follow-up or directions to staff should be made only through the City Manager or the City Attorney when appropriate. When in doubt about what staff contact is appropriate, Councilmembers should ask the City Manager for direction. Materials supplied to a Councilmember in response to a request will be made available to all members of the Council so that all have equal access to information.

3. Do not disrupt City staff from their jobs – Staff wants to be accessible for City Council, but Councilmembers should avoid disrupting City staff while they are in meetings, on the phone, or engrossed in performing their job functions.

4. Never publicly criticize an individual employee - Council should never express concerns about the performance of a City employee in public, to the employee directly, or to the employee's manager. Comments about staff performance should only be made to the City Manager.

5. Do not get involved in administrative functions - Councilmembers must not attempt to influence City Staff on the making of appointments, awarding of contracts, selecting of consultants, processing of development applications, or granting of City licenses and permits. The City Charter, Section 20 also contains information about the prohibition of Council interference in administrative functions.

6. Check with City staff on correspondence before taking action - Before sending correspondence, Councilmembers should check with City staff to see if an official City response has already been sent or is in progress.

7. Do not attend staff meetings (with or without public) unless requested by staff or City Council - Even if the Councilmember does not say anything, the Councilmembers presence implies support, shows partiality, intimidates staff, and hampers staff's ability to do their job objectively.

8. Limit requests for staff support - Even in high priority or emergency situations, requests for additional staff support should be made to the City

Manager who is responsible for allocating City resources in order to maintain a professional, well-run City government and following City Council direction.

9. Do not solicit political support from staff - Councilmembers should not solicit any type of political support (financial contributions, display of poster or lawn signs, name on support list, etc.) from City staff. City staff may, as private citizens with constitutional rights, support political candidates but all such activities must be done away from the workplace.

E. Council Conduct with the Public

1. IN PUBLIC MEETINGS

Making the public feel welcome is an important part of the democratic process. No signs of partiality prejudice or disrespect should be evident on the part of individual Councilmembers toward an individual participating in a public forum. Every effort should be made to be fair and impartial in listening to public testimony.

a. Be welcoming to speakers and treat them with care and gentleness - Speaking in front of Council can be a difficult experience for some people. Some issues the Council undertakes may affect people's daily lives and homes. Some decisions are emotional. The way that Council treats people during public hearings can do a lot to make them relax or to push their emotions to a higher level of intensity.

b. Be fair and equitable in allocating public hearing time to individual speakers - The Mayor, in accordance with the Administrative Code for City Council meetings, will determine and announce limits on speakers at the start of the public hearing process. Generally, each speaker will be allocated four minutes with applicants and appellants or their designated representatives allowed more time. If many speakers are anticipated, the Mayor may shorten the time limit and/or ask speakers to limit themselves to new information and points of view not already covered by previous speakers. No speaker will be turned away unless he or she exhibits inappropriate behavior. Each speaker may only speak once during the public comment unless the Council requests additional clarification. After the close of any public comment portion, no more public testimony will be accepted unless the Mayor reopens the public hearing for a limited and specific purpose.

c. Give the appearance of active listening - It is disconcerting to speakers to have Councilmembers not look at them when they are speaking. It is fine to look down at documents or to make notes, but reading for a long period of time, gazing around the room or getting up from your seat gives the appearance of disinterest. Be aware of facial expressions and body language (e.g., head and

arm movements), especially those that could be interpreted as “smirking”, disbelief, anger or boredom.

d. Ask for clarification, but avoid debate and argument with the public - Only the Mayor – not individual Councilmembers – can interrupt a speaker during a presentation. However, a Councilmember can ask the Mayor for a point of order if the speaker is off the topic or exhibiting behavior or language the Councilmember finds disturbing. If speakers become flustered or defensive, it is the responsibility of the Mayor to calm and focus the speaker and to maintain the order and decorum of the meeting. Questions by Councilmembers to members of the public testifying should seek to clarify or expand information. It is never appropriate to belligerently challenge or belittle the speaker.

e. No personal attacks of any kind, under any circumstance!

f. Follow parliamentary procedure in conducting public meetings - The City Attorney serves as advisory parliamentarian for the City and is available to answer questions or interpret situations according to parliamentary procedures. Final rulings on parliamentary procedure are made by the Mayor, subject to the appeal of the full Council.

2. IN UNOFFICIAL SETTINGS

a. Make no promise on behalf of the Council - Councilmembers will frequently be asked to explain a Council action or to give their opinion about an issue as they meet and talk with constituents in the community. It is appropriate to give a brief overview of City policy and to refer to City staff for further information. It is inappropriate to overtly or implicitly promise Council action, or to promise City staff will do something specific (fix a pothole, remove a library book, plant new flowers in the median, etc.).

b. Make no personal comments about other Councilmembers - It is acceptable to disagree publicly about an issue, but it is unacceptable to make derogatory comments about other Councilmembers, their opinions and actions.

c. Remember that despite its impressive size, Bonita Springs is a small community at heart – Councilmembers are constantly being observed by the community every day that they serve in office. Their behaviors and comments serve as models for proper deportment in the City of Bonita Springs. Honesty and respect for the dignity of each individual should be reflected in every word and action taken by Councilmembers, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It is a serious and continuous responsibility.

F. Council Conduct with Other Public Agencies

a. Be clear about representing the City or personal interests - If a Councilmember appears before another governmental agency or organization to give a statement on an issue, the Councilmember must clearly state:

- (i) if his or her statement reflects personal opinion or is the official stance of the City;
- (ii) whether this is the majority or minority opinion of the Council. Even if the Council member is representing his or her own personal opinions, remember that this still may reflect upon the City as an organization.
- (iii) If the Council member is representing the City, the Council member must support and advocate the official City position on an issue, not a personal viewpoint.
- (iv) If the Council member is representing another organization whose position is different from the City, the Council member should withdraw from voting on the issue if it significantly impacts or is detrimental to the City's interest. Councilmembers should be clear about which organizations they represent and inform the Mayor and Council of their involvement.

b. Correspondence also should be equally clear about representation - City letterhead may be used when the Council member is representing the City and the City's official position. A copy of official correspondence should be given to the City Clerk to be filed as part of the permanent public record. To avoid confusion regarding City Council's position, it is best that City letterhead not be used for correspondence of Councilmembers representing a personal point of view, or a dissenting point of view from an official Council position.

G. Council Conduct with Advisory Boards

The City has established several advisory boards as a means of gathering more community input. Citizens who serve on advisory boards become more involved in government and serve as advisors to the City Council. They are a valuable resource to the City's leadership and should be treated with appreciation and respect.

a. If attending an advisory boards meeting, and you are not the liaison, be careful to only express personal opinions - Councilmembers may attend any advisory board meeting, which are always open to any member of the public. However, if the advisory board is conducting a public hearing, the Council member shall refrain from attending. Councilmembers should be sensitive to the way their participation could be viewed as unfairly affecting the process. Any

public comments by a Council member at an advisory board meeting should be clearly made as individual opinion and not a representation of the feelings of the entire City Council. Also be cognizant of the Sunshine Law, precluding discussion (outside of meeting advertised for City Council) by two or more members of City Council on any item that may take action upon. A council member's presence may affect the conduct of the advisory boards and limit their role and function.

b. Limit contact with advisory boards members - It is inappropriate, and at times illegal, for a Council member to contact an advisory board member to lobby on behalf of an individual, business, or developer. Councilmembers should contact staff in order to clarify a position taken by the advisory boards.

c. Remember that advisory boards serve City Council, not individual Councilmembers - City Council appoints individuals to serve on Advisory boards, and it is the responsibility of advisory boards to follow policy established by the Council. But advisory board members do not report to individual Councilmembers, nor should Councilmembers feel they have the power or right to threaten advisory board members with removal if they disagree about an issue. Appointment and re-appointment to an advisory boards should be based on such criteria as expertise, ability to work with staff and the public, and commitment to fulfilling official duties. An advisory board's appointment should not be used as a political "reward".

d. Be respectful of diverse opinions - A primary role of advisory boards is to represent many points of view in the community and to provide the Council with advice based on a full spectrum of concerns and perspectives. Councilmembers must be fair and respectful of any citizens serving on advisory boards.

e. Keep election issues away from public forums and advisory board meetings – Section 14 of the City Charter calls for nonpartisan elections. While Councilmembers are free to participate in politics when not conducting official business, they should refrain from campaigning for office or providing political support or non-support for those who are running for any elected office (national, state or local) while conducting official duties or when attending advisory meetings.

f. Inappropriate behavior can lead to removal - Inappropriate behavior by an advisory board member should be brought to the attention of City Council, and with the assistance of the City Attorney in preparing the greensheet, the individual may be subject to removal from the advisory board or if the advisory board is not operating in accordance with City Council's direction, dissolution of the advisory board.

H. Council Conduct with the Media

Councilmembers may be contacted by the media for background and quotes.

a. **The best advice for dealing with the media is to avoid going “off the record”** - Most members of the media represent the highest levels of journalistic integrity and ethics, and can be trusted to keep their word. But one bad experience can be catastrophic. Words that are not said cannot be quoted.

b. **Choose words carefully and cautiously** - Comments taken out of context can cause problems. Be especially cautious about humor, sardonic asides, sarcasm, or word play. It is never appropriate to use personal slurs or swear words when talking with the media.

I. Sanctions

Councilmembers Behavior and Conduct (City Charter §22) - City Councilmembers who intentionally and repeatedly do not follow proper conduct may be reprimanded or formally censured by the Council. Serious infractions of this Code of Conduct could lead to other sanctions as deemed appropriate by Council, including forfeiture of office. It is the responsibility of City Council to initiate action if a Council member’s behavior may warrant sanction due to a breach of these written standards of conduct. Any action taken on the alleged violation(s) must be brought up with the City Council in a public meeting.

If the violation of the Code of Ethics or Code of Conduct is outside of the observed behaviors by the Mayor or Councilmembers, the complaining party should bring to the attention to City Council, with City Council voting whether the City Manager, the City Attorney and/or outside investigator should investigate the allegation and report the findings to City Council. If necessary, City Council can under §23 of the City Charter subpoena witnesses, administer oaths and require the production of evidence, in order to make their decisions in accordance with §22 of the City Charter.

Upon adoption of this Code of Conduct, following election to office and once a year thereafter, each elected officer will confirm that they have received a copy of this Code of Conduct for their review and use.

Signature

Date