

Caln Township Board of Commissioners Code of Conduct

It is the policy of Caln Township to uphold, promote, and demand the highest standards of ethics from its elected officials. Accordingly, members of the Township's Board of Commissioners (the "Board") shall maintain the utmost standards of personal integrity, trustfulness, honesty, and fairness in carrying out their public duties, avoid any improprieties in their roles as public servants, comply with all applicable laws, and never use their Township position or authority improperly or for personal gain.

Until now, a clear Code of Conduct for the Board of Commissioners has not been memorialized in writing. This Code of Conduct is designed to describe the manner in which Board members should treat one another, Township staff, constituents, and others they come into contact with in representing Caln Township. It reflects the work of the Board while defining more clearly the behavior, manners, and courtesies that are suitable for various occasions.

The constant and consistent theme through all of the conduct guidelines is "respect." Board members 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 Board members to do the right thing in even the most difficult situations.

I. CODE OF CONDUCT

A. Elected and Appointed Officials' Conduct with Each Other in Public Meetings

Elected and appointed officials are 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 and protect the present and the future of the community. In all cases, this common goal should be acknowledged even though individuals may not agree on every issue.

(1) Honor the role of the chair in maintaining order. It is the responsibility of the chair to keep the comments of members on track during public meetings. Members should honor efforts by the chair to focus discussion on current agenda items. If there is disagreement about the agenda or the chair's actions, those objections should be voiced politely and with reason, following procedures outlined in parliamentary procedure. (For ease of reference the term "member" throughout this Code refers to any member of the Caln Township Board of

Commissioners, and any other Committees and Commissions established by Township ordinance or Township policy.)

(2) Practice civility 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 debate by a free democracy in action. Free debate does not require nor justify, however, public officials to make belligerent, personal, impertinent, slanderous, threatening, abusive, or disparaging comments.

(3) Avoid personal comments that could offend other members. If a member is personally offended by the remarks of another member, the offended member should make notes of the actual words used and call for a "point of personal privilege" that challenges the other member to justify or apologize for the language used. The chair will maintain control of this discussion.

(4) Demonstrate effective problem-solving approaches. Members have a public stage and have the responsibility to show how individuals with disparate points of view can find common ground and seek a compromise that benefits the community as a whole.

B. Elected and Appointed Officials' Conduct with the Public

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 members toward an individual participating in a public forum. Every effort should be made to be fair and impartial in listening to public testimony. In addition, individual members should also carry this courtesy towards the public into their interactions with the public in private encounters.

(1) Be welcoming to speakers and treat them with care and gentleness. While questions of clarification may be asked, the official's primary role during public testimony is to listen.

(2) Be fair and equitable in allocating public hearing time to individual speakers. The chair will determine and announce limits on speakers at the start of the public hearing process.

(3) Practice active listening. It is disconcerting to speakers to have members 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, repeatedly looking at a cell phone or other electronic device, or gazing around the room gives the appearance of disinterest. Members shall try to be conscious of facial expressions, and avoid those that could be interpreted as "smirking," disbelief, anger, or

boredom. (4) Maintain an open mind. Members of the public deserve an opportunity to influence the thinking of elected and appointed officials.

(5) Ask for clarification, but avoid debate and argument with the public. A member can ask the chair for a point of order if the speaker is off the topic or exhibiting behavior or language the member finds disturbing.

(6) 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.

(7) 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.

C. Elected and Appointed Officials' Conduct with Township Staff

Governance of a Township relies on the cooperative efforts of elected officials, who set policy, appointed officials who advise the elected, and Township staff who implement and administer the Board's 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) Do not disrupt Township staff from their jobs. Elected and appointed officials should not disrupt Township staff while they are in meetings, on the phone, or engrossed in performing their job functions in order to have their individual needs met. Do not attend Township staff meetings unless requested by staff - even if the elected or appointed official does not say anything, his or her presence implies support, shows partiality, may intimidate staff, and hampers staff's ability to do their job objectively.

(3) Never publicly criticize an individual employee. Elected and appointed officials should never express concerns about the performance of a Township employee in public, to the employee directly, or to the employee's manager. Comments about staff performance should only be made to the Township Manager or the Board of Commissioners through private correspondence or conversation.

(4) Do not get involved in administrative functions. Elected and appointed officials acting in their individual capacity must not attempt to influence Township staff on the making of appointments, awarding of contracts, selecting of consultants, processing of development applications, or granting of Township licenses and permits unless authorized by the Township Code of Ordinances.

(5) Do not solicit political support from staff. Elected and appointed officials should not solicit any type of political support (financial contributions, display of posters or lawn signs, name on support list, etc.) from Township staff. Township staff may, as private citizens with constitutional rights, support political candidates but all such activities must be done away from the workplace.

D. Elected and Appointed Officials' Conduct with Boards, Committees and Commissions

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

(1) If attending a Committee or Commission meeting, be careful to only express personal opinions. Board of Commissioners members may attend any Board, Committee, or Commission meeting, which are always open to any member of the public. However, they should be sensitive to the way their participation - especially if it is on behalf of an individual, business or developer - could be viewed as unfairly affecting the process. Any public comments by a Board of Commissioners member at a Committee or Commission meeting should be clearly made as individual opinion and not a representation of the feelings of the entire Board of Commissioners.

(2) Limit contact with Committee and Commission members to questions of clarification. It is inappropriate for a Board of Commissioners member to contact a Committee or Commission member to lobby on behalf of an individual, business, or developer, and vice versa. It is acceptable for Board members to contact Committee or Commission members in order to clarify a position taken by the Committee or Commission.

(3) Respect that Committees and Commissions serve the community, not individual Board of Commissioners members. The Board as a whole appoints individuals to serve on Committees and Commissions, and it is the responsibility of Committees and Commissions to follow policy established by the Board. But Committee and Commission members do not report to individual Board

members, nor should Board members feel they have the power or right to threaten Committee and Commission members with removal if they disagree about an issue. Appointment and re-appointment to a Committee or Commission should be based on such criteria as expertise, ability to work with staff and the public, and commitment to fulfilling official duties. A Committee or Commission appointment should not be used as a political "reward."

(4) Be respectful of diverse opinions. A primary role of Committees and Commissions is to represent many points of view in the community and to provide the Board of Commissioners with advice based on a full spectrum of concerns and perspectives. Board members may have a closer working relationship with some individuals serving on Committees and Commissions, but must be fair and respectful of all citizens serving on Committees and Commissions.

(5) Keep political support away from public forums. Committee and Commission members may offer political support to a Board member, but not in a public forum while conducting official duties. Conversely, Board members may support Committee and Commission members who are running for office, but not in an official forum in their capacity as a Board member.

E. Cell Phone and Electronic Device Use During Public Meetings

Cell phones and other electronic devices may be used when necessary during meetings to allow Board members to have access to documents and necessary information; however, use of cell phones and other electronic devices should be limited so as to be respectful to speakers and to minimize disruption.

- (1) Cell phones or other electronic devices that ring or otherwise alert should be switched to "silent" mode or turned off to minimize disruption during public meetings.
- (2) When Board members, Township staff, consultants, guest speakers, or members of the public are speaking during public meetings, use of cell phones and other electronic devices should be limited to those times when necessary to have access to documents or other information relevant to the topic being discussed.
- (3) If a Board member is facing a personal situation or emergency, during which continuous access to a cell phone or other electronic device is necessary, the Board member shall take steps to minimize disruption and be respectful to speakers.

II. SANCTIONS

Board members who intentionally and repeatedly do not follow proper conduct shall first be given an opportunity to explain their actions to the Board, then upon decision of the majority of the Board, the offending member may be sent a letter of reprimand or formally censured by the Board in a public meeting. The Board shall decide whether the infraction warrants the offending member losing seniority or committee assignments or other privileges afforded by the Board. Serious infractions shall be referred to law enforcement or the Pennsylvania Legislature as required by law.