

# **CITY OF WEST HOLLYWOOD**

## **CODE OF CONDUCT FOR ELECTED AND APPOINTED OFFICIALS**

### **I. Introduction**

The purpose of this Code of Conduct (“Code”) is to define the role of elected and appointed officials (members of the City Council and its subsidiary Commissions and Boards, collectively “City officials” or “officials”) in the governance of the City. This Code consists of policies and implementing rules intended to advance the City’s goals of providing efficient and high quality services to its residents and providing a safe and productive work environment for its employees.

### **II. Background**

West Hollywood is a general law city governed by the council/manager form of government. The City Council, with the assistance of its advisory commissions and boards makes policies and fundamental governmental decisions; the City Manager is charged with implementing those policies and decisions and administering the day-to-day affairs of the City with the assistance of his/her staff. The City Council has direct authority over the City Manager and the City Attorney; all other employees of the City are under the direct authority of the City Manager. This Code establishes rules that contribute to the success of this basic structure and to maintaining positive and effective working relationships between officials and employees.

### **III. Limitations**

This Code addresses selective aspects of the governance of the City and supplements, but does not supplant other laws and rules that prescribe the legal responsibilities of City officials. Those include, among others, the California Constitution, various provisions of the California Government Code (including the Brown Act and the Political Reform Act) and Labor Code, federal laws prohibiting discrimination and harassment, and the provisions of the City’s own Municipal Code. Elected and appointed officials should be familiar with these laws to assure that they exercise their responsibilities properly; to that end, the City provides periodic training and education programs which should be attended by all City officials. In addition, the City Attorney is available to respond to questions about these matters.

It is not possible for a code of this kind to anticipate and provide a rule of conduct for all situations. At bottom, it is expected that officials will manage their behavior in a manner consistent with the rules that follow, respect the chain of command and behave within the bounds of their authority. It is also expected that officials will treat each other, City employees, residents and business-people with courtesy and respect in a manner that reflects well on the City.

#### IV. Policies and Rules

What follows are general policies governing the conduct of City officials. Following each policy is a set of rules that give specific application to the policy. In *italics* following each rule, is an explanation of the rule and guidance for interpreting and applying the rule.

Policy 1. City officials shall deal with the administrative service solely through the City Manager or his/her delegee.

##### **Rules:**

1.1 Officials shall not direct, order or make demands on any City employee, other than inquiries that can be answered routinely and without research.

*City staff is organized in a hierarchical structure, and City employees work under the direction and control of several layers of management culminating with the City Manager. Individual officials are not part of that management structure and have no authority to direct employees. When an official attempts to give an employee direction, the employee is put in an awkward position and the management structure is undermined. In some cases such actions have the potential for liability. Officials are not authorized directly to give work assignments to Employees. Employees are instructed not to take directions or work assignments from officials and to report any such attempts to their Department Director. An official may ask a routine question of staff; beyond that, concerns about work assignment should be addressed to the City Manager or to the appropriate Department Director.*

1.2 Officials shall not attempt to reorganize an employee's priorities or influence the manner by which City staff perform their assigned functions or duties.

*City employees are directed in their everyday tasks by their immediate supervisor in accordance with approved work plans. Interference with an employee's work routine, priorities or decisionmaking processes by an official creates confusion and stress and places the employee in the difficult position of either disregarding his or her assigned work or appearing to disrespect the official's wishes. All requests for work or research should be directed to the appropriate Department Director. From time to time an official may believe that a problem must be looked into immediately, and is tempted to direct an employee to drop everything and focus on that problem. Officials must, however, communicate their concern to the appropriate Department Director or the City Manager.*

1.3 Officials shall not retaliate or threaten to retaliate against employees as a result of disagreements over policy recommendations.

*It is critical to the success of the City that its employees enjoy a workplace free of the fear of retaliation. The City takes great pride in its creativity and its receptivity to new and different ideas; creativity is fostered by an open and nonjudgmental atmosphere where candor is not penalized. City employees are hired to offer their professional judgments and opinions. Officials are certainly free to disagree with those judgments; indeed, those officials ultimately may have the final word. But, those disagreements must not extend to threats or generate fear of reprisal. Officials enjoy substantial authority within City Hall; this authority must not be exercised in a manner that intimidates staff and degrades morale with resulting damage to the fabric of the organization.*

1.4 Officials shall not threaten a City employee with disciplinary action.

*If an official is concerned about the performance of a City employee, that concern should be expressed privately to the City Manager or to the employee's Department Director. Such criticisms can then be addressed in accordance with the City's personnel rules, in a manner that protects the employee's rights and protects the City's authority properly to discipline its employees. It is never acceptable for an official directly to threaten disciplinary action of any kind. And, rarely, if ever, is it appropriate to criticize publicly a non-managerial employee. Officials should certainly have high expectations of employees' work performance; but, there is no room in the City organization for public humiliation of any person.*

Policy 2. City officials shall act collectively in a properly noticed and constituted meeting; officials have no authority to make decisions or take actions on behalf of the body unless expressly authorized to do so.

**Rules:**

2.1 Officials shall not make representations or promises to any third party regarding the future actions of the City or of the body of which they are a member, unless such representation or promise has been duly authorized by the appropriate body.

*When officials engage in conversations with residents, applicants, developers, lobbyists and officials of other governmental agencies, they should be cautious not to make representations or promises that they cannot legally make or keep. Future actions of a legislative body cannot be promised or predicted with certainty. Individual officials do not have authority to make commitments on behalf of the City unless expressly authorized to do so by the body of which they are a member.*

2.2 When making public utterances, officials shall make it clear whether they are authorized to speak on behalf of the body of which they are a member, or whether they are presenting their own views.

*Officials occasionally speak before other public bodies, neighborhood groups or to the press. When doing so, they should always make it clear whether they are presenting their own point of view or whether they have been authorized by the body of which they are a member to present a particular view. They should be clear in all oral and written utterances whether they are using their title for identification purposes or because they are speaking in an official capacity. Use of City letterhead shall comply with Rule 4.1 herein. The actions and recommendations of subsidiary bodies are presented to the City Council as part of the staff report, and often memorialized in a resolution. If a subsidiary body feels it necessary to supplement these written transmittals, it should expressly authorize one of its members to speak on its behalf. Seldom should an individual member of a commission or board feel it necessary to explain his or her votes at a City Council meeting.*

2.3 Officials shall not interfere with the manner by which the City Manager performs his or her duties.

*The City Manager takes direction from the Council acting as a body, not from individual members. And, while the Council as a body may offer its views on matters within the Manager's area of authority (such as hiring subordinates), it is the Manager, as chief executive officer of the organization, that makes the final decisions on such matters. The Manager cannot function effectively if he or she receives inconsistent direction from individual Councilmembers or is not given the support and independence necessary to administer the City.*

2.4 City officials shall not interfere with the implementation by City staff of approved projects and programs.

*The City Manager is charged with the implementation of approved projects or programs. City Councilmembers must avoid interfering with or directing the Manager's method of carrying out the City Council's decisions, even if the project or program was conceived and initiated by an individual Councilmember. Once a project or program receives Council approval, it is an official activity of the City, not of any individual Councilmember. City officials do not have authority and should refrain from giving directions or instructions to City contractors or consultants working on City projects or programs.*

Policy 3. Appointed legislative bodies shall limit their activities to matters within their subject matter jurisdiction.

**Rules:**

3.1 Commissions and Boards shall address only those matters determined by the Municipal Code or by the Council to be within their subject matter jurisdiction; staff need not place on an agenda, provide resources for or implement requests, directions or actions outside that jurisdiction. Unless directed otherwise by the City Council, Commissions and Boards shall refrain from consideration of policy issues that are under active consideration by the Council.

*The Municipal Code sets forth the subject area jurisdiction of the City's Commissions. The City Council establishes the duties of its advisory boards. These subsidiary bodies are limited to acting and/or making recommendations within the area of their jurisdiction, and in accordance with by-laws approved by the City Council.*

3.2 The City Council as a whole shall provide direction and guidance to its subsidiary bodies.

*There may be times when the Council feels that an advisory body is straying from its mission or making decisions or recommendations inconsistent with the Council's vision for the City. It is preferable for the Council to communicate its concerns to such bodies in a joint study session.*

Policy 4. City resources shall be used solely for proper governmental purposes, and only with proper authorization.

**Rules:**

4.1 City letterhead may be used by City Councilmembers for official City business.

*City letterhead must be used with care to avoid misunderstandings. Letterhead may be used to communicate official City policy or actions. It is also routinely used by Councilmembers to respond to inquiries or communicate their individual opinions, in which event the author should be clear about whose view is being presented. Appointed City officials are not authorized to use City letterhead.*

4.2 City employees shall not be asked or directed to spend time on non-City business.

*It is improper to ask or require a City employee to engage in non-City related activities. Non-City activities include, among other things, election campaign-related activities and personal errands. This rule especially pertains to Council deputies, who are most susceptible to influence from Councilmembers in the management of their time. Further, City employees should not be solicited to engage in political activity on behalf of a City official; they may, of course, choose to do so when off-duty and away from City Hall.*

4.3 When traveling on City business, officials holding a City credit card shall adhere to the City's credit card use policy.

*The City has adopted a policy governing the use of City credit cards for official business, and otherwise obtaining reimbursement for business-related expenses. It is expected that all officials holding City credit cards will adhere strictly to this policy.*

4.4 Officials shall not use or disclose information obtained through City service for improper purposes.

*Officials often acquire information in performing their duties that is not generally available to the public, including information received in closed sessions. Sometimes this information is confidential or highly sensitive. Information that is not generally available to the public must remain confidential and be used only for the purposes for which it was divulged. In particular, this information can never be used for personal gain.*

Policy 5. When representing the City, officials shall conduct themselves in a dignified manner and in accordance with all legal requirements.

**Rules:**

5.1 When representing the City on official business, officials shall behave responsibly and in a manner as to project a positive image for the City.

*Whenever an official is representing the City, in or out-of-town, the official is “on-duty” and should behave in a manner that will reflect well on the City. When out-of-town or at social events there is a temptation to behave more informally than one might in City Hall, which can lead to awkward or embarrassing situations, and in extreme cases to improper or illegal behavior. When at official functions, officials should avoid drinking alcohol to excess.*

5.2 Officials shall exercise best efforts to avoid the appearance of impropriety in the performance of their official duties.

*The public’s confidence in the integrity and fairness of City government often hinges on the behavior of City officials. Real or perceived ethical lapses by City officials undermine the effectiveness of the City and cast a shadow on the decisions of its legislative bodies. Often, ethical considerations extend beyond the legal requirements of conflict of interest law.*

V. City Council Deputies

City Council Deputies are unique among employees in City Hall. Unlike other employees they answer directly to City Councilmembers as well as the City Manager, and may be given work assignments directly by the Councilmember to whom they are assigned. They are employed at- will, meaning that they can be terminated without cause at any time.

Deputies are unique from an operational point of view as well. Most of their time is spent performing assignments directly from the Councilmember for whom they work, sometimes representing him or her to constituents, representatives of other governmental agencies and other City staff. In this capacity, Deputies communicate their Councilmembers’ wishes or viewpoints.

Deputies are subject to all of the policies and rules in this Code when acting as a surrogate of the Councilmember to whom they are assigned when relating both to City employees and others, and are otherwise subject to the same rules, expectations of conduct and disciplinary procedures as other employees of the City.

## VI. Enforcement

The City is committed to maintaining a healthy, fulfilling and humane workplace. To that end, every City official is expected to observe the foregoing policies and rules when engaged in City business.

Complaints alleging a violation of this Code of Conduct by a City official should be directed to the City Manager or the City Attorney. Upon receipt of a complaint of a minor nature, the City Manager and the City Attorney shall together determine a course of action. The City Manager and the City Attorney shall, should they fail to resolve the complaint or should the complaint be of a serious nature, consult with the Mayor (unless the Mayor is the subject of the complaint, in which event they shall consult with the Mayor Pro Tem or other Councilmember, in order of seniority, as is appropriate under the circumstances) in order to determine an appropriate course of action.

The goal of enforcement of this Code of Conduct is corrective, rather than penal, and a progressive approach to curing violations shall be employed, beginning with informal methods and proceeding to more formal methods as necessary. If appropriate, informal counseling and instruction (including referral to the Employee Assistance Program if appropriate) shall be utilized to correct the official's behavior prior to recommending imposition of sanctions.

Should less drastic measures fail, the City Council may in a public meeting impose one or more of the following sanctions:

- Reprimand
- Censure
- Travel or expense reimbursement restrictions
- Loss of committee or liaison assignments
- Removal from an appointed commission or board
- Loss of staff support or use of City resources
- Other penalties as may be applicable under the circumstances