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