

Town of Topsfield

CODE OF RESPONSIBILITY

(October 28, 2013)

There shall be a Code of Responsibility which establishes a formal protocol that governs how the Board of Selectmen and Town Administrator will function in relation to one another and in relation to the public that they both serve.

To this end, the following protocols are hereby approved by the Topsfield Board of Selectmen:

Protocol for the Board of Selectmen

1. A member of the Board of Selectmen, in relation to his or her community should:

- Realize that his or her basic function is to make policy, with administration delegated to the Town Administrator.
- Realize that he or she is one of a team and should abide by, and carry out, all legal, moral and ethical Board decisions once they are made.
- Be well informed concerning the responsibilities of a Board member in accordance with municipal, state and federal laws.
- Remember that he or she represents the entire community at all times.
- Accept the role of a member is a means of unselfish service, not to benefit personally or politically from his or her Board activities.
- Abide by the ethics guidelines established by the State and not use the position of Selectmen to obtain inside information on matters that may benefit someone personally.

2. A member of the Board of Selectmen, in his or her relations with the Town Administrator, should:

- Endeavor to establish sound, clearly defined policies that will direct and support the administration of or the benefit of the staff and residents of the community.
- Recognize and support the administrative chain of command and refrain from acting on complaints as an individual outside the administration.
- Give the Town Administrator full responsibility for discharging his or her disposition and/or solutions.
- Not give instructions to or request assistance from Town department heads, but rather channel all such activities through the full Board of Selectmen and the Town Administrator.

3. A member of the Board of Selectmen, in his or her relations with fellow Board members, should:

- Recognize that action at official legal meetings is binding and that he or she alone cannot bind the Board outside of such meetings.

- Not make statements or promises of how he or she will vote on matters that will come before the Board until he or she has had an opportunity to hear the pros and cons of the issue during a Board meeting.
- Uphold the intent of executive session and respect the privileged communication that exists in executive session.
- Make decisions only after all facts on a question have been presented and discussed.
- Refrain from communicating the position of the Board of Selectmen to anyone unless the full Board has previously agreed on both the position and the language of the statement conveying the position.
- Treat with respect the rights of all members of the Board despite differences of opinion.

4. A member of the Board of Selectmen, in his or her relations with Town staff, should:

- Treat all staff as professionals in a manner that respects the abilities, experience, and dignity of each individual.
- Limit contact to specific Town staff. Questions of Town staff and/or requests for additional background information should be directed through the Board of Selectmen or to the Town Administrator or Department heads. The office of the Town Administrator should be copied on all requests or correspondence.
- Never publicly criticize an individual employee. Concerns about staff performance should only be made to the Town Administrator through private conversation.
- Limit requests for staff support, and insure that all requests go through the Town Administrator's office.
- Ensure that any materials or information provided to a Selectmen from a staff member be made available to all Selectmen.

5. The Chair of the Board of Selectmen, in his or her relations with the public, the Board and Town staff, should:

- Develop an agenda and facilitate the requests of the other selectmen, including agenda items and requests for information.
- Run the meetings according to an agreed upon set of rules so that everyone understands how to conduct business, and all are treated fairly and equally.
- Understand that the Chair serves at the pleasure of the Board to run the Board's meetings and develop the agenda. In all other respects, the Chair is an equal member of the Board who possesses no special authority or privilege.
- Act as the voice of the Board and represent the decisions of the Board when requested from the media.

Revised Draft for review and discussion updated October 28, 2013; First Draft prepared October 5, 2013.

This code of conduct was developed based on similar codes used by other elected boards and committees in other communities, including but not limited to: Towns of Princeton, Falmouth, Littleton, Sudbury and Harvard.