

Chapter 11: Ethics and Code of Conduct

It is the responsibility of board membership to maintain a high standard of ethics. Members are expected to demonstrate the highest degree of principles and integrity. The [Ohio Revised Code](#) is the best source for more information about the ethical obligations of a board member. An overview of public ethics laws for the State of Ohio can be found in [Ohio Ethics Laws Overview](#). For more information, view the [ICMA Code of Ethics](#), the [Oxford Code of Conduct](#) and the [Ohio Ethics Board and Commission Member Guidance Sheet 2018](#). Please review the City's Code of Ethics which is part of the [Employee Personnel Rules and Policies](#).

Confidential Information

If an official or employee has access to confidential information in his or her public job, he or she is prohibited from disclosing or using that confidential information. Information discussed in executive session or that is privileged based on attorney-client privilege, HIPPA or otherwise deemed confidential are not to be shared outside of those receiving the communication. Contact the City Solicitor for help on determine what information is considered privileged. In general, most emails or communications from or to the City Solicitor or Special Council could be privileged. Check with the City Solicitor to determine if they are public record before sharing such emails.

Local Ballot Measures

At times, initiatives may be placed on the ballot that affect City Council policy. There are restrictions regarding what actions the City may take on ballot measures. Specifically, State of Ohio statutes prohibit the City from using its personnel, equipment, materials, buildings, or other resources to influence the outcome of elections.

The City can create and distribute informational reports or pamphlets for the purpose of informing the public of the facts of an issue. Information from the City cannot encourage people to vote for or against any issue. City Council members can take a personal stand on issues but should make it clear that this is their personal opinion and not the opinion of City Council or the City.

Gifts

The conflict of interest law prohibits a public official or employee from soliciting or accepting things of value that could have a "substantial and improper influence" on the official/employee. Per [Ohio Ethics Laws](#), an official cannot solicit or accept gifts, travel expenses, employment, substantial meals or other items of significant value if it could improperly influence the official in the performance of their duties. While there is an exception for *de minimis* (small) gifts, it is best practice not to accept gifts. The receipt of a gift can't be remedied by giving it to someone else. Often the perception of impropriety is more important than the reality. Examples of prohibited gifts:

- Golf outings, greens fees, cart rentals
- Discount at a local retailer
- Travel, meal, and lodging
- Free season tickets, tickets to a post-season game
- Jewelry
- An increase in the value of property, an opportunity to sell property at a profit or for a commission or any other benefit to property
- Meal at an exclusive restaurant, spa services