



# **Ulster County**

**Code of Conduct  
For  
Elected and Appointed Officials**

## **POLICY PURPOSE**

The Ulster County Legislature adopts this Code of Conduct to assure that all elected and appointed officials, while exercising their office, conduct themselves in a manner that will instill public confidence and trust in the fair operation and integrity of Ulster County's government.

### **A. ETHICS**

The citizens and businesses of Ulster County are entitled to have fair, ethical and accountable local government. To this end, the public should have full confidence that their elected and appointed officials:

- Comply with both the letter and spirit of the laws and policies affecting the operations of government;
- Are independent, impartial and fair in their judgment and actions;
- Use their public office for the public good, not for personal gain; and
- Conduct public deliberations and processes openly, unless required by law to be confidential, in an atmosphere of respect and civility.

Therefore, the County Executive, County Comptroller, County Clerk, Sheriff, District Attorney, members of the County Legislature, all appointees of the aforementioned, and members of all Boards, Committees and Commissions (collectively the "members"), shall conduct themselves in accordance with the following ethical standards:

1. Act in the Public Interest. Recognizing that stewardship of the public interest must be their primary concern, members will work for the common good of the people of Ulster County and not for any private or personal interest, and they will assure fair and equal treatment of all persons, claims and transactions coming before them.
2. Comply with both the spirit and the letter of the Law and County Policy. Members shall comply with the laws of the nation, the State of New York and the County of Ulster and all Ulster County policies, in the performance of their public duties.
3. Conduct of Members. The professional and personal conduct of members while exercising their office must be above reproach and avoid even the appearance of impropriety. Members shall refrain from abusive conduct, personal charges or verbal attacks upon the character or motives of other members, county employees, or the public.
4. Respect for Process. Members shall perform their duties in accordance with the policies, processes and rules of order established by the Ulster County Legislature.
5. Conduct at Public Meetings. Members shall prepare themselves for public issues; listen courteously and attentively to all public discussions before the body; and focus on the business at hand.

6. Confidential Information. Members must maintain the confidentiality of all written materials and verbal information provided to members which is confidential or privileged. Members shall neither disclose confidential information without proper legal authorization, nor use such information to advance their personal, financial or other private interests.

7. Advocacy. Members shall represent the official policies or positions of the County to the best of their ability when designated as delegates for this purpose. When presenting their individual opinions and positions, members shall explicitly state they do not represent their body or the County of Ulster, nor will they allow the inference that they do.

8. Legislators and Board, Committee and Commission members have the right to endorse candidates for all County Legislative seats or other elected offices. It is prohibited to mention or display endorsements during Legislative meetings, or Board, Committee and Commission meetings, or other official County meetings.

9. Positive Work Place Environment. Members shall support the maintenance of a positive and constructive work place environment for County employees and for citizens and businesses dealing with the County.

## **B. CONDUCT GUIDELINES**

The Conduct Guidelines are designed to describe the manner in which elected and appointed officials should treat one another, County staff, constituents, and others they come into contact with while representing the County of Ulster.

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

(a) Honor the role of the Chair in maintaining order.

(b) 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 public officials to make belligerent, threatening, **or** abusive, comments.

(c) Avoid personal comments that could offend other members.

(d) 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.

2. Elected and Appointed Officials' Conduct with the Public 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 demonstrated 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 The official's roll during public testimony is to listen.

(b) Practice active listening. Avoid distractions, such as texting, and avoid mannerisms that might signal disinterest or disapproval.

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

3. Elected and Appointed Officials' Conduct with County Staff. Governance of a County relies on the cooperative efforts of elected officials, who set policy, appointed officials who advise the elected, and County staff who implement and administer the Legislature'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.

(a) Treat all staff as professionals. Clear, honest communication that respects the abilities, experience, and dignity of each individual is expected.

(b) Elected and appointed officials should never express concerns about the performance of a County employee by name in public, to the employee directly, or to the employee's manager.

### **C. ACKNOWLEDGEMENT & TRAINING**

1. Acknowledgement of Code of Conduct. Members who do not sign an acknowledgement that they have read and understand the Code of Conduct shall be ineligible for intergovernmental assignments or subcommittees. Board, Committee and Commission members who do not sign an acknowledgement that they have read and understand the Code of Conduct are not eligible to hold office.

2. Ethics Training for Local Officials. The County Executive, County Comptroller, County Sheriff, County Clerk, District Attorney, members of the County Legislature, all appointees of the aforementioned, and members of all Boards, Committees and Commissions who are out of compliance with State or County mandated requirements for ethics training shall not represent the County on intergovernmental assignments or subcommittees, and may be subject to sanctions.

**D. IMPLEMENTATION**

The Code of Conduct is intended to be self-enforcing and is an expression of the standards of conduct for members expected by the County. It therefore becomes most effective when members are thoroughly familiar with it and embrace its provisions.

For this reason, this document shall be included in the regular orientations for candidates for County Legislature, County Comptroller, County Executive, County Clerk, Sheriff, District Attorney, and applicants to Boards, Committees and Commissions, and newly elected and appointed officials. Members entering office shall sign a statement (example below) acknowledging they have read and understand the Code of Conduct. In addition, the Code of Conduct shall be periodically reviewed by the County Legislature, Boards, Committees and Commissions, and updated it as necessary.

*I affirm that I have read and understand the Ulster County Code of Conduct for Elected and Appointed Officials.*

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Signature

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Date