



Meeting Name: Town Council Meeting
Meeting Date: January 22, 2025
Prepared By: Leonard G. Rubin, Town Attorney
Item Title: Revised Code of Conduct and Enforcement Options

DISCUSSION:

At the November 13, 2024 Town Council meeting, this office presented the Town Council with a revised Code of Conduct for members of the Town Council. The Council, by consensus, agreed to additional revisions, which are highlighted in yellow on the attached document. These revisions include:

- A revised preamble as proposed by former Councilmember Rosengarten. If the Council adopts the enforcement language, the italicized language would need to be removed.
- A revision to Section B.2 to include members of Town Staff.
- An additional revision to the end of Section B.2 regarding newsletters also proposed by former Councilmember Rosengarten.
- The deletion of “without the use of the Councilmember’s official title” from Section B.3.

The Council, by consensus, also indicated that it wished to include enforcement provisions (although former Councilmember Rosengarten was part of that consensus). However, as explained below, the Town Council’s authority is limited with respect to the methods available for enforcement.

The Town Charter currently provides for removal of a Councilmember “by the remaining members of the Town Council” if the member no longer meets the requirements for candidacy set forth in Article III, Section 1(b) of the Town Charter. Thus, a Councilmember may only be removed if the member is no longer a resident of the Town or the member has been convicted or pled nolo contendere to any felony or any crime of fraud or dishonesty including, by way of example, larceny, theft, burglary, forgery, perjury, or embezzlement.

In addition to the Town Charter, Section 112.51, Florida Statutes, authorizes the Governor to suspend (and ultimately remove) a municipal official for “malfeasance, misfeasance, neglect of duty, habitual drunkenness, incompetence, or permanent inability to perform official duties” or when arrested for a felony or for a misdemeanor related to the duties of office. Additionally, Section 100.361, Florida Statutes, provides a procedure whereby the electors of a municipality may initiate a petition remove a member of the governing body for “malfeasance, misfeasance, neglect of duty, drunkenness, incompetence, permanent inability to perform official duties, or conviction of a felony involving moral turpitude.”

Based on the foregoing, the Council cannot, absent an amendment to the Town Charter, suspend or remove a Councilmember for violation of the Code of Conduct. Consequently, the enforcement provisions previously provided to the Council have been included within the Code of Conduct. At the suggestion of Councilmember Davis, these provisions have been revised to require that the Town Council determine whether to pursue the violation once a complaint is received. While Councilmember Davis suggested that such a decision require a supermajority vote, there is no supermajority of four (assuming one Councilmember has been named in the complaint and that there is a full Council with four other members). Consequently, the language has been revised to require a unanimous vote of the non-named Councilmembers to proceed. The potential consequences remain the same, listed from least consequential to most consequential: (1) admonishment; (2) written warning; and (3) censure.

Once the Council agrees on the revisions to the Code of Conduct and/or the enforcement options, a Resolution adopting the final version will be placed on the Town Council's consent agenda.

RECOMMENDATION:

Consideration of revisions to the Town Council Code of Conduct and enforcement options.