



City of Stevenson

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MEMORANDUM

To: City Council Members: Pat Rice, Tina Van Pelt, Erin Minnis, Lucy Lauser and Dave Cox

Cc: Wes Wootten, City Administrator; Robert Muth, City Attorney

From: Jenny Taylor, Mayor

Date: January 11, 2026

Subject: Intent and Purpose of Proposed City Council Code of Ethics

Purpose of this Memo

The purpose of this memorandum is to provide context for the proposed City Council Code of Ethics included in the agenda packet. This memo is intended to explain why I believe adopting a Code of Ethics is important at this time and how it fits into the broader governance framework of the City.

Background and Context

The City of Stevenson operates under a Mayor-Council form of government. Effective governance under this structure depends on clear understanding and consistent application of Roles, Authority, and Accountability (RAA) between the Council, the Mayor, and City staff.

Since I began serving on Council in 2016, the City has experienced unusually high turnover in Council membership, effectively cycling through multiple full Council compositions over a relatively short period of time. This level of turnover has resulted in repeated resets in priorities, working relationships, and institutional knowledge. While some turnover is a natural part of any elected body, frequent early departures and instability can undermine continuity, effectiveness, and long-term planning.

The City has experienced similar instability on the staff side. Staff retention and organizational health are directly affected by leadership dynamics, clarity of roles, and the consistency of expectations applied by elected officials

Intent of the Proposed Code of Ethics

The proposed City Council Code of Ethics is intended to establish a shared foundation for how the Council conducts itself as a governing body. Specifically, the Code is designed to:

- Reinforce public trust in City governance through clear ethical expectations
- Clarify standards of professionalism, conduct, and communication
- Support staff by reinforcing appropriate boundaries and lines of authority
- Promote clarity around Roles, authority, and Accountability (RAA) within the Mayor–Council form of government
- Encourage consistency across Council transitions and future Councils

The Code is not intended to limit debate, participation, or constitutionally protected speech. Rather, it is intended to provide clear guardrails so expectations around conduct, communication, and process are understood in advance and applied consistently.

Relationship to Culture and Professionalism

Not all aspects of effective governance can or should be reduced to formal policy. Professionalism, respectful communication, and constructive disagreement are often shaped by shared norms and expectations rather than prescriptive rules.

In addition to Council discussion during the public meeting, I intend to reserve time during the upcoming Council offsite to discuss the intent behind this Code, particularly as it relates to professionalism standards, communication, and how Councilmembers interact with staff and one another. This includes “soft skill” areas, such as tone, respect during meetings, handling disagreement, and communication outside of meetings that are critical to a healthy working environment but do not easily lend themselves to codification.

Conclusion

My goal in bringing forward this Code of Ethics is to establish a clear, consistent governance framework that promotes stability, trust, and a constructive working environment for elected officials, staff, and the public. I believe adopting this Code will

help reduce unnecessary friction, support staff retention, preserve institutional knowledge, and strengthen the City's ability to govern effectively over time.

I appreciate the Council's thoughtful consideration of this proposal and look forward to the discussion.