

CITY OF STONECREST TRAVEL POLICY AND PROCEDURES

CITY TRAVEL REGULATIONS

INTRODUCTION: The City of Stonecrest (the “City”) has adopted the following Travel Policy and Regulations (the “Policy”) to comply with the requirements set forth in federal law and in O.C.G.A §36-35-4 regarding expenses of municipal employees.

PURPOSE

The purpose of this Policy is to provide guidelines for payment of travel expenses in an efficient, cost-effective manner, and to enable travelers to successfully execute their travel requirements at the lowest reasonable costs, resulting in the best value for the City. Teleconferencing instead of travel should be considered when possible. Each department is charged with the responsibility for determining the necessity, available resources and justification for the need and the method of travel.

It is important for the Mayor and City Council members (the “Elected Officials”) and employees to understand the intent of the Policy and work with management to comply with the Policy regarding work related travel.

AUTHORITY

Per the provisions of O.C.G.A §36-35-4 and City Ordinance 2018-07-03, the Mayor and Council are authorized to adopt rules and regulations governing in- state and out-of-state travel and travel reimbursement to promote economy and efficiency in city government and to ensure that elected officials and employees are treated fairly and equitably. Appeals from any decision made under this travel policy shall be considered by the Mayor and City Council. In the event that an Elected Official appeals a decision, the Elected Official shall be recused from voting on the appeal.

COMPLIANCE AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Throughout this document the words "must" and "should" are used. When the word "must" is used, departments or individuals may not deviate from the associated portion of the Policy. The word "should" is used to convey that departments and individuals are expected to follow the associated portion of the Policy as written. Deviations from the Policy are permitted if, based upon the specific facts of the situation, a reasonable justification (in writing) can be provided for the deviation.

All departments and governing **body bodies** are required to follow the guidelines outlined in the Policy. For travelers with disabilities, the City will, in conformance with the requirements of the Americans with Disabilities Act, provide reasonable accommodations during travel on official City business.

All requests for reimbursements under this policy should be made within thirty (30) days of incurring the expense. The City will not provide reimbursement for expense requests submitted more than thirty (30) days after the traveler incurred the expense.

GENERAL PROVISIONS

The City of Stonecrest reimburses travelers for reasonable and necessary expenses actually incurred in connection with approved travel on behalf of the City and in connection with the traveler's official duties. All reimbursements for Elected Officials must be in accordance with the City's Charter and Georgia law. The City encourages travelers to take advantage of arranged travel discounts whenever possible.

A necessary expense is one for which there exists a clear business purpose and which falls within the City's expense policy limitations. A clear business purpose will include the reasons for the traveler's attendance at the event and how the expenditure benefited the City.

This Policy is intended to be a guideline for the planning and reimbursement of all City approved travel expenses. There are several key points to remember when incurring expenses on behalf of the City:

- Under no circumstances should an individual approve his/her own expense report.
- All expense reports must be submitted by the individual who incurred the expense.
- The City will not reimburse employees or Elected Officials for personal expenses.
- All expense reports and receipts are subject to disclosure under the Open Records Act.
- When submitting an expense report, the traveler is subject to O.C.G.A. § 16-10-20, which sets forth the penalties for making false statements and writings, concealing facts, and presenting fraudulent documents in matters within the jurisdiction of state or political subdivisions.
- Advances for travel expenses are not permitted.

AUTHORIZATION FOR TRAVEL

Elected Officials and employees may be reimbursed for reasonable travel-related expenses incurred while on official business for the City. In order to be eligible for reimbursement of travel expenses, Elected Officials and employees must sign the expense reimbursement form, attesting that the information presented on the form is accurate. Subject to the provisions outlined in these travel regulations, reimbursements are authorized for the following expenses:

- Meals associated with overnight travel and in certain circumstances where there is no overnight lodging;
- Lodging expenses; **associated with education and training**
- Mileage for use of a personal motor vehicle (mileage will be reimbursed at the standard business rate for the applicable year as established by ~~the Internal Revenue Service~~ <https://www.gsa.gov>)
- Transportation expenses; and
- Certain miscellaneous expenses associated with travel, such as parking and toll fees.

Except in the case of emergencies, requests for travel authorization should be made at least seven (7) days prior to date of travel.

Employees who are required to travel for their job and are eligible for travel reimbursement must receive written authorization from their department head prior to performing the travel.

Employees must utilize the travel request form for in-state and out-of-state travel. Upon return from the travel, the employee must complete an Expense Reimbursement form.

Elected Officials will notify the City Manager in writing of their request to travel. Upon return from the approved travel, the elected official must complete an expense reimbursement form. The City Manager signs all elected officials' expense reimbursement forms. Per the City Council Leave of Absence Policy Sec. 2-6. (e). No City funds shall be expended by such member or on such member's behalf for costs or expenses incurred while the member is on a leave of absence or for any period during which a leave of absence was effective.

TRAVEL TO CONFERENCES FOR CERTIFICATION PURPOSES

Department Heads, Elected Officials and Employees traveling to a conference or event for certification purposes should limit their travel to these conferences and prohibit "discretionary" travel. If travel for certification is necessary, then efforts should be made to seek a location within the State of Georgia or an adjacent state. If such travel occurs during the current COVID-19 pandemic and/or at any time when a national or state public health emergency is in effect, the traveler may be asked to sign a document acknowledging that such travel is being undertaken at the traveler's own risk and that the City bears no responsibility or liability for any illness contracted during travel to and from the conference or while the traveler is attending the conference.

REIMBURSEMENT PROCEDURES

Elected Officials and employees requesting reimbursement for travel expenses are required to submit their claim to authorized personnel on the employee expense reimbursement form within thirty (30) days of incurring the expense.

Requests for reimbursement should include the following information:

- Itemized expenses for authorized lodging, mileage, transportation, and miscellaneous expenses. The types of expenses that are authorized and the allowable limits are set forth below;
 - Explanation of any expenses that exceed the established limits;
 - Explanation of any unusual expenses;
 - Explanation of the purpose for the trip; and
 - Description of the type(s) of transportation used.

Elected Officials and employees are required to submit receipts for expenses, including:

- Meals purchased,
- Lodging,
- Airline or Railroad fares,
- Rental of motor vehicles,
- Registration Fees,
- Gasoline purchased for rental vehicles,
- Parking,
- Tollway,
- Mass transit,
- Taxi, and
- Airport vans.
- **Training Itinerary**

If a receipt is not available, Elected Officials and employees are required to include an explanation of the expense on the travel expense statement. Credit card receipts are valid provided they contain complete details of the purchase.

BAGGAGE AND LUGGAGE FEES - Baggage and luggage fees are a reimbursable expense. All travelers should consider the extra fees charged by the airlines prior to making their travel arrangements and plan accordingly. When combining personal travel and City business travel, baggage and luggage fees should be allocated accordingly and in a manner that is reasonable under the circumstances.

MEALS AND INCIDENTAL TRAVEL EXPENSES

Generally, meals are reimbursable on an actual expense basis, subject to the maximum amount **allowed below**. The maximum rate ~~for meal expense reimbursement for each day is fifty five dollars (\$55.00) shall not exceed the standard rate as listed by the GSA at <https://www.gsa.gov/travel/plan-a-trip/per diem>. On the first and last day of travel, the maximum rates for meal expense reimbursement are capped at seventy five percent (75%) of the daily rate, or forty one dollars and twenty five cents (\$41.25).~~

However, the traveler may only receive reimbursement for the actual expense of the meal excluding the cost of any alcohol purchased with the meal. **If the traveler is dining with a companion, the traveler's meal must be on a separate receipt.**

It should be noted that the City of Stonecrest Travel Regulations **do not** authorize Elected Officials and

employees to receive a reimbursement for a "lunch meeting" in which the meal and meeting are the same, or when meals are otherwise provided at the meeting.

Reimbursement for meals must be reasonable and necessary.

LODGING EXPENSES

Elected Officials and employees who travel more than fifty (50) miles from ~~their office~~ **City Hall** and/or residence, may be reimbursed for lodging expenses associated with approved overnight travel **when the travel is for education and training purposing only.**

Elected Officials and employees will be reimbursed for the actual lodging expenses, providing the expenses are reasonable.

Elected Officials and employees traveling overnight are responsible for ensuring the most reasonable lodging rates are obtained. To accomplish this, the employee should:

- Provide Finance with information about hotel accommodations,
- Utilize minimum rate accommodations,
- Avoid the "luxury" hotels and motels, and
- Obtain City/Government rates, whenever possible.
- **[Refer to gsa.gov/travel/plan-a-trip](https://gsa.gov/travel/plan-a-trip) for the most current per diem rates**

Elected Officials and Employees who stay at a hotel/motel that is holding a scheduled meeting or seminar may incur lodging expenses that exceed the rates generally considered reasonable if no alternative hotels or lodging is available or the higher cost is justified in order to avoid excessive transportation costs between a lower cost hotel/motel and the location of the meeting. If this is the case, the traveler must provide a written explanation for the higher cost lodging.

Elected Officials and employees should attempt to resolve any problems with the billing prior to checkout.

Elected Officials and employees should review hotel/motel receipts to ensure that taxes have not been applied to their lodging expenses in accordance with state tax laws and regulations. Elected Officials and employees traveling within the state for official business are exempt from paying the **county or municipal excise tax** on lodging ("hotel/motel" or "occupancy" tax). [OCGA 48- 13-51 (h) (3)], regardless of the payment method being used. Elected Officials and employees are required to submit a copy of the hotel/motel tax-exemption from when they register at a hotel/motel. This exemption does not apply to Elected Officials and Employees staying at an out-of-state hotel/motel. Elected Officials and Employees should be able to provide proper identification to document their employment as a City/local government Employee or Official.

PROHIBITED MILEAGE REIMBURSEMENT

Elected Officials and Employees are not entitled to mileage reimbursement for travel between ~~their place of residence~~ **City Hall** and their official headquarters, or personal mileage incurred while on travel status.

PARKING FEES AND TOLLS

The City may reimburse Elected Officials and Employees who incur parking fees and toll expenses while on official business for the City. Elected Officials and Employees who attend offsite meetings or training sessions may also be reimbursed for parking expenses. These expenses are reimbursable for travel in both City-owned and personal vehicles. Elected Officials and employees are expected to obtain receipts for these expenses. If it is not possible to obtain a receipt, then a written explanation should be included on the expense statement.

TRAVEL EXPENSES & REQUIRED RECEIPTS/DOCUMENTATION

All requests for reimbursement of mileage, parking, and toll charges must be documented on the travel expense statement and a receipt must accompany the documentation. Employees should claim mileage based on the most direct route from the point of departure **(which does not include a residence)** to the destination.

TRAVEL BY COMMERCIAL OR PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION

When commercial transportation is necessary to reach a destination, Elected Officials and employees may be reimbursed for the expenses incurred. Elected Officials and employees will be reimbursed for actual expenses incurred, provided the appropriate steps **are** taken to obtain the most reasonable fare or cost.

Authorized department personnel must approve travel by commercial or public transportation prior to the date of travel. When considering such a request, authorized department personnel should consider the distance to be traveled, the travel time and the cost.

COMMERCIAL AIR TRANSPORTATION

Elected Officials and employees should utilize commercial air transportation when it is more cost effective and efficient to travel by air than by vehicle. Elected Officials and employees who choose to travel by personal vehicle when air travel is more cost effective will only be reimbursed for the cost of the lowest available airfare to the specified destination. In some instances, a higher airfare may be appropriate to reduce or eliminate multiple stops and extended travel time.

Under the circumstances stated above, the City of Stonecrest may reimburse Elected Officials and employees for expenses incurred for air travel, provided these expenses were approved prior to the date of travel. Additionally, the City may reimburse Elected Officials and employees for reasonable expenses associated with selecting seats or checking bags. These expenses should be included in the total cost of the airline ticket.

Elected Officials and employees who require air travel should obtain the most reasonable available airfare to the specified destination by comparing rates.

In general, it will be the City's policy that Elected Officials and employees traveling by commercial air carrier will not be reimbursed for the portion of non-coach (first class, business class, etc.) airfare that exceeds the cost of the most reasonable, available fare on the same flight.

TRAVEL BY MASS TRANSPORTATION, TAXI OR AIRPORT VANS

Elected Officials and employees officially on travel status may be reimbursed for necessary costs of transportation by bus, taxi, or airport vans in the following situations:

- Between the individual's departure point and the common carrier's departure point;
- Between the common carrier's arrival point and the individual's lodging or meeting place; and
- Between the lodging and meeting places (if in different locations).
- Elected Officials and employees will be reimbursed for economy parking only.

It is expected that airport vans will be utilized when available and practical and when they are the most reasonably priced alternative.

TRAVEL BY PERSONAL VEHICLE

A traveler may use a privately-owned vehicle for city travel. The Elected Official or employee will be reimbursed for mileage rates based on the federal per diem rate in effect.

PROHIBITED EXPENSES

The following expenses are not reimbursable unless specifically authorized by law:

- Tipping for maid services.
- Theater.
- Entertainment.
- Alcoholic beverages.
- Bank charges for ATM withdrawals.
- Clothing or toiletry items.
- Commuting between the traveler's residence and the primary work location.

- Country club dues.
- Expenses related to vacation or personal days taken before, during or after a business trip.
- Haircuts and personal grooming.
- Laundry, cleaning, and pressing costs.
- Loss or theft of cash advance, money or airline tickets.
- Loss or theft of personal funds or property.
- Medical expenses while traveling (*Exceptions may be made to accommodate ADA compliance*).
- Mini-bar charges.
- Movies.
- No-show/cancellation fees or fees related to hotel late check-out (unless business or weather related).
- Personal reading materials (magazines, newspapers, etc.).
- Personal vehicle maintenance.
- Personal entertainment.
- Personal pet care.
- Recreational expenses.
- Saunas or massages.
- Shoeshines.
- Souvenirs or personal gifts.
- Traffic citations (moving violations), parking tickets, court fees and other fines.
- Travel accident insurance premiums.
- Valet services for parking, when self-parking options are available, unless there are valid security reasons.

DISCIPLINARY ACTIONS

Noncompliance or abuse of travel policy may result in disciplinary action, up to and including termination of employment.

Elected Officials must adhere to the Code of Ethics and other related policies and state laws governing elected officials.