City of Watertown Code of Conduct
Elected and Appointed Officials
DRAFT – 10/7/26

Section 1: The City of Watertown Code of Conduct

It is the policy of the City of Watertown to uphold, promote, and demand the highest standards of ethics from its elected and appointed officials. Accordingly, members of the Common Council, the Mayor, Commission/Board/Committee members, the Municipal Court Judge and other appointed officials shall maintain the utmost standards of personal integrity, trustworthiness, honest, and fairness in carrying out their public duties, avoid any improprieties in their roles as public servants, comply with all applicable laws, and never use their City position or authority improperly or for personal gain.

The City of Watertown and its elected/appointed officials share a commitment to ethical conduct and service to the City of Watertown. This Code has been created to ensure that all officials have clear guidelines for carrying out their responsibilities in their relationships with each other, with the City staff, with the citizens of Watertown, and with all other private and governmental entities.

Section 2: Standards of Expected Conduct

City elected and appointed officials shall create and maintain a welcoming, courteous and inclusive environment in the performance of their duties. They shall not engage in abusive, violent, bullying, harassing, discriminatory, or other threatening or intimidating behaviors or language.

- Bullying is repeated, unwanted, aggressive physical or verbal behavior that hurts another individual, physically, mentally, or emotionally.
- Harassment is repeated or egregious unwelcome, intimidating, hostile or offensive actions, words, jokes or comments based on any protected class status or statuses.
- Discrimination is unfair treatment of an individual or members of a group based on their protected class status or statuses.

Section 3: Elected/Appointed Official Conduct with One Another

The Common Council and Mayor (hereinafter the "Council") have a responsibility to set the policies for the City. Policy setting is a function of the legislative body (elected Alderpersons and Mayor), while the executive body (Mayor) assures policies, as set by the Council, are carried out with staff assistance. In doing so, certain types of conduct foster positive debate, while other types do not. The Council is responsible for treating one another as they wish to be treated. The same expectation is in place for Commission/Board/Committee Members.

The Council, as well as Commissions/Boards/Committees, is composed of individuals with a wide variety of backgrounds, personalities, values, opinions, and goals. Despite this diversity, all choose to serve in public office and, therefore, have the obligation to preserve and protect the well-being

of the community and its citizens. In all cases, this common goal should be acknowledged, and all officials must recognize that certain behavior is counterproductive, while other behavior will lead to success.

A. Use of Formal Titles. All officials shall try to refer to one another formally during public meetings as Mayor, Council President, Alderperson, Commission/Board/Committee Member, followed by the individual's last name.
B. Use 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 free democracy in action. Every official has the right to an individual opinion, which should be respected by the other officials. Elected/appointed officials shall not be hostile, degrading, or defamatory when debating a contentious issue. Officials should assume the other members of the Council and/or Commission/Board/Committee have the appropriate motives and interest of the public in mind and should not criticize differing opinions because they believe them to be lacking in judgment or improperly motivated. However, this does not allow officials to make belligerent, impertinent, slanderous, threatening, abusive, or personally disparaging comments in public meetings or during individual encounters. Shouting or physical actions that could be construed as threatening or demeaning will not be accepted. If an elected/appointed official is personally offended by the remarks of another official, the offended member should make a note of the actual words used and call for a "point of personal privilege" that challenges the other official to justify or apologize for the language used.
C. Honor the Role of the Chair in Maintaining Order. It is the responsibility of the Mayor, as Chair of the Council, to keep the comments of Council members on track during Council meetings. The same applies to the Chairperson during Commission/Board/Committee meetings. Elected/appointed officials should honor efforts by the Mayor and/or Chairperson to focus discussion on current agenda items. If there is disagreement about the agenda or the Mayor/Chairperson's actions, those objections should be voiced politely and with reason, following commonly recognized parliamentary procedure.

Section 4: Elected/Appointed Official Conduct with City Staff

Governance of the City relies on the cooperative efforts of elected/appointed officials who set policy and the City staff who implement and administer the Council's and Commissions/Boards/Committees' policies. Therefore, every effort should be made to be cooperative and show mutual respect for the contributions made by each other for the good of the community.

A. Treat all Staff as Professionals. Elected/appointed officials should treat all staff as professionals. Clear, honest communication that respects the abilities, experience, and dignity of each individual is expected. Poor behavior toward staff is not acceptable.

Elected/appointed officials should refer to staff by their title followed by the individual's last name in public meetings when first introduced.

B. Never Publicly Demean or Personally Attack an Individual Employee. Elected/appointed officials shall never demean or personally attack an employee regarding the employee's job performance in public. All employee performance issues shall be forwarded to the employee's supervisor or the City Attorney through private correspondence or conversation.

C. Do not Supersede Administrative Authority. Unless otherwise provided in this Code, neither the Council nor any Commission/Board/Committee shall attempt to supersede the administration's powers and duties. Neither the Council nor any member thereof shall give orders to any subordinate of the Department Heads, either publicly or privately. The same applies for Commissions/Boards/Committees and their members. Elected/appointed officials shall not attempt to unethically influence or coerce City staff concerning either their actions or recommendations to the governing body about personnel, purchasing, awarding contracts, selection of consultants, processing of development applications, or the granting of City licenses and permits. Nothing in this section shall be construed, however, as prohibiting the Council or its Commissions/Boards/Committees while in open session from fully and freely discussing with or suggesting to the Department Heads anything pertaining to City affairs or the interests of the City.

D. Do not Solicit Political Support from Staff. Elected/appointed officials should not solicit any type of political support (financial contributions, display of posters or lawn signs, name on support list, collection of petition signatures, collection of nomination signatures, etc.) from City staff. City staff may, as private citizens within their constitutional rights, support political candidates, but all such activities must be done away from the workplace. Photographs of uniformed City employees shall not be used in political ads.

Section 5: Elected/Appointed Official Conduct Towards 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 evident on the part of individual Council or Commission/Board/Committee members toward an individual participating in a public forum. Every effort should be made to be fair and impartial in listening to public testimony. Elected/appointed officials are expected to demonstrate, both publicly and privately, their honesty and integrity, and to be an example of appropriate and ethical conduct. All elected/appointed officials should convey to the public their respect and appreciation for the public's participation, input, and opinions.

A. Be Welcoming to Speakers and Treat Them with Care and Respect. For many citizens, speaking in front of Council or a Commission/Board/Committee is a new and difficult experience. Under such circumstances, many are nervous. Elected/appointed officials are

expected to treat citizens with care and respect during public hearings. Officials should commit full attention to the speakers or any materials relevant to the topic at hand. Comments and non-verbal expressions should be appropriate, respectful, and professional.

B. Be Fair and Equitable in Allocating Public Hearing Time to Individual Speakers. The Mayor or Chairperson will determine and announce time limits on speakers at the start of the public hearing process if noticed on an agenda. For Council meetings, each speaker will generally be allocated three minutes. If many speakers are anticipated, the Mayor may shorten the time limit and/or ask speakers to limit themselves to new information and points of view not already covered by previous speakers.

C. Ask for Clarification but Avoid Debate and Argument with the Public. Only the Mayor or Chairperson, not other Council/Commission/Board/Committee members, should interrupt a speaker during a presentation. However, other officials may ask the Mayor or Chairperson for a point of order if the speaker is off topic or exhibiting behavior or language the official finds disturbing. Questions directed by officials to members of the public testifying should seek to clarify or expand information, not to criticize or debate.

Outside Public Meetings

A. Make No Promise on Behalf of the City or Council in Unofficial Settings. Elected/appointed officials will frequently be asked to explain an action or to give their opinion about an issue as they meet and talk with constituents in the community. It is appropriate to give a brief overview of City policy and to refer to City staff for further information. Overt or implicit promises of specific Council and/or Commission/Board/Committee action or promises that City staff will take some specific actions shall be avoided. Elected/appointed officials must ensure that in expressing their own opinions they do not mislead any listener into believing that their individual opinion is that of the entire Council or Commission/Board/Committee, unless the respective body has taken a vote on that issue and the official's is the same as the decision made by said body. Likewise, no elected/appointed official should state in writing their personal position in a way that implies it is the position of the entire City Council or Commission/Board/Committee. An elected/appointed official has the right to state a personal opinion and has the right to indicate that he/she is stating such as a member of the Council or Commission/Board/Committee, but must always clarify that he/she is not speaking on behalf of the City, the Council, or a Commission/Board/Committee, unless explicitly authorized to do so by the body.

Section 6: Elected/Appointed Official Conduct with Public Agencies

A. Be Clear About Representing the City or Personal Interests. If an elected/appointed official appears before another governmental agency or organization to give a statement on an issue, the official must clearly state whether his or her statement reflects personal opinion or is the official stance of the City. Elected/appointed officials must inform the Council or

Commission/Board/Committee of their involvement in an outside organization if that organization is or may become involved in any issue within the City's jurisdiction. If an individual elected/appointed official publicly represents or speaks on behalf of another organization whose position differs from the City's official position on any issue, the official must clearly communicate the organization upon whose behalf they are speaking and must withdraw from voting as a Council or Commission/Board/Committee member upon any action that has bearing upon the conflicting issue.

B. Representation of the City on Intergovernmental Commissions and Other Outside Entities. Elected/appointed officials serving on committees or boards as a City representative for outside entities or agencies shall properly communicate with other Council or Commission/Board/Committee members on issues pertinent to the City.

Section 7: Elected Official Conduct with Board and Commissions

A. Limit Contact with Board and Commission Members to Questions of Clarification. Council members shall not contact a Board or Commission member to lobby on behalf of an individual, business, or developer for personal gain. Council members may contact Board or Commission members in order to clarify a position taken by the Board or Commission or a member thereof. Council members may respond to inquiries from Board and Commission members. Communications should be for information only.

B. Attendance at Board or Commission Meetings. Council members may attend any Commission/Board/Committee meeting, which are always open to any member of the public. However, they should be sensitive to the way their participation is viewed, especially if it is on behalf of an individual, business, or developer, which could be perceived as unfairly affecting the process. Council members should provide prior notice of attendance at a Commission/Board/Committee meeting to the City Clerk, who can prepare a Batke notice when appropriate.

C. Be Respectful of Diverse Opinions. The primary role of Boards and Commissions is to represent many points of view in the community and to provide the Council with advice based on a full spectrum of concerns and perspectives. Council members must be fair and respectful to all citizens serving on Boards and Commissions.

Section 8: Elected/Appointed Official Conduct with the Media

A. Expression of Positions on Issues. When communicating with the media, elected/appointed officials should clearly differentiate between personal opinions and the official position of the City. Each elected/appointed official represents one vote of many and until a vote on any issue is taken, Council and Commission/Board/Committee members' positions are merely their own.

B. Discussion Regarding City Staff. Elected/appointed officials should not discuss personnel issues or other matters regarding individual City staff in the media. Any issues pertaining

to City staff should only be addressed directly to the Department Head, the Human Resources Department, the Mayor, or City Attorney.

C. Discussions Regarding Closed Session Matters. Elected/appointed officials should hold in strict confidence all information concerning matters dealt with in closed session. Closed sessions may involve confidential or privileged information on litigation, records that cannot be disseminated under the Public Records Law, information significant to the competitive or bargaining position of the City, or privacy and reputation interests of individuals. Elected/appointed officials shall not, either directly or indirectly, release, make public, or in any way divulge any such information, or any aspect of the closed session deliberations to anyone, unless expressly authorized by Council or required by law to do so, or unless such information has already been made public or the reasons for holding closed session no longer apply.

D. Social Media Guidelines for Officials. Elected and appointed officials should use social media in a positive, respectful, and constructive manner when discussing City business, City officials or employees, and members of the community. Public officials should recognize that their comments and posts can reflect upon the City and should strive to promote civility, respect, and productive dialogue, even when there are differences of opinion.

E. Social Media Conduct for Officials. Elected and appointed officials should avoid personal attacks, disrespectful or inflammatory comments, and statements intended to embarrass, threaten, or discredit another individual on social media. Social media should be used as an opportunity to share information, encourage community engagement, and strengthen public trust in local government.

Section 9: Enforcement of this Code of Conduct

The investigatory body for violations of this Code of Conduct is the City of Watertown Ethics Board. Procedures regarding filing complaints and the complaint procedure are set forth in Section 65-7 of the Watertown Municipal Code.

A. False or Frivolous Complaints. A person who knowingly makes a false, misleading, or unsubstantiated statement in a complaint may be subject to criminal prosecution for perjury and possible civil liability. If, after reviewing a complaint, it is determined that a sworn complaint is groundless and appears to have been filed in bad faith or for the purpose of harassment, or that intentionally false or malicious information has been provided under penalty of perjury, a City official who seeks to take civil action regarding any such complaint shall do so at his or her expense.

B. Penalties and Sanctions Policy. It is the intent of the Council to educate and, when necessary, discipline elected/appointed members who violate this Code. Discipline shall be progressive, from the least punitive to the most punitive measures, unless the Council believes that the progressive discipline does not provide the appropriate sanction because of the gravity of the offense, or because the Council does not believe the sanction would

deter future misconduct. In all instances, the totality of the circumstances shall be taken into consideration in resolving the matter, including the intent of the one accused of wrongdoing.

a. Possible Penalties and Sanctions. Possible sanctions may include, but are not limited to:
    i. An informal censure by the Council, which would only be made as part of a motion in a public meeting.
    ii. A formal censure by the Council, which would be made by motion in a public meeting and then published in the City newspaper.
    iii. Imposition of a nonrefundable forfeiture of not less than $100 nor more than $1000, as determined by the Common Council.
    iv. Any other sanction available by law.

   After receiving a recommendation from the Ethics Board pursuant to Section 65-7(J) of the Watertown Municipal Code, the Common Council may impose penalties and sanctions as set forth in Section 65-9 of the Watertown Municipal Code and any other penalty permitted under law. The imposition of any of these penalties or sanctions will require an affirmative vote of 3/4 of the Council, other than an informal or formal censure which shall only require a majority vote of the Council. A violation of the penalties imposed by Council may constitute grounds for removal from office under Wisconsin Statute §17.12(1)(a).

b. Notice. The municipal clerk shall give notice of the Council's decision to the person charged.