

RESOLUTION 2013-03

City of Center Point Council Relations Policy

Last update: January 8, 2013

The City Council for the City of Center Point is dedicated to ethical, efficient and orderly government wherein opportunities must be created to allow citizens to have a say in their representative government. This policy addresses the responsibilities the Council has to provide those openings. The City of Center Point Council Relations Policy is designed to make public Meetings and the process of governance run more smoothly.

The integrity of the City of Center Point is built on the interaction between elected officials, City employees, and the citizens. The Council Relations Policy is intended to maintain a high level of integrity by providing a protocol for how Council members treat one another, City staff, constituents and others they come into contact with in representing the City of Center Point. The Council Relations Policy reflects the intentions of the Center Point City Council in defining the behaviors, manners, and courtesies that are suitable for various occasions.

The contents of the Council Relations Policy include:

- Overview of Roles and Responsibilities
- Policies and Protocol Related to Conduct
- Council Relations with One Another
- Council Relations with City Staff
- Council Relations with Boards and Commissions
- Council Relations with the Citizens
- Council Relations with the Media
- Sanctions

The constant and consistent theme through all of the conduct guidelines is “respect.” Council members experience huge workloads and tremendous stress in making decisions that could impact thousands of lives. Despite these pressures, elected officials are called upon to exhibit appropriate behavior at all times. Demonstrating respect for each individual through words and actions is the compass that can help guide Council members to do the right thing in even the most difficult situations.

Overview of Roles and Responsibilities

Mayor’s Responsibilities

- Acts as the official head of the City for all ceremonial purposes
- Chairs Council meetings
- Recognizes comments from citizens at public meetings
- Calls for special meetings
- Makes judgment calls on proclamations, special presentations, etc.
- Signs documents on behalf of the City
- Works with City Administrator to prepare Council agenda

Mayor Pro Tem's Responsibilities

- Serves at the pleasure of the Mayor
- Performs the duties of Mayor if the Mayor is absent or unable to perform mayoral duties for any reason

Council Members' Responsibilities

- All members of the City Council, including those serving as Mayor Pro Tem, have equal votes. No Council member has more power than any other Council member, and all should be treated with equal respect.

All Council members should:

- Fully participate in City Council meetings and other public forums while demonstrating respect, kindness, consideration, and courtesy to others
- Ask to be excused by the Mayor prior to a meeting if unable to attend the full meeting
- Prepare in advance of Council meetings and be familiar with issues on the agenda
- Represent the City at ceremonial functions at the request of the Mayor
- Be respectful of other people's time. Stay focused and act efficiently during public meetings.
- Serve as a model of leadership and civility to the community
- Inspire public confidence in Center Point government
- Provide contact information to the City Administrator's Office in case an emergency or urgent situation arises while a Council member is out of town
- Demonstrate honesty and integrity in every action and statement
- Participate in scheduled activities to increase team effectiveness and review Council procedures, such as this Council Relations Policy

Meeting Chair's Responsibilities

- The Mayor chairs official meetings of the City Council, unless the Mayor Pro Tem or another Council member is designated as Chair of a specific meeting
- Maintains order, decorum, and the fair and equitable treatment of all speakers
- Keeps discussion and questions focused on the specific agenda item under consideration

Policies and Protocol Related to Conduct

Reflecting Council Opinions

Council members should remember they speak only for themselves and not other Council members.

Ceremonial Events

Requests for a City representative at ceremonial events will be handled by City staff. The Mayor will serve as the designated City representative. If the Mayor is unavailable, then City staff will determine if event organizers would like another representative from the Council. If yes, then the Mayor Pro-Tem will serve as a substitute. Invitations received at City Hall are presumed to be for unofficial, personal consideration.

Cell Phone Guidelines

Cell phones are an important tool and common place in our society today. However, we need to be cognizant that cell phones can disrupt a meeting if not used properly. During Council meetings your cell phone should be set to vibrate or turned off. If you must take an emergency call please remove yourself from the meeting as quickly as possible. This should be the same procedure for all official meetings.

E-Mail Guidelines

E-mail has become a familiar form of communication between the public and its elected officials. It is important to remember that e-mails held by elected officials regarding their position are a form of public record and must be maintained as per the Open Records Act. When a Council member receives a personalized e-mail, the Council member should acknowledge the receipt of the e-mail and concern voiced through a reply e-mail. The response should be polite and careful in regard to any personal opinions expressed on the issue. If a reply is sent, the City Administrator and/or City Clerk should be copied if there is any further action and/or official response needed in regard to the e-mail.

Correspondence Signatures

Council members do not need to acknowledge the receipt of correspondence, or copies of correspondence, during Council meetings. City staff will prepare official letters in response to public inquiries and concerns. These letters will carry the signature of the Mayor unless the Mayor requests that they be signed by another Council member or City staff. If correspondence is addressed only to one Council member that Council member should check with staff on the best way to respond to the sender.

Public Hearing Protocol

The applicant or appellant shall have the right to speak first. The Chair will determine the length of time allowed for this presentation. Speakers representing either pro or con points of view will be allowed to follow. The Chair will determine how much time will be allowed for each speaker, with 3 to 5 minutes the standard time granted. The applicant or appellant may be allowed to make closing comments. The Chair has the responsibility to run an efficient public meeting and has the discretion to modify the public hearing process in order to make the meeting run smoothly.

Council members will not express opinions during the public hearing portion of the meeting except to ask pertinent questions of the speaker and staff. "I think" and "I feel" comments by

Council members are not appropriate until after the close of the public hearing. Council members should refrain from arguing or debating with the public during a public hearing and shall always show respect for different points of view.

Main motions may be followed by amendments, followed by substitute motions. Any Council member can call for a point of order. Only Council members who voted on the prevailing side may make motions to reconsider.

Agenda Development Participation

Any Council member can request an item be placed on the agenda for future discussion. The request should be made to the City Administrator generally before noon on the Thursday before the meeting. The City Administrator will discuss the item with the Council member and the Mayor to determine the appropriate placement of the item on the agenda.

Council Relations with One Another

Councils are composed of individuals with a wide variety of backgrounds, personalities, values, opinions, and goals. Despite this diversity, all 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 as Council members may “agree to disagree” on contentious issues.

IN PUBLIC MEETINGS

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 a free democracy in action. This does not allow, however, Council members to make belligerent, personal, impertinent, slanderous, threatening, abusive, or disparaging comments. No shouting or physical actions that could be construed as threatening will be tolerated.

Honor the role of the Chair in maintaining order

It is the responsibility of the Chair to keep the comments of Council members on track during public meetings. Council members should honor efforts by the Chair to focus discussion on current agenda items. If there is disagreement about the agenda or the Chair’s actions, those objections should be voiced politely and with reason, following procedures outlined in parliamentary procedure.

Avoid personal comments that could offend other Council members

If a Council member is personally offended by the remarks of another Council member, the offended Council member should make notes of the actual words used and call for a “point of personal privilege” that challenges the other Council member to justify or apologize for the language used. The Chair will maintain control of this discussion.

Demonstrate effective problem-solving approaches

Council members have a public stage to show how individuals with disparate points of view can find common ground and seek a compromise that benefits the community as a whole.

IN PRIVATE ENCOUNTERS

Continue respectful behavior in private

The same level of respect and consideration of differing points of view deemed appropriate for public discussions should be maintained in private conversations.

Be aware of the insecurity of written notes, voicemail messages, and e-mail

Technology allows words written or said without much forethought to be distributed wide and far. Council members should take into consideration that anything sent out via fax, voicemail, e-mails, or correspondence could be distributed to the media and citizens. Written notes, voicemail messages and e-mail should be treated as potentially “public” communication.

Even private conversations can have a public presence

Elected officials are always on display – their actions, mannerisms, and language are monitored by people around them that they may not know. Lunch table conversations will be eavesdropped upon, parking lot debates will be watched, and casual comments between individuals before and after public meetings noted.

Council Relations with City Staff

Governance of a City relies on the cooperative efforts of elected officials, who set policy, and City staff who implements and administers the Council’s policies. Cooperation and mutual respect are essential from each individual for the good of the community.

Treat all staff as professionals

Clear, honest communication that respects the abilities, experience, and dignity of each individual is expected. Poor behavior towards staff is not acceptable.

Limit contact to specific City staff

Questions of City staff and/or requests for additional background information should be directed only to the City Administrator, City Attorney, City Clerk or Department Directors. The City Administrator’s Office should be copied on any request, except those to the City Attorney.

Requests for follow-up or directions to staff should be made only through the City Administrator or the City Attorney when appropriate. When in doubt about what staff contact is appropriate, Council members should ask the City Administrator for assistance. Materials supplied to a Council member in response to a request will be made available to all members of the Council so that all have equal access to information.

The Council should not entertain or respond to any staff complaints. Any discussions of this nature should be referred directly to the City Administrator. The Council should never speak critically to a member of City staff about other City staff, other Council members, and/or Council decisions.

Do not disrupt City staff from their jobs

Council members should not disrupt City staff while they are in meetings, on the phone, or engrossed in performing their job functions in order to have their individual needs met.

Never publicly criticize an individual employee

Council should never express concerns about the performance of a City employee in public, to the employee directly, or to the employee's manager. Comments about staff performance should only be made to the City Administrator through private correspondence or conversation.

Do not get involved in administrative functions

Council members must not attempt to influence City staff on the making of appointments, awarding of contracts, selecting of consultants, or granting of City licenses and permits. The Center Point Code of Ordinances also addresses the role of the City Council in regard to administrative functions.

Check with City staff on correspondence before taking action

Before sending correspondence, Council members should check with City staff to see if an official City response has already been sent or is in progress.

Be selective and careful attending meetings with City staff unless requested by staff

Even if the Council member does not say anything, the Council member's presence implies support, shows partiality, intimidates staff, and hampers staff's ability to do their job objectively. This policy does not apply to social functions, such as conferences, etc.

Do not solicit political support from staff

Council members should not solicit any type of political support (financial contributions, display of posters or lawn signs, name on support list, etc.) from City staff. City staff may, as private citizens with constitutional rights, support political candidates but all such activities must be done away from the workplace.

Council Relations with Citizens

IN PUBLIC MEETINGS

The Center Point City Council welcomes requests, suggestions, and viewpoints of residents of the City and considers the responsible presentation of these viewpoints as vital to effective municipal government. Council members also recognize their responsibility for proper governance and the need to conduct its business in an orderly and effective manner. The Council therefore establishes the following procedures to receive citizen input during public meetings.

1. Amount of time allocated

The Mayor will be responsible for recognizing any speakers, maintaining proper order, and adhering to any time limit set. Ordinarily, each speaker shall be afforded three minutes in which to make their presentation to the Council. Groups of citizens who wish to be heard on the same topic should designate a spokesperson when requested to do so by the Mayor.

2. Protocol for addressing the City Council

There shall be a time designated for the City Council to hear from the public at the beginning of City Council meetings held at City Hall. The Mayor has the right to limit the number of speakers, as well as the amount of presentation time allocated to each

speaker. If there are a large number of speakers wanting to address an issue, the Mayor may request or designate a spokesperson for groups wanting to speak with the Council.

If an item on the Council agenda for that meeting provides for a public hearing, the person wishing to make comments on that item shall speak at the time of the public hearing.

Requests to be heard regarding an item(s) on the regular agenda that does not have a public hearing should be made to the City Clerk prior to the start of the meeting. A “request to speak” form, provided by the City, requesting to be heard regarding a specific agenda item(s) shall contain the citizen’s name, address, telephone number, and subject agenda item(s) number, which the speaker wishes to address. The form can be picked up at City Hall or in the Council Chambers, and must be turned in to the City Clerk prior to the start of the council meeting.

Speakers shall address the Council from the podium to insure that the audience can hear the speaker and a record of all comments may be made. If a speaker asks a question during the time designated for public comment under this policy, it will be not be answered at this time but may be answered during the agenda item. Any comment or discussion by any Council member about the subject of the inquiry shall only be made at the time the subject is scheduled for consideration on the Council agenda.

3. Protocol for dealing with requests made by citizens

Citizens with specific requests should first discuss them with the City Administrator or City staff. The Council will consider requests that remain unresolved only after being addressed through proper administration channels. Citizens who have not attempted to resolve situations at lower levels will be directed to the City Administrator.

4. Protocol regarding complaints against City personnel

Negative comments regarding City personnel by name or title may not be made in open session. Specific complaints regarding municipal employees may be taken up with the employee’s supervisor or City Administrator.

Disruption of meetings by word or actions of any person may result in removal from the meeting by law enforcement officials.

IN UNOFFICIAL SETTINGS

Make no promises on behalf of the Council

Council members will frequently be asked to explain a Council action or 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. It is inappropriate to overtly or implicitly promise Council action, or to promise City staff will do something specific (fix a pothole, plant new flowers in the median, etc.).

Make no personal comments about other Council members

It is acceptable to publicly disagree about an issue, but it is unacceptable to make derogatory comments about other Council members, their opinions and actions.

Remember that Center Point is a small town

Council members are constantly being observed by the community every day that they serve in office. Their behaviors and comments serve as models for proper behavior in the City of Center Point. Honesty and respect for the dignity of each individual should be reflected in every word and action taken by Council members, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It is a serious and continuous responsibility.

Council Relations with Other Public Agencies

Be clear about representing the City or personal interests

If a Council member appears before another governmental agency or organization to give a statement on an issue, the Council member must clearly state: 1) if his or her statement reflects personal opinion or is the official stance of the City; 2) whether this is the majority or minority opinion of the Council.

If the Council member is representing the City, the Council member must support and advocate the official City position on an issue, not a personal viewpoint.

If the Council member is representing another organization whose position is different from the City, the Council member should withdraw from voting on the issue if it significantly impacts or is detrimental to the City's interest. Council members should be clear about which organizations they represent and inform the Mayor and Council of their involvement.

Correspondence also should be equally clear about representation

City letterhead may be used when the Council member is representing the City and the City's official position. A copy of official correspondence should be given to the City Clerk to be filed as part of the permanent public record.

City letterhead will not be used for correspondence of Council members representing a personal point of view, or a dissenting point of view from an official Council position.

Council Relations with Boards and Commissions

The City has established several boards and commissions as a means of gathering more community input. Citizens who serve on boards and commissions become more involved in government and serve as advisors to the City Council. They are a valuable resource to the City's leadership and should be treated with appreciation and respect.

If attending a board or commission meeting, be careful to only express personal opinions

Council members may attend any board or commission meeting, which are always open to any member of the public. However, they should be sensitive to the way their participation – especially if it is on behalf of an individual, business or developer – could be viewed as unfairly affecting the process. Any public comments by a Council member at a board or commission meeting should be clearly made as individual opinion and not a representation of the feelings of the entire City Council.

Limit contact with board and commission members to questions of clarification

It is inappropriate for a Council member to contact a board or commission member to lobby on behalf of an individual, business, or developer. It is acceptable for Council members to contact board or commission members in order to clarify a position taken by the board or commission.

Remember that boards and commissions serve the community, not individual Council members

The City Council appoints individuals to serve on boards and commissions, and it is the responsibility of boards and commissions to follow policy established by the Council. But board and commission members do not report to individual Council members, nor should Council members feel they have the power or right to threaten board and commission members with removal if they disagree about an issue. Appointment and re-appointment to a board or commission should be based on such criteria as expertise, attendance records, ability to work with staff and the public, and commitment to fulfilling official duties. A board or commission appointment should not be used as a political “reward.”

Be respectful of diverse opinions

A 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 may have a closer working relationship with some individuals serving on boards and commissions, but must be fair and respectful of all citizens serving on boards and commissions.

Keep political support away from public forums

Board and commission members may offer political support to a Council member, but not in a public forum while conducting official duties. Conversely, Council members may support board and commission members who are running for office, but not in an official forum in their capacity as a Council member.

Inappropriate behavior can lead to removal

Inappropriate behavior by a board or commission member should be noted to the Mayor, and the Mayor should counsel the offending member. If inappropriate behavior continues, the Mayor should bring the situation to the attention of the Council and the individual is subject to removal from the board or commission.

Council Relations with the Media

The media (newspapers, radio, television, etc.) frequently contacts Council members for information and quotes.

The best advice for dealing with the media is to never go “off the record”

Most members of the media represent the highest levels of journalistic integrity and ethics, and can be trusted to keep their word. But one bad experience can be catastrophic. Words that are not said cannot be quoted. Council members should not feel obligated to speak to the media. “No comment” can be an acceptable response.

The City Administrator is the official spokesperson for the representative on City positions

The City Administrator is the designated representative to present and speak on the official City position. If the media contacts an individual Council member, the Council member should be clear about whether their comments represent the official City position or a personal viewpoint. Council members are encouraged to refer media contacts to the Public Information Officer.

All City press releases should go through the Public Information Officer’s Office or City Administrator for distribution

The City Administrator maintains up-to-date contact information for all local media outlets that cover Center Point. In order to insure that all media outlets are treated fairly, news releases should be submitted to the PIO’s Office for review and distribution coordination. Some items may be best handled as a "media advisory" or a feature story suggestion. Other items may be best handled as correspondence to a particular group.

Choose words carefully and cautiously

Comments taken out of context can cause problems. Be especially cautious about humor, sardonic asides, sarcasm, or word play. It is never appropriate to use personal slurs or swear words when talking with the media.

Remember the media lives by a tight deadline

Because of the daily demands of the media business, deadlines are one of the most important factors for members of the media in determining what stories will be run. Because of these deadlines, it is essential for Council members to quickly reply to members of the media when they call for information on a story.

Sanctions

Public Disruption

Members of the public who do not follow proper conduct after a warning in a public hearing may be barred from further testimony at that meeting or removed from the Council Chambers.

Inappropriate Staff Behavior

Council members should refer to the City Administrator any City staff that does not follow proper conduct in their dealings with Council members, other City staff, or the public. These employees may be disciplined in accordance with standard City procedures for such actions. Please refer to the section on Council Relations with City Staff for more details on interaction with City staff.

Council Members Behavior and Conduct

City Council members who intentionally and repeatedly do not follow proper conduct may be reprimanded or formally censured by the Council, lose seniority or committee assignments (both within the City of Center Point or with inter-government agencies). Serious infractions of the Council Relations Policy could lead to other sanctions as deemed appropriate by Council.

Council members should point out the offending Councilmember infractions of the Council Relations Policy. If the offenses continue, the matter should be referred to the Mayor, City Administrator, and/or City Attorney in private. It is the responsibility of the City Administrator and/or City Attorney to speak with the offending Council member in private about the offenses.

It is the responsibility of the City Administrator and/or City Attorney to initiate action and inform all other Council members of the repeated infractions and initiate action if a Council member’s behavior may warrant sanction.

NOW THEREFORE, BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF CENTER POINT to approve the Council Relations Policy.

M/S Stanton/Mann

Aye – Mann, Stanton, Dillon, Robinson, Brunner

Nay – None

Abstentions – None

Absent – None

Passed and approved this 8th day of January, 2013

Mona J. Barz, Mayor

Attest:

Melissa J Atkinson, City Clerk/Treasurer