

Chairperson Teager called the meeting to order at 6:00 P.M.

**ROLL CALL:**

Members Present - Michael Teager, Chairperson  
Teresa Funk, Vice-Chairperson  
Lawrence Kavanaugh, Jr.  
Kayla Leonard  
Paula Eade Newcomb, Deputy Town Attorney

Absent - Anna Garvey

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**MINUTES TO BE APPROVED**

Motion by Chairperson Teager, seconded by Mr. Kavanaugh, to approve Minutes of the July 10, 2024, board meeting.

Ayes: All

Noes: None

Motion Carried

**PUBLIC COMMENTS**

James Randolph, 68 West Bihrwood Drive, made the following comments and questions:

- Consider removing "Public" from the definitions
  - The definition is not applicable across the code when the word public is used and provided the following examples: public confidence, public administration, and public service
  - The definition is very broad
- Consider adding a definition of Sub-Contractors and Volunteers
- Referred to the Standards of Conduct and revisited his concerns over campaign contributions
  - Is there a limit that becomes unethical and referred to campaign donations that were received by some Town Board members from the spouse of the town's Insurance Broker noting Tompkins Insurance Agency receives a commission for securing insurance for the town
  - Should access to the Ethics Code be provided to the public annually – Chairperson Teager stated the Ethics Code is always available on the town's website, there is a link on the Ethics Code webpage.
- Concerning whistleblowers, there is a process for employees to follow but there is not much reference to a process that a volunteer or member of the public should follow and suggested the Ethics Board may want to address this
- What is the resolution after the Ethics Board renders an opinion, for example, against an employee or Town Board member noting there could be a conflict of interest in some situations
- Does the Ethics Board receive the resolution back – Chairperson Teager stated many complaints have been filed during his time on the Ethics Board, but none have resulted in ramifications, and some were determined to be unfounded. In the event any complaint is filed against a Town Board member, Chairperson Teager believes that member would recuse themselves from the situation. Ms. Eade-Newcomb stated the Town Board would take the final position and is not certain the Town Board will report back to the Ethics Board, but their decision would be public record unless it is done in executive session with an employee and agreed that any complaint involving a Town Board member, that member would recuse themselves on any vote. Chairperson Teager stated the Ethics Board provides advisory opinions but does not have the authority to direct the Town Board to follow them. Mr. Randolph stated he wondered if it would be beneficial for the Ethics Board to have this information. Ms. Funk stated she

understands Mr. Randolph's intention that the Ethics Board would learn how the advisory opinions are utilized by the Town Board.

## **COMMUNICATIONS**

### Ethics Code Revisions

Chairperson Teager questioned if sub-contractors should be addressed in the Ethics Code or are they covered under an agreement the vendor has with the town. Ms. Eade Newcomb stated town contracts usually require the contractor to be responsible and held liable for any subcontractors. A definition for independent contractors is in the code and does not believe it is necessary to add subcontractors. Chairperson Teager stated the definition of independent contractors was added by the Ethics Board because there are references to both contractors and vendors and the disclosure form was revised to make it applicable to both. Ms. Eade Newcomb stated the Ethics Board could add verbiage to the disclosure form requiring the contractor to have their subcontractors complete the same form. Mr. Kavanaugh supported this addition. Chairperson Teager stated he will provide the revised form to Ms. Eade Newcomb.

Regarding campaign contributions, Chairperson Teager referred to Part E under Standards of Conduct and stated the Ethics Board is not an election governing body. Ms. Eade Newcomb stated there are rules that govern elections and advised the Ethics Board against involving themselves. Mr. Kavanaugh agreed and stated there are very strict disclosure requirements. Further, certain industries have very strict limitations, restrictions, and reporting within their organizations and noted this is a recent development. Ms. Funk stated this could be considered unfair. Chairperson Teager agreed and stated campaign contributions are governed under their own laws, and it is not appropriate to include them in the code. Ms. Eade Newcomb stated in her opinion, Mr. Randolph's concerns are more of a conflict-of-interest argument. Ms. Funk questioned the need to add verbiage in the code that the statement does not include campaign donations. Ms. Eade Newcomb stated it is not necessary and commented that political donations are made to a fund not an individual. Ms. Martin questioned if there is any benefit to a contractor or vendor under a contract with the town disclosing campaign contributions. Ms. Eade Newcomb stated the question could be added to the disclosure form. Chairperson Teager stated he recalls previous discussions but was uncertain what the outcome was. Mr. Kavanaugh stated the question was not added to the form and in his opinion campaign donations are covered by election laws. Ms. Martin suggested the disclosure of this information would allow for better transparency. Chairperson Teager stated questions such as was a campaign contribution made, to whom, and in what amount could be added to the form. Ms. Eade Newcomb stated an ethics complaint would be if a Town Board member voted in favor without disclosure or recusal. Ms. Martin questioned if it would be worthwhile to disclose receipt of a campaign donation from a party being awarded a contract with the town. Mr. Kavanaugh questioned if an elected official received a donation from someone, is there cause for recusal on a vote that might involve that person. Ms. Eade Newcomb stated there must be disclosure. Ms. Funk stated disclosure would be for someone to review the campaign funds disclosure. Ms. Eade Newcomb stated in her opinion, the Town Board member should make a disclosure before the board members. Ms. Funk questioned if this should be added to the code. Ms. Leonard stated the Ethics Board is not tasked with deciding conflicts and if a complaint is made against an elected official for not disclosing a contribution the Ethics Board would review the complaint. It is not for the Ethics Board to tell an individual if they have a conflict before a vote and prefers that the Ethics Board not involve themselves in campaign finance and election law noting political donations wade into free speech. If Mr. Randolph lodges a complaint, then the Ethics Board could review it.

Chairperson Teager referred to the highlighted addition in Section 13-7 Part B and stated the Ethics Board has

had discussions and concluded advisory opinions are prospective, or something that will happen, and complaints are events that have happened. Issuing an advisory opinion on something that has happened is a way to get a public opinion without an investigation. Ms. Funk questioned if providing an advisory opinion would not require an investigation. Chairperson Teager questioned if the Ethics Board would be derelict if an advisory opinion is issued on an action that has been deemed to be a violation but does not go further than just issuing the opinion. Ms. Funk questioned if an investigation should be conducted when an advisory opinion is requested regarding an action that did occur. Mr. Kavanaugh indicated he does not think an investigation should be conducted; the party should file a complaint instead of requesting an advisory opinion. Ms. Funk suggested adding a statement at the end of advisory opinions indicating further investigation is required if a complaint is filed. Chairperson Teager stated he has provided his objective opinion on occasion with the disclaimer that if an individual wants an advisory opinion from the Ethics Board, they need to submit the request in writing noting only certain people can request an advisory opinion. Mr. Kavanaugh suggested the Ethics Board would conduct research for an advisory opinion and conduct an investigation for a complaint keeping each one separate and, in his opinion, this should be added to the Bylaws instead of the Ethics Code. Chairperson Teager questioned if this section should be left as written and verbiage would be added to an advisory opinion noting an investigation was not conducted.

Chairperson Teager questioned if the Ethics Board members had any other comments and highlighted the following changes:

- ✓ Struck out any references to the public. Ms. Leonard questioned if the definition of public should be removed. Chairperson Teager stated he added the definition at the request of Mr. Randolph and is agreeable to leaving it or removing it from the code.
- ✓ Page 6, item no. 1, and noted he changed the order of the personnel listed.
- ✓ Page 10, nos. 1 and 4, added the provision that the Town Attorney and Town Clerk cannot appoint themselves, accordingly; and no. 3, added the provision that no governing or board member of a political party can be on the Ethics Board.

Ms. Funk referred to the Section 13-3, letter P, accredited training and noted the members have struggled to find appropriate training and questioned if this will limit themselves. Chairperson Teager did acknowledge this question and suggested the NYS Comptroller's Office could provide accreditation. Ms. Eade Newcomb stated the wording was changed based on feedback from previous meetings. Mr. Kavanaugh suggested changing accredited to acceptable. Ms. Eade Newcomb suggested using approved but questioned who would approve the training. Mr. Kavanaugh stated the Ethics Board can approve the training. Ms. Martin questioned the need for the extra word. Ms. Eade Newcomb and the members agreed with removing approved and accredited.

Ms. Funk referred to Section 13-6, letter B. (1) noting the phone number and email address is being removed and questioned how an individual would know how to contact the hotline. Ms. Leonard stated hyperlinks change, also. Ms. Eade Newcomb stated this information can be found using a Google search and confirmed specific information was removed so the code would not require an update if the phone number or email changed.

Mr. Kavanaugh stated in his notes from previous discussions that a whistleblower complaint check box should be added to the ethics complaint form and noted whistleblowers have very specific protections. Ms. Funk stated the protections should apply to any complaint. Chairperson Teager stated whistleblowers are covered differently than a member of the public and would support adding this to the complaint form. Ms. Funk stated the complainant should be protected and does not see a difference. Ms. Leonard stated an employee is different from a member of the general public. Ms. Eade Newcomb stated by adding a check box on the form the Ethics Board is notified that the complainant is requesting extra protection. Mr. Kavanaugh stated 13-6, letter A does

provide for protection to a complainant from the public but still prefers to include the checkbox. Chairperson Teager stated there are differing levels of retaliation between the public and an employee and requires a change to the form opposed to the code. While the Ethics Board handles all complaints with confidentiality, whistleblower protections apply beyond or outside of the Ethics Board. Ms. Eade Newcomb stated the complainant has extra protection relative to their job. Ms. Funk stated if an employee files a complaint they should check the whistleblower box. Ms. Leonard stated checking the box does not automatically award the protection, for example, a member of the public may check the box. Ms. Eade Newcomb stated the check box is an alert to the Ethics Board that an individual may seek whistleblower protection. Chairperson Teager questioned Mr. Kavanaugh's intention, adding the box to the form or changing the language in the code. Mr. Kavanaugh stated he agrees with the language of the code and would like the check box added to the complaint form. Ms. Funk questioned how the Ethics Board can distinguish whether a written complaint from an employee is a whistleblower complaint or not. Ms. Leonard stated in her opinion it is not for the Ethics Board to determine and understands that whistleblower protection is outside the scope of the Ethics Board; the check box on the form is for informational purposes only and does not have legal ramifications. Mr. Kavanaugh stated no. 11 addresses the existing laws and may answer Ms. Funk's concerns. Ms. Eade Newcomb concurred. Ms. Funk questioned how an individual such as herself would request protection. Ms. Leonard stated Ms. Funk would have this protection because the Ethics Board conducts investigations in closed sessions.

Chairperson Teager questioned if the Ethics Board could approve the revised disclosure form and complaint form at next month's meeting. Ms. Eade Newcomb stated that is acceptable. Further, Chairperson Teager questioned if the updated member terms can be approved at the next meeting, also. Ms. Funk noted the code must be adopted first.

Motion by Chairperson Teager, seconded by Ms. Leonard, to adopt the attached draft of the Ethics Code with one change, the removal of the word accredited from Section 13-3, letter P.

Ayes: All

Noes: None

Motion Carried  
\*APPENDICES\*

Chairperson Teager stated the Ethics Board will review disclosure forms at the next meeting. There were no objections.

### **ADJOURNMENT**

Motion by Chairperson Teager, seconded by Ms. Funk, to adjourn the meeting at 7:20 P.M.

Ayes: All

Noes: None

Motion Carried

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Margaret A. Martin  
Deputy Town Clerk/Secretary to the Ethics Board

§ 13-1 The proper operation of Town government requires that its officers and employees be independent, impartial and responsible to the people; that government decisions and policy be made in the proper channels of the governmental structure; that public office not be used for personal gain; that public officers and employees observe in their official acts the highest standards of ethics and discharge faithfully the duties of their public office regardless of personal consideration; that the public have confidence in the integrity of its government and the officers and employees thereof; ~~and that officials and employees may perform their duties without being subject to harassment by individuals in the public.~~ It is the policy of the Town of West Seneca and the purpose of this chapter to establish standards and guidelines for ethical conduct of officers, and employees, ~~and members of the public.~~ Though assurance of such conduct will continue to rest primarily on personal integrity and community vigilance, the establishment of standards is another step toward providing the highest caliber of public administration for the Town and ensuring that government decisions are arrived at impartially and free of conflict of interests and thereby increasing confidence in public officials. It is also the purpose of this chapter to protect officials and employees from unwarranted assaults on their integrity by separating real conflict from the inconsequential, recognizing that for local government to attract and hold competent administrators ~~and employees,~~ public service must not require a complete divesting of all proprietary interests ~~and personal reputations.~~ In recognition of these goals, there is hereby established a Code of Ethics for all officers and for all employees of the Town of West Seneca, hereinafter referred to as the "Town," ~~and all vendors, third parties, and members of the public.~~ In the event of any conflict between the provisions of this Code and provisions of Article 18 of the General Municipal Law, the latter shall control. This chapter shall be enforceable upon all Town officials, officers, ~~and employees,~~ ~~contractors, and vendors, and members of the public.~~ No acknowledgement, service or acceptance of this chapter shall be necessary for enforcement of its provisions.

§ 13-2           **Definitions and word usage.**

**A.**       Definitions. As used in this chapter, the following terms shall have the meanings indicated:

**AGENCY**                               Any Town department, division, board, committee, or bureau, including the Town Board or any successor thereto.

**APPEAR and APPEAR BEFORE**   Communicating in any form, including without limitation, personally, by letter, electronic communication, telephone or by any other device.

**CONFIDENTIAL INFORMATION**   The same meaning as defined in the New York State Public Officer's Law<sup>11</sup> as well as any information discussed and/or revealed at an executive session of a Town Board meeting.

**CONFLICT OF INTEREST**           Any action or omission which is in conflict or gives or may reasonably give the appearance of conflict with the performance of official Town business or government.

**CUSTOMER or CLIENT** Any entity or person to whom an official, officer or employee of the Town of West Seneca or his or her outside employer or business has supplied goods or services during the previous calendar year having, in the aggregate, a value greater than \$2,000.

**ETHICS** Moral and economic principles that govern behavior and conduct based upon well-founded standards of universal fairness and right and wrong that prescribe human and organizational activity.

**FINANCIAL BENEFIT** Any money, service, license, permit, contract, authorization, loan, travel, entertainment, hospitality, gratuity or other compensation of anything of value, or any promise thereof.

**GOOD FAITH** Information concerning potential wrongdoing is disclosed in good faith when the individual making the disclosure reasonably believes such information to be true and reasonably believes that it constitutes potential wrongdoing.

**HOUSEHOLD** All persons living in a single residence, whether related or not.

**INDEPENDENT CONTRACTOR** A person or entity performing work for the Town pursuant to an agreement and receiving non-employee compensation.

**INTEREST** Deemed to include the affairs of the official, officer or employee or their spouse, minor children and dependents, firm, partnership or association in which such official, officer or employee is a member or employee; a corporation in which such official officer or employee is an officer director, or employee; and a corporation of which any stock is owned or controlled directly by the official, officer or employee.

**PERSONNEL ACTION** Any action affecting compensation, appointment, promotion, transfer, assignment, reassignment, reinstatement or evaluation of performance.

**PUBLIC** Any individual, organization, entity, or corporation which engages in any manner with the Town, its officials, or employees.

**RECUSE** The act of abstaining from participation or influencing in an official action due to a conflict of interest.

**RELATIVE** A spouse, parent, grandparent, stepparent, sibling, step-sibling, sibling's spouse, child, grandchild, stepchild, uncle, aunt, nephew, niece or household member of a Town official, officer or employee and individuals having any of these relationships to the spouse of the Town official, officer or employee.

**TOWN EMPLOYEE** All board members, officers and staff employed by the Town, whether employed full-time or part-time, employed pursuant to a contract, employed temporarily or employees who are on probation, paid or unpaid.

**VENDOR** Any individual, organization, entity, or corporation that engages in any form of business, including the sale of goods or the provision of services, or other transaction with the Town.

**WHISTLEBLOWER** Any Town employee (as defined herein) who in good faith discloses information concerning wrongdoing by another Town employee or concerning the business of the Town itself.

**WRONGDOING** Any alleged corruption, fraud, criminal or unethical activity, misconduct, waste, conflict of interest, intentional reporting of false or misleading information or abuse of authority engaged in by a Town employee (as defined herein) that relates to the Town.

**B.** Word usage. The use of the masculine gender shall include the feminine where applicable.

§ 13-3 **Standards of conduct.**

Every official, officer and employee of the Town of West Seneca shall be subject to and abide by the following standards of conduct:

**A.**

No Town official, officer or employee shall use his or her official position or office to take or fail to take any action in a manner which he or she knows or has reason to know may result in a financial benefit or interest for any of the following persons or entities:

- (1)** The Town official, officer or employee;
- (2)** His or her outside employer or business;
- (3)** A member of his household;
- (4)** A customer or client; or
- (5)** A relative.

**B.** No Town official, officer or employee shall have any interest, financial or otherwise, direct or indirect, or engage in any business or transaction or professional activity or incur any obligation of any nature that is in conflict with, or might reasonably tend to conflict with, the proper discharge of his

duties in the public interest. Any officer or employee who has a direct or indirect financial or other private interest in any matter before any board of the Town shall publicly disclose in writing on the official record of such board the nature and extent of such interest prior to participating in the discussion or before making a recommendation or giving an opinion to such board on such matter.

C. No Town official, officer or employee shall represent private interests before any board, department, office or agency of the Town, nor represent private interests in any action or proceeding against the interests of the Town or in any litigation to which the Town is a party. The preceding sentence shall not preclude any such officers or employees from appearing in the performance of public or civic obligations or on their own behalf with respect to matters of a personal nature. All appearing parties before any board of the Town shall make a disclosure as provided under § 809 of Article 18 of the General Municipal Law. Every application, petition or request submitted for a variance, change of zoning, site plan approval or waiver, license or permit pursuant to the provisions of any ordinance, local law, rule or regulation constituting the zoning and planning regulations of the Town in which a Town officer or employee has an interest as defined in this chapter shall state the name, residence and the nature and extent of the interest of any officer or employee of the Town, in the person, partnership or association making such application, petition or request.

D. A Town Board member, official, officer or employee shall promptly recuse himself or herself from acting on a matter before the Town when acting on the matter or failing to act on the matter may provide a financial benefit to the persons or entities listed in § 13-3A above. A Town Board member shall promptly recuse himself or herself from voting on the appointment, hiring, or other matter involving a person or entity described in § 13-3A above.

E. No Town official, officer or employee, whether paid or unpaid, shall directly or indirectly solicit, accept or receive any gift, whether in the form of money, services, loan, travel, entertainment, hospitality, material goods, things, or promise of any other form, under circumstances in which it could reasonably be inferred or could reasonably be expected that the gift was intended to influence such official, officer or employee in the performance of his or her official duties or was intended to reward official action or inaction. Under no circumstances shall an official, officer or employee accept any gift valued in excess of \$25. No officer or employee of the Town shall grant in the discharge of his duties any improper favor, service or thing of value. Nothing contained herein shall be deemed to prohibit any officer or employee of the Town from borrowing money from any bank or banks designated as depositories by the Town Board.

F. No Town official, officer or employee shall disclose any confidential information or use said information to further their personal interest or the personal interests of others, unless required to do so by law or court order.



**G.** No Town official, officer or employee, whether paid or unpaid, shall engage in or accept private employment or render services for private interests when such employment or service is in conflict with the proper discharge of his official duties.

**H.** No Town official, officer or employee shall accept employment by any person, firm or corporation with which he or his department, office or agency is engaged on behalf of the Town in the transaction of business which is or may be affected by his official action. No officer or employee of the Town shall, within one year after termination of service or employment with the Town, appear before any board or agency of the Town in relation to any case, proceeding or application in which he personally participated during the period of his service or employment or which was under his active consideration.

**I.** No Town official, officer or employee shall use or attempt to use his official position to secure unwarranted privileges or exemptions for himself or others or grant any special consideration, treatment or advantage to any citizens beyond that which is available to every other citizen.

**J.** No Town official, officer or employee shall, by his conduct, give reasonable basis for the impression that any person can unduly influence him or improperly enjoy his favor in the performance of his official duties or that he is affected by the kinship, rank, position or influence of any party or person.

**K.** No Town official, officer or employee shall direct or cause any officer or employee of the Town to do or perform any service or work outside of public work or employment, or accept any such service or work, nor shall any officer or employee of the Town offer to or perform any such service or work for such officer or employee.

**L.** No Town official, officer or employee shall use or permit the use of Town property (including vehicles, equipment, materials and any other property) for personal convenience, profit, or political means except when such use is available to Town citizens generally or is provided as a matter of written Town policy.

**M.** No Town official, officer or employee shall require, authorize, or influence any other Town official, officer, or employee to participate in an election campaign or contribute to a political committee.

**N.** No Town official, officer or employee shall induce or aid other officials, officers or employees of the Town to violate any provisions of this chapter.

O. All Town Board members, officials, officers, employees, and volunteers are required to reasonably cooperate with any investigation of the Board of Ethics. Such reasonable cooperation shall include by way of example, but not be limited to, participating in investigatory interviews, producing documents or other tangible information in their possession or control, and appearing at scheduled hearings and giving testimony. Employees represented by a union will have the right to have a union representative present with them for any investigatory interviews and to seek the advice of their union representative prior to appearing before or providing information to the Board of Ethics.

**1.** Any complaint filed by any individual or employee, regardless of its nature, may be made in writing to the Chair of the Board of Ethics, the counsel to the Board of Ethics, or the Town Attorney. Complaints initially made orally will require the completion of an Ethics Complaint Form (see §13-6, B(2)) to be officially submitted for consideration, and this may be done with the assistance of one of the aforementioned individuals. The Board of Ethics shall investigate and render an opinion on all officially submitted complaints.

P. Every Ethics Board Member shall annually complete two hours of ~~approved~~-accredited ethics training and submit such evidence as may be required of such training to the Town Clerk. The failure to undertake such training shall be grounds for removal.

Q. This Ethics Code shall be annually available to all Town officials, Board members, employees, and volunteers.

#### § 13-4 Penalties.

A. In addition to any penalty contained in any other provision of law, a violation of this chapter may result as follows:

**(1)** Forfeiture of pay, suspension or removal from office or employment or such other disciplinary action as the Town Board may consider advisable.

**(2)** Any contract knowingly entered into by and/or with the Town or any agency thereof in which there is an interest or financial benefit prohibited by this chapter shall be null, void, and wholly unenforceable.

**(3)** Recommend a civil fine, not to exceed \$10,000 for each violation, upon a Town Official, Board member, employee or volunteer found guilty of a violation of this code. Such fine shall be payable to the Town.

**B.** No action expressly or impliedly permitted under Article 18 of the General Municipal Law shall constitute a violation of this chapter.

**C.** Any violation of this code by a vendor or contractor may result in the Town ceasing all future purchases and operations with such vendor or contractor.

§ 13-5 **Disclosure statements.**

**A.** The following Town officials, officers and employees of the Town of West Seneca shall be required to file annual disclosure statements by March 31 of each year in the form as set forth by the Board of Ethics and approved by the Town Board.

**(1)** All elected officials.

**(2)** All department heads.

**(3)** Any and all Board members, Commission members, Committee members, whether elected, appointed, or volunteer.

**B.** Said forms shall be filed with the Town Clerk and shall be available for public inspection.

**C.** Any independent contractors hired by the Town to perform any work for the Town shall be required to file annual disclosure statements by March 31 of each year in a form as set forth by the Board of Ethics and approved by the Town Board. ~~in Exhibit "B" attached hereto.~~<sup>[2]</sup> This shall not apply to any governmental entity doing business with the Town pursuant to an intermunicipal agreement.

§ 13-6 **Whistleblower Policy.**

**A.** This Whistleblower Policy applies to all board members, officers, employees of the Town of West Seneca, and the public, and provides them with a confidential means to report credible allegation of misconduct, wrongdoing or unethical behavior and to protect those individuals, when acting in good faith, from personal or professional retaliation.

**B.** Town employees who discover or have knowledge of potential wrongdoing concerning board members, officers or employees of the Town, or a person having business dealings with the Town, or concerning the Town itself, shall report such activity in accordance with the following procedures:

**(1)** The Town employee shall disclose any information concerning wrongdoing either orally or in a written report to his or her supervisor, to the Town Ethics Board Attorney, general counsel,

human resources representative, or the Erie County Whistle Blower Hotline at (716-858-7722) or electronically. [email at whistleblower@erie.gov](mailto:whistleblower@erie.gov).

(2) Town employees who discover or have knowledge of wrongdoing shall report such wrongdoing in a prompt and timely manner. If reporting through the Town Ethics Board Attorney, then the form developed by the Ethics Board ~~attached hereto as Exhibit "C"~~ shall be completed and submitted to the Town Ethics Board Attorney.

(3) The identity of the whistleblower and the substance of his or her allegations will be kept confidential to the best extent possible.

(4) The individual to whom the potential wrongdoing is reported shall investigate and handle the claim in a timely and reasonable manner, which may include referring such information to the authorities or an appropriate law enforcement agency where applicable.

(5) Should a Town employee believe in good faith that disclosing information within the Town would likely subject him or her to adverse personnel action or be wholly ineffective; the Town employee may instead disclose the information to the local authorities or to an appropriate law enforcement agency, if applicable.

(6) No Town employee who in good faith discloses potential violations of the Town's Code of Ethics or other instances of potential wrongdoing shall suffer harassment, retaliation or adverse personnel action.

(7) All allegations of retaliation against a whistleblower or interference with an individual seeking to disclose potential wrongdoing will be thoroughly investigated by the Town Ethics Board.

(8) Any Town employee who retaliates against or attempts to interfere with any individual for having in good faith disclosed potential violations of the Town's Code of Ethics or other instances of potential wrongdoing is subject to disciplinary action, which may include termination of employment.

(9) Any allegation of retaliation or interference will be taken and treated seriously and irrespective of the outcome of the initial complaint, will be treated as a separate matter.

(10) The Whistleblower Policy is not intended to limit, diminish or impair any other rights or remedies that an individual may have under the law with respect to disclosing potential wrongdoing free from retaliation or adverse personnel action.

**(11)** Specifically, the Whistleblower Policy is not intended to limit any rights or remedies that an individual may have under the laws of the State of New York, including but not limited to the following provisions: Civil Service Law § 75-b, Labor Law § 740, State Finance Law § 191 (commonly known as the "False Claims Act") and Executive Law § 55(1).

**(12)** With respect to any rights or remedies that an individual may have pursuant to Civil Service Law § 75-b or Labor Law § 740, any employee who wishes to preserve such rights shall, prior to disclosing information to a government body, have made a good faith effort to provide the appointing authority or his or her designee the information to be disclosed and shall provide the appointing authority or designee a reasonable time to take appropriate action unless there is imminent and serious danger to public health or safety. [See Civil Service Law § 75-b(2)(b); Labor Law § 740(3)].

**C.** Once a complaint has been submitted, the Ethics Board will investigate the allegations of the complaint. In conducting any such investigation, the Ethics Board may administer oaths or affirmations, issue subpoenas pursuant to Article 23 of the New York Civil Practice Law and Rules, compel witness attendance and require the production of any books or records which it may deem relevant and material. The Ethics Board shall require clear and convincing evidence before determining that a violation has occurred. A copy of any such determination shall be provided to the Town Attorney.

§ 13-7 **Creation of Board of Ethics; composition of membership; conditions of membership.**

**A.** A Board of Ethics is hereby established pursuant to Article 18, Section 808, Subdivision 3 of the General Municipal Law. The members of the Board of Ethics shall be appointed by the Town Board and shall receive no salary or compensation for their services as members of such Board. A member of the Board of Ethics may be removed for cause. The Board shall be composed of ~~one five members~~ to be appointed by ~~each member of~~ the Town Board with staggered terms. ~~Membership in the Board shall consist of no more than two members of the same political party. No member of the Board shall be a full-time employee of the State of New York, the County of Erie, the Erie County Water Authority, the Niagara Frontier Transportation Authority, or Erie Community College. Three members shall be appointed in 2021 and two members to be appointed in 2022.~~ The term of each member shall be five years ~~with one expiring each year on December 31<sup>st</sup>. with three more being appointed or reappointed in 2026 and two being appointed or reappointed in 2027, which shall continue on the same scheme.~~ A member of the Town Board shall not appoint himself or herself or any other current Town Board member. ~~The seventh member of the Board of Ethics shall be the Town Clerk, who shall be an ex officio member without the power to vote.~~ The members of the Board of Ethics shall be residents of the Town of West Seneca ~~and up to only one member shall be a current Town official, officer or employee. The Town Attorney representing the Town shall be an ex officio member of the Board of Ethics without the power to vote. In the event that the Town Board increases to five board members, the Board of Ethics~~

~~shall become a five-member Board. One member shall be appointed by each Town Board member and the terms shall be five years as decided by a majority of the Town Board members.~~

1. A member of the Town Attorney's office **who is not the Town Attorney** shall act as counsel to the Ethics Board and shall be appointed annually by the Town Board.

2. No **elected official** or candidate for political office, including the Town Board, Town Justice, Town Clerk, Superintendent of Highways, Supervisor, ~~or West Seneca Board of Education~~ shall be a member or ex-officio member of the Board of Ethics.

3. No Ethics Board member or ex-officio member shall be a **governing or board** member of a political party committee or officer therein.

4. **A member of the Town Clerk's office who is not the Town Clerk shall act as secretary to the Ethics Board and shall be appointed annually by the Town Board.** ~~The Town Clerk shall appoint an individual from the Town Clerk's office to act as secretary to the Ethics Board.~~

**B.** Advisory opinions. Upon written request of any Town official, ~~member of the public~~, officer or employee, the Board of Ethics established herein shall render advisory opinions regarding this chapter of Ethics or the provisions contained in Article 18 of the New York State General Municipal Law. **Requests for advisory opinions and reviews may be submitted after the commencement and/or completion of the matter for which an opinion is sought or in the advance of same.** The Board of Ethics shall also make recommendations as to any amendments to this chapter upon the request and majority vote of the Town Board. The opinions of the Board of Ethics shall be advisory and under no circumstances shall the identity of the Town officer, official or employee be disclosed except to authorized persons and agencies or pursuant to a court order.

1. All requests for advisory opinions shall be provided in writing to the Chair of the Board of Ethics, the counsel to the Board of Ethics, or the Town Attorney, ~~or counsel to the Board of Ethics~~. All such advisory opinions shall be filed with the Town Board and the Town Attorney upon completion.

**C.** Rules and regulations. The Board of Ethics shall promulgate its own rules and regulations as to its form and procedures and shall maintain appropriate records of its opinions and proceedings. **All decisions and opinions of the Board shall be delivered to the Town Attorney, Town Board, any complainant, and any individual against whom a complaint has been filed. In the event that the complaint or an advisory opinion is sought with respect to the individual with whom complaints and advisory requests are to be filed, such complaint or request shall be filed with the Town Attorney for submission for a full review by the Board of Ethics.**

1. All meetings of the Board of Ethics shall be subject to the provisions of the Open Meetings Law.

2. Members of the Board of Ethics shall recuse themselves from any matter in which a conflict of interest exists.

D. All recommendations, advisory opinions and rules and regulations of the Board of Ethics shall be filed in the Town Clerk's Office.

§ 13-8 **Severability.**

If any portion of this chapter shall be adjudged by a court of competent jurisdiction to be invalid or unconstitutional, such portion thereof shall be deemed inoperative and the balance of the code deemed to be in full force and effect.

§ 13-9 **Permissible claims.**

Nothing herein shall be deemed to bar or prevent the timely filing by a present or former Town official, officer or employee of any claim, account, demand or suit against the Town or any agency thereof on behalf of himself or any relative or household member arising out of any personal injury or property damage or for any lawful benefit authorized or permitted by law.

§ 13-10 **Compliance required; distribution of copies.**

Compliance with this Code of Ethics shall be deemed a condition of employment for all Town officials, officers and employees. The Town Human Resources Department must promptly cause a copy of this code, including any amendments, to be distributed to every person who is or becomes an official, officer or employee of the Town of West Seneca and a receipt of the same shall be signed by such official, officer or employee. Such receipts shall be filed with Human Resources, who shall supply the necessary forms, and a photocopy shall be filed in the officer's or employee's personnel folder and with the Board of Ethics.

§ 13-11 **When effective.**

This chapter shall become effective immediately upon its enactment by the Town Board after ~~proper filing, including filing with the office of the State Comptroller and the office of~~ the Secretary of State.