

**Code of Ethics for the  
Board of Aldermen of  
City Of Southport, North Carolina**

**WHEREAS**, the Constitution of North Carolina, Article I, Section 35, reminds us that a “frequent recurrence to fundamental principles is absolutely necessary to preserve the blessings of liberty,” and

**WHEREAS**, a spirit of honesty and forthrightness is reflected in North Carolina’s State Motto, Esse Quam Videri, “To Be Rather than to Seem,” and

**WHEREAS**, Section 160A-86 of the North Carolina General Statutes requires local governing boards to adopt a code of ethics, and

**WHEREAS**, as public officials we are charged with upholding the trust of the citizens and residents of Southport, and with obeying the law, and

**WHEREAS**, as public officials of Southport we believe our citizens and residents are entitled to the most open and ethical government possible under the law.

**NOW THEREFORE**, in recognition of our blessings and obligations as citizens of the State of North Carolina and as public officials representing the citizens and residents of Southport, and acting pursuant to the requirements of Section 160A-86 of the North Carolina General Statutes, we the Board of Aldermen of the City of Southport, North Carolina, do hereby adopt the following General Principles and Code of Ethics to guide the Mayor and Aldermen in its lawful decision-making.

**GENERAL PRINCIPLES UNDERLYING THE CODE OF ETHICS**

- The stability and proper operation of democratic representative government depends upon public confidence in the integrity of the government, and upon responsible exercise of the trust conferred by the people upon their elected officials.

- Governmental decisions and policy must be made and implemented through proper channels and processes of the governmental structure.
- Board members must be able to act in a manner that maintains their integrity and independence, yet is responsive to the interests and needs of those they represent.
- Board members must always remain aware that at various times they place different roles:
  - As advocates, who strive to advance the legitimate needs of their citizens,
  - As legislators, who balance the public interest and private rights in considering and enacting ordinances, orders, and resolutions, and
  - As fair and impartial decision-makers, when making quasi-judicial and administrative determinations.

Board members must know how to distinguish among these roles, to determine when each role is appropriate, and to act accordingly.

- Board members must be aware of their obligation to conform their behavior to standards of ethical conduct that warrant the trust of their constituents. Each official must find within his or her own conscience the touchstone by which to determine what conduct is appropriate.

## **CODE OF ETHICS**

**The purpose** of this Code of Ethics is to establish guidelines for ethical standards of conduct for the Southport Board of Aldermen and to provide guidance in determining what conduct is appropriate in particular cases. It should not be considered a substitute for the law or for a board member's best judgment.

### **Section 1.**

(a) Board members should obey all laws that apply to their official actions as members of the board. Board members should be guided by the spirit as well as the letter of the law in whatever they do. At the same time, board members should feel free to assert policy positions and opinions without fear of reprisal from fellow board members or citizens. To assert that a board member is behaving unethically due to the fact that one has a

disagreement with that board member based on a question of policy (and not on the board member's ethical behavior) is unfair, dishonest, irresponsible, and is itself unethical.

(b) Board members shall endeavor to keep themselves up-to-date, through the board's attorney and other sources, of the most pertinent constitutional, statutory, and other legal requirements with which they must be familiar in order to meet their legal responsibilities.

(c) Board members shall comply with General Statute 160A-87 in receiving two hours of ethics education within 12 months of each appointment or election to office. Board members may additionally receive two hours of ethics education annually, but failure to receive such additional ethics education shall not constitute a violation of this Code of Ethics.

## **Section 2.**

Board members should act with integrity and with independence from improper influence as they exercise the functions of their offices. Characteristics and behaviors that are consistent with this standard are:

- Adhering firmly to a code of sound values.
- Behaving consistently and with respect towards everyone with whom they interact
- Exhibiting trustworthiness.
- Living as if they are on duty as elected officials regardless of where they are or what they doing.
- Using their best independent judgment to pursue the common good as they see it, presenting their opinions to all in a reasonable, forthright, consistent manner.
- Remaining incorruptible, self-governing, and not subject to improper influence, while at the same time being able to consider the opinions and ideas of others.
- Disclosing contacts and information about issues that they receive outside of public meetings, and refraining from seeking or receiving information about quasi-judicial matters outside of the quasi-judicial proceedings themselves.
- Treating other board members and the public with respect, and honoring the opinions of others even when they disagree.

- Being careful not to reach conclusions on issues until all sides have been heard.
- Showing respect for their office and not behaving in ways that reflect badly on it.
- Recognizing that they are part of a larger group and acting accordingly.
- Recognizing that individual board members are not generally allowed to act on behalf of the board, but may only do so if the board specifically authorizes, and that the board must take official action as a body.

### **Section 3.**

- (a) Board members should avoid impropriety in the exercise of their official duties. Their official actions should be above reproach. Although opinions may vary about what behavior is inappropriate, this board will consider impropriety in terms of whether a reasonable person who is aware of all of the relevant facts and circumstances surrounding the board member's action would conclude that the action was inappropriate.
- (b) If a board member believes that his or her actions, while legal and ethical, may be misunderstood, he or she should seek the advice of the board's attorney and should consider public disclosing the facts of the situation and the steps taken to resolve it, such as consulting with the attorney.

### **Section 4.**

Board members should be faithful in the performance of the duties of their offices. They should act as the especially responsible citizens whom others can trust and respect. They should set a good example for others in the community, keeping in mind that trust and respect must continually be earned.

Board members should faithfully attend and prepare for meetings. They should carefully analyze all credible information that is properly submitted to them, mindful of the need not to engage in communications outside the meeting in quasi-judicial matters. They should demand full accountability from those over whom the board has authority.

Board members should be willing to bear their fair share of the board's workload. To the extent appropriate, they should be willing to put the board's interests ahead of their own.

### **Section 5.**

Elected members of local governing boards should conduct the affairs of their boards in an open and public manner. They should comply with all applicable laws governing open meetings and public records, recognizing that doing so is an important way to be worthy of the public's trust. They should remember when they meet that they are conducting the public's business. They should also remember that the records of their local government belong to the public and not to them or their employees. They should make clear that a climate of openness is to be maintained at all times in their governmental units.

In order to insure strict compliance with the laws governing openness, governing board members should strive to be open. They should prohibit unjustified delay in fulfilling public records requests. They should take deliberate steps to insure that any closed sessions held by the board are lawfully conducted, and that such sessions do not stray from the purposes for which they are called.

### **Section 6.**

If a majority of the board has reason to believe that one of its members has violated a provision of this Code of Ethics, it may at a regular meeting of the Board of Aldermen open an investigation into the matter. All information compiled, including the grounds for the finding of probable cause, shall be shared with the member when it is received. All information pertaining to the case shall be open to public inspection and copying pursuant to the North Carolina public records statutes. If upon investigation the board concludes that a violation of a criminal law may have occurred, it shall refer the matter to the local district attorney.

Should the board determine that it wishes to proceed further with censure proceedings, it shall, by majority vote, call for a hearing, to be held at a regular meeting or at a special meeting convened for that purpose. Notice of the hearing stating its time, place, and purpose shall be given

once a week for two successive calendar weeks in a newspaper having general circulation in the jurisdiction. The notice shall be published the first time not less than 10 days nor more than 25 days before the date fixed for the hearing. In computing such period, the day of publication is not to be included but the day of the hearing shall be included. Alternatively, the hearing shall be advertised on the jurisdiction's website for the same period of time, up to and including the date of the hearing. The notice shall state that a detailed list of the allegations against the member is available for public inspection and copying in the office of the clerk or secretary to the board.

The hearing shall be convened at the time and place specified. The hearing and any deliberations shall be conducted in open session in accordance with the requirements of the North Carolina open meetings statutes.

The accused board member shall have the right to have counsel present, to present and cross-examine expert and other witnesses, and to offer evidence, including evidence of the bias of any other board member or the presiding officer. An audio or video and audio tape of the proceedings shall be prepared. Any and all votes during the hearing shall be taken by the ayes and noes and recorded in the board's minutes.

Once the hearing is concluded, it shall be closed by vote of the board. The presiding officer shall next entertain a motion to adopt a resolution censuring the member based on specified violations of the Code of Ethics. Any motion made must be an affirmative one in favor of adopting a non-binding resolution of censure. If the motion or resolution does not state particular grounds for censure under the Code of Ethics, the presiding officer shall rule it out of order.

If a motion to adopt a resolution of censure stating particular grounds under the Code of Ethics has been made, the board shall debate the motion. The accused member shall be allowed to participate in the debate, but shall not vote on the motion to adopt the resolution of censure.

At the conclusion of the debate, the board shall vote on the resolution. If the motion to adopt the resolution of censure is approved by a two-thirds vote of those present and voting, a quorum being present, the motion passes and the non-binding resolution of censure is adopted.

The text of the resolution of censure shall be made a part of the minutes of the board. Any recording of the board's proceedings shall be approved by the board as a permanent part of the board's minutes. The proceedings shall then be considered concluded, the board having done all that it legally can with respect to the matter in question.

**Adopted, this the 31<sup>st</sup> day of July, 2010 by a unanimous vote of the Southport Board of Aldermen. (Vote 6-0)**

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**Robert D. Howard, Mayor**

**ATTEST:**

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**Regina W. Alexander, MMC- City Clerk**