



City Council Rules of Procedure/Decorum Guidelines

Adopted: April 16, 2018

All Council Members

All members of the City Council have equal votes. No Councilmember has more power than any other Councilmember and all should be treated with equal respect.

All Councilmembers should:

- Demonstrate honesty and integrity in every action and statement
- Comply with both the letter and spirit of the laws and policies affecting the operation of government
- Serve as a model of leadership and civility to the community
- Inspire public confidence in Hastings government
- Work for the common good, not personal interest, considering all impacts, influences and concerns, and not only those that are presented with the strongest emotions.
- Prepare in advance of Council meetings and be familiar with issues on the agenda
- Fully participate in City Council meetings and other public forums while demonstrating respect, kindness, consideration, and courtesy to others
- Participate in scheduled activities to increase Council effectiveness
- Review Council procedures, such as these guidelines, at least annually
- Represent the City at ceremonial functions at the request of the Mayor
- Be responsible for the highest standards of respect, civility, and honesty in ensuring the effective maintenance of intergovernmental relations
- Respect the proper roles of elected officials and City staff in ensuring open, transparent, and effective government
- Accept and respect decisions made by the Council as a body. Deliver a consistent message to the community
- Provide accurate contact information to the City Administrator
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Council Conduct 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 service in public office in order to improve the quality of life in the community. In all cases, this common goal should be acknowledged even as Councilmembers may “agree to disagree” on contentious issues.

In Public Meetings

- **Use formal titles**—The Council should refer to one another formally during Council meetings as Mayor or Councilmember followed by the individual’s last name
- **Practice civility and respect for 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. Be respectful of diverse opinions.
- **Honor the role of the presiding officer in maintaining order and equity**—respect the Mayor’s efforts to focus discussion on current agenda items. Objections to the Mayor’s actions should be voiced politely and with reason.
- **Demonstrate effective problem-solving approaches**—Councilmembers 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. Councilmembers are role models for residents, business people, and other stakeholders involved in public debate.
- **Be respectful of people’s time**—stay focused on the matter being discussed and act efficiently during public meetings.
- **Be prepared**—Review items for discussion prior to the meeting.
- **Submit questions on Council agenda items ahead of the meeting**—in order to focus the Council meetings on consideration of policy issues and to maintain an open forum for public discussion, questions which focus on the policy aspects of agenda items should be discussed at the Council meeting rather than administrative minutia. Any clarifications or technical questions that can be readily answered can be handled before the meeting. Councilmembers are encouraged to submit their questions on agenda items to the City Administrator as far in advance of the meeting as possible so that staff can be prepared to respond at the Council meeting.

In Private Encounters

- Treat others how you would like to be treated—ask yourself how you would like to be treated in similar circumstances, and then treat the other person that way.

Council Conduct with City Staff

Governance of a City relies on the cooperative efforts of elected officials, who set policy, and City staff, which analyze issues, make recommendations, and implement and administer the Council’s priorities. Therefore, every effort should be made to be cooperative and show mutual respect for the contributions made by 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. As with your Council colleagues, practice civility and respect in all interactions with City staff.
- **Channel communications through the appropriate senior City staff**—questions of City staff should be directed only to the City Administrator or Department Heads. The City Administrator should be copied on any request to senior staff. When in doubt about what staff contact is appropriate, Councilmembers should ask the Mayor and/or City Administrator for guidance.
- **All Councilmembers should have the same information with which to make decisions**—the City Administrator and Department Heads will endeavor to ensure Councilmembers are provided with clear and consistent information upon which to base decisions.
- **Never publicly criticize an individual employee**—All critical comments about staff performance should only be made to the City Administrator through private correspondence or conversation.

- **Do not get involved in administrative or personnel functions**—Avoid any interactions with staff that may be construed as trying to shape staff recommendations. Councilmembers shall refrain from coercing staff in making recommendations to the Council as a whole.
- **Be cautious in representing City positions on issues**—before sending correspondence related to the legislative position, check with the City Administrator to see if a position has already been communicated. When corresponding with representatives of other governments or constituents, remember to indicate if appropriate that the views you state are your own and may not represent those of the full Council.
- **Respect the competing demands for staff work**—requests for information should be made through the City Administrator, according to the protocol for channeling communications. Any request which would require an inordinate amount of staff to research a problem or prepare a response may be referred to the full Council for direction to ensure that staff resources are allocated in accordance with overall Council priorities.
- **Support a respectful, positive and constructive workplace**—Councilmembers should support the maintenance of a respectful, positive and constructive workplace environment for City staff and for citizens and businesses dealing with the City.
- **Depend upon the staff to respond to citizen concerns and complaints**—it is the role of Councilmembers to pass on concerns and complaints on behalf of their constituents if the Councilmember is not familiar with the current practice/policy/background. It is not, however, appropriate to pressure staff to solve a problem in a particular way. Refer citizen complaints to the Department Head or City Administrator who will coordinate follow-up by the appropriate staff member(s). The City Administrator should be copied on any request to senior staff. Staff is responsible for making sure the Councilmember knows how the matter was resolved.

Council Conduct with Boards and Commissions

The City has established several boards and commissions as a means for 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. Councilmembers are expected to represent the full Council in providing guidance to boards and commissions. In some instances, Councilmembers may attend board or commission meetings as individuals, and should follow these protocols:

- **If attending a board or commission meeting, identify your comments as personal views or opinions**—Councilmembers may attend any board or commission meeting, which are always open to any member of the public. Any public comments by a Councilmember at a board or commission meeting should be clearly made as an individual opinion and not as a representation of the feelings of the entire City Council.
- **Remember that boards and commissions are advisory to the Council as a whole, not individual Councilmembers**—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. Individual Councilmembers should not feel they have the power or right to unduly influence Board and Commission members in any way if they disagree about an issue. A board or Commission appointment should not be used as a political “reward.”
- **Concerns about an individual Board or Commission member should be pursued with tact**—if a Councilmember has a concern with the effectiveness of a particular board or commission member, the Councilmember should consult with the Mayor who can bring the issue to the Council as a whole.

- **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. Councilmembers may have a closing working relationship with some individuals serving on boards and commissions but must be fair to 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 Councilmember, but not in a public forum while conducting official duties. Conversely, Councilmembers may support board and commission members who are running for office, but not in an official forum in their capacity as Councilmember

Staff Conduct with City Council

- **Respond to Council questions as fully and as expeditiously as is practical**—senior staff will strive to respond to all Councilmember inquiries as completely and quickly as practical. If a Councilmember forwards a complaint or service request to the City Administrator, there will be follow through with the Councilmember on the outcome.
- **Respect the role of Councilmembers as policy makers for the City**—staff is expected to provide its best professional recommendations on issues. Staff should provide information about alternatives to staff recommendations as appropriate, as well as pros and cons for staff recommendations and alternatives.
 - Demonstrate professionalism and non-partisanship in all interactions with the community and in public meetings.
 - It is important for the staff to demonstrate respect for the Council at all times. All Councilmembers should be treated equally.

Other Procedural Issues

- Don't politicize procedural issues (e.g. minutes approval or agenda order) for strategic purposes.
- Respect the work of the Council standing committees
- Commit to periodically review procedural rules and guidelines and advise presiding officer of any issues or concerns—throughout the year, Councilmembers should routinely review these guidelines. Questions or unresolved issues should be brought to the Mayor for clarification or to schedule follow up with the full Council at a future meeting.

Enforcement

Councilmembers have a primary responsibility to assure that these guidelines are understood and followed, so that the public can have full confidence in the integrity of their local government. These guidelines are intended to be self-enforcing thereby requiring an ongoing commitment by Councilmembers to faithfully honor the trust and dignity bestowed upon them as elected leaders and community role models.