

TOWN OF WOODSTOCK ETHICS BOARD 2020 ANNUAL REPORT

The Ethics and Disclosure Law of the Town of Woodstock (the “Ethics Law”), Section VIII Ethics Board, C Powers and Duties, number 8 requires the Ethics Board to “... prepare and submit and annual report to the Town Board summarizing the activities of the Ethics Board, listing any recommended changes to the text or administration of the Local Law.” Herewith is our 2020 annual report:

CURRENT MEMBERS AS OF JANUARY 25, 2021:

Allison Dodd - Serving 3-year term (2019, 2020, 2021)
Paul Washington – Serving 3-year term (2019, 2020, 2021)
Neil Ratner – Serving 3-year term (2021, 2022, 2023)
Iris York – Serving 3-year term (2020, 2021, 2022)

James Dougherty – Completed 2-year term (2019, 2020), reappointment under consideration by the Town Board.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS:

There is no obligation under the Ethics Law to have a secretary, but we are required to elect a Chairperson. The Ethics Board decided, once again, not to appoint an official Secretary, but to continue rotating the responsibilities for taking minutes and to ask Iris York to be responsible for a number of responsibilities such as interacting with the Town Clerk’s office with respect to scheduling meetings, providing finalized copies of minutes, etc. Paul Washington was re-elected as the Chairperson in January 2020.

ANNUAL DISCLOSURE FORMS:

The Ethics Board performed its review of annual disclosure forms. It noted that while most Town employees received the correct form in 2020, some did not. The Ethics Board re-confirmed with the Town Clerk’s Office the correct form to provide.

ETHICS INQUIRIES: There were two cases carried over from prior years into 2020 (Cases 2019-08 and 2019-09). The Board received complaints in two matters during 2020 and resolved each of them, but has continued to receive correspondence relating to Case 2020-1 and has continued to respond to the complainant. The Ethics Board was not required to notify the Town Board of any matters pursuant to Section 71-8C(6) of the Ethics Law.

ETHICS LAW UPDATES:

During 2020, the Ethics Board did not recommend any changes to the Ethics Law.

ETHICS LAW PRESENTATION, TRAINING AND DISCLOSURES.

The Ethics Board provided a presentation to the Town Board in December 2020, which has been posted on the Town’s website. As part of that presentation, the Ethics Board provided the Town with FAQs relating to the Ethics Law, which have been posted on the Town’s website. At the Ethics Board’s request, the Town Supervisor’s Office has now posted recent years’ Ethics Board annual reports and meeting minutes on the Town’s website.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

As we noted in our 2018 annual report, our 2019 annual report, and our presentation to the Town Board in December 2020, the Ethics Board receives complaints alleging conduct that did not violate the Ethics Law, but that may violate the Town’s Employment Practices Compliance Handbook (the “Handbook”).

As underscored in our presentation to the Town Board in December 2020:

- The Ethics Board urges the Town (1) to provide the Handbook to all those who are covered by it (which includes not only paid employees, but also those who serve voluntarily on Town boards, committees, and commissions); (2) to provide comprehensive training to all Town employees on the Handbook and the Ethics Law, including the different types of conduct covered by the Handbook and the Ethics Law, and processes for reporting violations of each.
- We encourage all Town Board members to complete the annual disclosure forms on a timely basis, to set an example for Town employees.
- We also encourage the Town Clerk's office to provide newly appointed Town employees, including those who serve on newly formed Town committees and commissions, with an annual disclosure form on a timely basis in accordance with the requirements of the Ethics Law.

During 2021, the Ethics Board will be pleased to work with the Town in updating the handbook for Town *volunteer* employees (which is in addition to the general Handbook noted above). We also stand ready to work with the Town on training for all Town employees, as noted above, on the Handbook and Ethics Law.

2020 Meetings:

The Ethics Board met six times during 2020: January 21, August 24, October 19, November 16, December 15, and December 21. The meeting schedule reflected the impact of the Covid-19 pandemic and the lower number of complaints received in 2020 as compared to 2019 (two versus nine): the Ethics Board met in person in January, suspended meetings during the spring, resumed them on a hybrid basis (a combination of in-person and online) in August, and then held them exclusively online in the autumn. The Ethics Board is grateful for the assistance of the Town Supervisor's Office in holding hybrid and online meetings during 2020.

Respectfully submitted by the Woodstock Ethics Board – January 25, 2021