

TOWN OF WOODSTOCK ETHICS BOARD 2015 ANNUAL REPORT

The Ethics and Disclosure law of the Town of Woodstock, Section VIII Ethics Board, C Powers and Duties, number 8 requires the Ethics Board to "... prepare and submit an 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 2015 annual report:

MEMBERS:

Allison Dodd - Serving 3 year term (2013, 2014, 2015)
James Huben – Appointed June 2014: Completing term expiring December 31, 2016
Diane Katz – Appointed March 2014: Resigned January 2015
Neil Ratner – Appointed January 2015; Serving 3 year term (2015, 2016, 2017)
Paul Washington – Appointed June 2014: Completing term expiring December 31, 2015

- **Resignation** - Diane Katz resigned January 2015
- **Reinstated** - Neil Ratner was reinstated for a 3 year term (2015, 2016, 2017).

ELECTION OF OFFICERS:

In March we decided not to appoint an official Secretary (a position held by Diane Katz prior to her resignation), but to rotate the responsibilities. There is no obligation under the Ethics and Disclosure Law to have a secretary, but we were required to elect the chair, and we re-elected Allison Dodd and Neil Ratner as Co-Chairs.

VOLUNTEER DAY, AUGUST 2015:

Several members attended the Town's Volunteer day

ANNUAL DISCLOSURE FORMS:

Performed review of annual disclosure forms.

ETHICS INQUIRIES:

Cases 2015-1: The inquiry was resolved without any involvement from the Town Board.

ETHICS LAW UPDATES:

During 2015, the Ethics Committee concluded our comprehensive review of the Ethics Law, not only addressing the changes suggested by the Town Supervisor and Town Board, but also other provisions in light of the Ethics Board's experience and best practices. These recommendations were submitted on June 14, 2015. To date, while an individual Town Board Member has attended Ethics Board meetings to ask questions and express views, we have not received any response from the Town Board itself to our recommendations.

CONTINUED RECOMMENDATIONS:

The Ethics Board wants to help ensure that all new and ongoing Town officers and employees are familiar with the requirements of the Ethics and Disclosure Law. We believe that there are procedural enhancements that can be made to help ensure that information reaches these individuals in a more effective manner and that the individuals can complete the appropriate forms in a more timely manner.

- **Ethics Information Upon Assuming Office.** Currently, pursuant to Section 71-13B of the Ethics and Disclosure Law “[e]very Town officer or employee elected or appointed . . . shall be furnished a copy of those provisions [of the Ethics and Disclosure Law] within 10 days of entering upon the duties of his/her position.” (Emphasis added.) In addition, the same section requires “[t]hese individuals [to] sign stating that they have read and understand the ethics law.” Further, Section 71-B7(2) further requires that individuals must file their Annual Disclosure form within 30 days of taking office.
To help ensure that all new officers and employees are familiar with the Ethics and Disclosure Law, and to facilitate the completion and filing of these documents, we recommend:
 - (1) that the Annual Disclosure Form be revised to include the website address for the Ethics and Disclosure Law and to include a place for the individual to sign and acknowledge that they have read and understand the Ethics and Disclosure Law;
 - (2) that the Town Clerk provide this enhanced Annual Disclosure form to individuals upon taking the oath of office and encourage them to sign and return it within 10 days of assuming office; and
 - (3) that, upon request, the Town Clerk make available for review a copy of the Ethics and Disclosure Law (especially for those who may not have ready access to the online version of the Law).
- **Ethics Information and Acknowledgment on an Annual Basis.** Further, pursuant to Section 71-B(3), Town officers and employees are required to fill out and file an Annual Disclosure Form no later than January 31 of each year. To help ensure that officers and employees are familiar with the provisions of the Ethics and Disclosure Law on an ongoing basis, we continue to recommend the changes to the Annual Disclosure form noted above (including the website and a place to acknowledge having read and understood the law), and that all officers and employees sign and acknowledge that they have read and understood the Ethics and Disclosure Law on an annual basis when they submit their Annual Disclosure Form.
- The Ethics Board would be pleased to work with the Town and Town Attorney on additional training and educational materials, but we believe that the *full* Ethics and Disclosure Law should be made available to all new and ongoing Town officers and employees, as simply providing selected provisions of the Law may result in confusion and error.

2015 Meetings:

The Ethics Board scheduled nine meetings and met five times during 2015 (March 9, May 11, June 8, September 14, November 23) based on business need.

Respectfully submitted,

2015 Woodstock Ethics Board