

## TOWN OF WOODSTOCK ETHICS BOARD 2014 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 2014 annual report.

### **Members:**

Allison Dodd - Serving 3 year term (2013, 2014, 2015)

Neil Ratner, MD - Appointed September 2013. Completing term expiring December 31, 2014  
September 2014

Paul Washington - Appointed June 2014: Completing term expiring December 31, 2015

James Huben - Appointed June 2014: Completing term expiring December 31, 2016

Diane Katz - Appointed March 2014: Completing term expiring December 31, 2016

In March 2014, Diane Katz was elected secretary. At this meeting, Allison Dodd and Neil Ratner were elected Co-Chairs.

### **Volunteer Day August 16, 2014:**

Several members attended the Town's Volunteer day

### **"Form for Complaints and Requests for Advisory Opinions":**

Developed "Form for Complaints and Requests for Advisory Opinions," which is currently available at the Town office and on-line.

### **Annual Disclosure Forms:**

Performed review of annual disclosure forms. Did we have any violations? Present recommended modifications.

### **Ethics Inquiries:**

Cases 2014-1, 2014-2, 2014-3, 2014-4. All inquiries were resolved without any involvement from the Town Board. However, several cases were quite involved and required extensive research including opinions from the Town Attorney.

### **Ethics Law Updates:**

During 2014, the Ethics Board discussed potential changes to the Ethics and Disclosure Law. This review is continuing into 2015. To date, the review has focused on the changes submitted by the Town Board, but it has also included considering other suggestions including those for potential recommendations we reviewed proposed changes submitted by the Town Supervisor, those outlined in Town of Woodstock Ethics Board's 2013 Annual Report, as well as official and unofficial recommendations from the Town Board, Town Attorney, other government agencies, and research information obtained from current and past Ethic Board members (including reviewing the Model Code of Ethics for Local Governments, published by the Office of the State Comptroller), and the Ethics Board's own experience during the past year. The Ethics Board plans to present its recommendations to the Town Board as soon as its review is complete in 2015.

### **Other 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-B(3B) of the Ethics and Disclosure Law ("every 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-B(7)(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/Acknowledgment on an Annual Basis.** Further, pursuant to Section 71-B(3), 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 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. As the Law requires, it provides the Ethics Law to all applicable individuals, we recommend that an acknowledgement be made by all individual that the Ethics Law applies to that they have reviewed the Ethics Law prior to taking their position.

#### 2104 Meetings:

The Ethics Board met 10 times during 2014: March 21, 24, 31; June 16, 24; August 19; September 8, 29; October 20; November 10; December 8, 22.

Respectfully submitted,

2014 Woodstock Ethics Board