

TOWN OF WOODSTOCK ETHICS BOARD 2023 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 2023 annual report:

CURRENT MEMBERS AS OF FEBRUARY 5, 2023:

Allison Dodd - Serving 3-year term (2022-24)
Paul Washington – Serving 3-year term (2022-24)
Neil Ratner – Serving 3-year term (2024-26)
Iris York – Serving 3-year term (2023-25)

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 2023.

ANNUAL DISCLOSURE FORMS:

The Ethics Board performed its review of disclosure forms. The Ethics Board is pleased to report that the vast majority of Town Employees submitted disclosure forms. We are also pleased to note that all Town Board members submitted completed forms this year and several employees who did not submit forms in 2022 did so in 2023.

Attached as Appendix A to this report is the list of Town employees from whom the Ethics Board did not receive disclosure forms during the year, but who were requested to do so. We note that it is possible that the employees submitted forms, but that they could have been lost in the mail or otherwise inadvertently misplaced during the process of reaching the Ethics Board. There are several employees, however, from whom we did not receive forms in either 2022 or 2023. The Town Board may wish to take into account a repeated failure to submit forms by volunteers when considering the reappointment of these individuals to Town committees, boards, and commissions..

ETHICS INQUIRIES:

The Ethics Board received 12 cases during 2023. As of the date of this report, the Ethics Board has resolved [seven] of those cases with a determination that no potential violation of the Ethics Law occurred; we referred three cases to the Town Board pursuant to Section 71-8C(6) of the Ethics Law having determined that there was reasonable cause to conclude that there was a violation of the Ethics Law; and [two] cases are still outstanding.

ETHICS LAW UPDATES:

In 2023 there were no changes to the Ethics Law, which was last updated in December 2022. The Ethics Board has adopted new procedures to implement the Ethics Law. While the Ethics Law does not require the Ethics Board to investigate potential disclosures that appear on the forms submitted by

Town employees, the Ethics Board will do so in the future to help ensure that any issues raised on those forms are addressed promptly.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

As noted in our reports to the Town Board for the past **five** years (2018, 2019, 2020, 2021, and 2022), the Ethics Board receives complaints alleging conduct that did not violate the Ethics and Disclosure Law, but that may violate the Town's Employment Practices Compliance Handbook (the "Handbook").

As we have repeatedly suggested, we strongly encourage the Town to provide training on both the Handbook and the Ethics Law not only to paid employees, but also to those who serve voluntarily on Town boards, committees, and commissions. This training should explain the different types of conduct covered by the Handbook and the Ethics Law, and the processes for reporting violations of each. As we have stated in the past, the Ethics Board stands ready to work with the Town in developing and assisting in providing this training, which should include specific examples drawn from prior Ethics Board decisions.

We also received a number of complaints this year alleging harassing, intimidating, or otherwise inappropriate conduct by elected Town officials. We have neither investigated nor reached any conclusions regarding the veracity of these allegations because this type of conduct falls outside the scope of the Ethics Law. When engaged in by elected Town officials, however, this type of conduct also falls outside the scope of the Handbook, which explicitly excludes elected Town officials. Thus, the Town Board may wish to consider adopting a general code of conduct that applies to itself and to other elected Town officials.

2023 MEETINGS:

The Ethics Board met nine times during 2023: January 23, February 27, April 7, May 22, July 3, September 26, November 6, November 27, and December 11.

Respectfully submitted by the Woodstock Ethics Board – February 5, 2024

APPENDIX A to 2023 Annual Report of the Ethics Board

Comeau Stewardship Advisory Committee
Marilyn St. John

Commission for Civic Design
Joan Elliott (form also not received for 2022)
Geoff Hardin (form also not received for 2022)
Piotr Worokowicz

Complete Streets Committee
Rahm Rechtshaffen

Housing Committee
Laura Warren

Human Rights Commission
Elwin Cuevas

Planning Board
Brian Normoyle

Senior Recreation Committee
Daisy Furth (form also not received for 2022)
Agnes Tomaselli (form also not received for 2022)
Diana Wilkinson (form also not received for 2022)

Zoning Revision Committee
Dave Menzies
Conor Wenk (form also not received for 2022)

Town Dispatch
Tammy-Lynn Williams

Police
Trevor Bailey
Cheryl Benjamin
Tiffany Crozier
Noah Kight
Denis Lyman
Patricia Vincent

Water/Sewer
Chris Maragoudakis