



Camden, Ohio  
— ESTABLISHED IN 1818 —

# **ELECTED OFFICIALS CODE OF CONDUCT**

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Adopted by Council Resolution Dated August 1, 2024

## **Purpose of Camden's Code of Conduct**

Under the authority of Ohio Revised Code Section 731.45, Council for the Village of Camden has adopted this Code of Conduct for its Elected Officials (i.e., the Mayor and all Councilmembers) to assure public confidence in the integrity of local government and its effective operation.

## **ETHICS**

1. **Act in the Public Interest.** Recognition and stewardship of the public interest must be all elected officials' primary concern. They should work for the common good of the people of Camden and not for any private or personal interest and assure fair and equal treatment of all persons, claims and transactions coming before them.
2. **Comply with both the spirit and the letter of the Law and Village Policy.** All elected officials shall comply with the laws of the nation, the State of Ohio and the Village of Camden in the performance of their public duties. These laws include, but are not limited to: the United States Constitution, the Ohio Constitution, the Ohio Revised Code, included. but not limited to, Ohio Sunshine Law, Open Meetings Act, and Ethics Laws; the Village's codified ordinances and resolutions; and any other Village legislative policies.
3. **Conduct of Elected Officials.** All elected officials shall refrain from abusive conduct, personal charges or verbal attacks upon the character or motives of other any other elected official, as well as the Village's administration, staff and employees, including those members of the public who attend meetings of the Village Council.
4. **Conduct at Public Meetings.** The Mayor and all Councilmembers shall prepare themselves for public issues; be courteous and attentive to all public discussions; and focus on the business at hand. They shall refrain from interrupting other speakers, making personal comments not germane to the business of Council; attempt to monopolize the discussion or otherwise interfere with the orderly conduct of public meetings.
5. **Decisions Based on Merit.** The Mayor and Councilmembers shall base their decisions on the merits and substance of the matter at hand, rather than on unrelated personal bias or other considerations.
6. **Communication.** The Mayor and Councilmembers shall publicly disclose relevant and substantive information to a matter under public consideration.
7. **Confidential Information.** The Mayor and Councilmembers shall respect the confidentiality of information concerning property, personnel or legal affairs of the Village. They shall not disclose confidential information or information

discussed during an Executive Session of Village Council without proper legal authorization, nor use such information to advance their personal, financial, political or other private interests. Disclosure of confidential discussions taking place in Executive Session is prohibited under Ohio's Ethics Code for public officials and may constitute a criminal offense.

8. **Advocacy.** The Mayor and Councilmembers shall represent the official policies and positions of the Village of Camden Council to the best of their ability when designated for that purpose. However, when presenting their individual opinions or positions, rather than those of the Village, they shall explicitly state that such opinions or positions do not represent the Village of Camden, nor shall they allow such inference be made that they do.
9. **Policy Role of Council.** The Mayor and Councilmembers shall respect and adhere to the mayor-council government system. Councilmembers shall not interfere with the administrative functions of the Village or the professional duties of Village staff; nor shall they impair the ability of staff to implement Council's policy decisions.
10. **Use of Public Resources.** The Mayor and Councilmembers shall not use public resources not available to the public, such as staff time, equipment, supplies, or facilities, for private gain, personal or political purposes. If the Mayor or a councilmember wants to use such public resources for a legitimate public purpose, they shall first obtain permission from a majority of Councilmembers at a regularly scheduled Council meeting.
11. **Representation of Private Interest.** Neither the Mayor nor any Councilmember shall appear before Council; a committee, board, or commission organized by the Village; or before any other official proceeding of the Village, acting on behalf of the private interests of third parties.

## **CONDUCT**

All Councilmembers have equal votes. Councilmembers shall treat each other with equal respect. Therefore, no ranking or pecking order shall be established for predetermining the order of roll-call votes. All Councilmembers shall:

1. Fully participate in Council meetings and other public forums while demonstrating respect, kindness, consideration and courtesy to others;
2. Prepare in advance of Council meetings and be familiar with issues on the agenda;
3. The Council shall select a Councilmember to represent the Village at ceremonial functions;
4. Be respectful of other people's time. Stay focused and act efficiently during public meetings;
5. Serve as a model of leadership and civility to the Village;

6. Provide contact information to the Clerk of Council in case of an emergency or urgent situation;
7. Demonstrate honesty and integrity in every action and statement;
8. Not involve themselves in the day to day running of the Village;
9. Work constructively with the Mayor acknowledging their separate roles;
10. Recognize that the Village staff do not work under the instruction of individual Councilmembers;
11. Participate in scheduled activities to increase team effectiveness when able; and
12. Review Council Rules and Procedures, including this Code of Conduct, at least every year.

### **Conduct with One Another**

Council is comprised of individuals with a wide variety of backgrounds, personalities, values, opinions and goals who have chosen to serve in a public office in order to preserve and protect the present and future of the community. The common goal should be acknowledged even though individuals may “agree to disagree” on some issues.

Councilmembers shall not disparage any other Councilmember. Councilmembers shall not, at any time, directly or indirectly, make, publish, or communicate to any person or entity or in any public forum any defamatory or disparaging remarks, comments, or statements concerning Council business or any other Councilmember.

### **Conduct During Public Meetings**

Council shall refer to one another formally during public meetings.

### **Civility and Decorum in Discussions and Debate**

Difficult questions, challenges to a particular point of view and criticism of ideas and information are legitimate elements of a free democracy in action. This does not allow, however, for the Mayor or Councilmembers to make belligerent, personal, impertinent, slanderous, threatening, abusive or disparaging comments to other Councilmembers, the Mayor, Village staff, or the public. No shouting or physical actions that may be construed as threatening will be tolerated.

Council has 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.

### **Private Encounters**

Continue respectful behavior in private. The same level of respect and consideration of differing points of view that is deemed appropriate for public discussion should be maintained in private conversations related to Village business.

Written notes, voicemails and emails should be treated as potentially a public record.

Elected officials are always on display – their actions, mannerisms and language are monitored by people around them who they may not know.

### **Private Social Media Usage**

The Mayor and Councilmembers shall not use any private social media accounts to discuss Village business. This includes, but is not limited to, discussing or opining on matters that involve business that has been, or is scheduled to be, before Council. In addition, the business of the Village of Camden shall never be conducted via email between the Mayor and/or Councilmembers. Furthermore, no posting of private information or private advertisement shall appear on the Village's Facebook or other social media accounts, without prior approval of Council.

### **Conduct with Mayor and Staff**

Governance of the Village relies on the cooperative efforts of elected officials. Council provides direction and makes decisions in the best interest of Camden's citizens by making and following policy, passing ordinances and resolutions, and approving appropriations. The Mayor is elected by the Village and heads the Council, although the Mayor does not vote except to break a tie vote of Council. 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.

Councilmembers shall treat staff as professional through clear, honest communication that respects the abilities, experience and dignity of each individual. Poor behavior toward staff will not be tolerated.

The Mayor and all Councilmembers shall never publicly criticize an individual employee, or express concerns about the performance of a Village employee in public to the employee directly or to their manager. Comments about staff performance should only be made to their manager through private correspondence or conversation.

Council shall not get involved in administrative functions or attempt to influence Village staffing situations including but not limited to, making of appointments, awarding contracts, selecting consultants, making promises to contractors of developers.

### **Conduct with the Village Solicitor**

The Village Solicitor acts as the legal advisor to and attorney for the Village. Councilmembers may only solicit legal advice from the Village Solicitor after receiving approval by the Mayor or by an approval vote of two thirds of Council.

### **Conduct with the Fiscal Officer Relating to Public Records Requests**

In recognition of the fact that the Fiscal Officer has full-time job responsibilities in addition to being the Village's designated first responder to public records requests (PRRs), all PRRs coming to the Village from one of its elected officials seeking more than a copy of a few discrete, specified records, shall first be presented to Council for review and discussion. Any PRR found by a vote of Council to be overly broad and abusive, or motivated by personal rather than legitimate public reasons, shall be withdrawn.

For voluminous PRRs submitted by an elected official, Council shall appoint the Fiscal Officer to interview/select an outside vending firm to review and copy the responsive records, with the bill for the vendor's services, as well as the cost of copying, to be paid for by the elected official that submitted the PRR.

This procedure is in addition to, and not to be construed as a limitation on, all other rights and duties of the Village under Ohio's Public Records statute (Ohio Revised Code Section 149.43) in response to a PRR.

### **Conduct with the Public**

Councilmembers should:

1. Make the public feel welcomed. No signs of partiality, prejudice, or disrespect should be evident on the part of individual Councilmembers towards individuals participating in a public forum. Every effort should be made to be fair and impartial;
2. Be welcoming to speakers;
3. Not turn away any speaker unless he or she exhibits inappropriate behavior;
4. Give the appearance of active listening;
5. Be aware of facial expressions especially those that could be interpreted as disbelief, anger or boredom;
6. Refrain from texting or other cellular functions during a public meeting; and
7. Not engage in personal attacks of any kind, under any circumstances. Councilmembers should be aware that their body language and tone of voice, as well as the words they use, can appear to be intimidating or aggressive.

### **Unofficial Setting**

Councilmembers shall not:

1. Make promises on behalf of Council, other Councilmembers, or the Village. It is appropriate to give a brief overview of Village policy. It is inappropriate for a Councilmember to overtly or implicitly promise Council action or to promise staff will do something specific.
2. Make personal comments about other Councilmembers. It is acceptable to disagree with an issue but is unacceptable to make derogatory comments about other members or staff, their opinions, and actions.

### **Conduct with Other Public Agencies**

The Mayor and all Councilmembers shall avoid misrepresenting the views or position of the Village to other local governments or public agencies. When representing the views or positions of the Village, the Mayor and all Councilmembers shall support and advocate the official Village position on an issue, not a personal viewpoint.

### **Conduct with the Media**

The Mayor and Councilmembers are sometimes contacted by the media for background or comment. The best advice is to never go “off the record” or speak without proper attribution. Words that are not said cannot be quoted. The Mayor and Councilmembers should choose words carefully and cautiously. Comments taken out of context can cause problems. Be especially cautious about humor, sarcasm or word play. It is never appropriate to use personal slurs or swear words when talking with the media.

### **Behavior and Conduct**

This Code of Conduct expresses standards of conduct expected for all elected officials for the Village of Camden. Individual elected officials have the primary responsibility to ensure that these standards are understood and met so that the Village community can continue to have full confidence in the integrity of governance.

### **Penalties**

Any elected official who intentionally and repeatedly fails to comply with the Code of Conduct may be reprimanded or censured by Council, removed by Council from committee assignments within the Village or with other local governmental agencies, and/or barred from attending Council meetings until compliance has been restored.

The Mayor or any Councilmember may point out any elected official violating this Code of Conduct in writing or by email sent to the Village Solicitor. If the offense(s) continue(s) or is a serious breach of this Code of Conduct, the matter shall be placed on the Executive Session meeting agenda, with the Village Solicitor present thereat, to discuss the nature of the complaint and offending conduct, as well as to present any recommendation designed to restore compliance with the Code of Conduct.

Under the authority of Ohio Revised Code Section 731.45, Council may punish, or expel from attending public meetings, any Councilmember for disorderly conduct or repeated, chronic or serious violations of the Village’s Code of Conduct. Council may also declare any Councilmember’s seat vacant for absence without valid excuse, where such absence has continued for two or more months. No expulsion from attending public meetings, or declaration of a Councilmember seat as being vacant without valid excuse, shall occur without the concurrence of at least two-thirds (2/3<sup>rd</sup>) vote of all Councilmembers after the offending or absent

Councilmember has first been notified of the charge against him or her, and has an opportunity to be heard.

Under the authority of Ohio Revised Code Section 731.43, when the seat of a Councilmember of the Village becomes vacant, the vacancy shall be filled by a majority vote of Council for the unexpired term, or, if Council fails within thirty days to fill such vacancy, by appointment by the Mayor for the unexpired term.

Violations of this Code of Conduct may also result in a complaint filed by the Village, acting upon vote of Council, with the Ohio Ethics Commission.

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**THE CODE OF CONDUCT FOR CAMDEN IS ADOPTED BY RESOLUTION OF COUNCIL. A COPY OF THE CODE OF CONDUCT, AND ANY SUBSEQUENT MODIFICATION THERETO, SHALL BE PROVIDED TO ALL ELECTED OFFICIALS AT THEIR FIRST AVAILABLE PUBLIC MEETING OF COUNCIL, AND DISSEMINATION THEREOF SHALL BE REFLECTED IN THE MINUTES OF THE MEETING.**

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