

# **CITY OF SPOKANE ETHICS COMMISSION POLICY AND PROCEDURES MANUAL**

## **RULE 1 – GENERAL PRINCIPLES**

### **1.1 PURPOSE**

It is the purpose of the City of Spokane Ethics Commission (“Commission”) in adopting this policy and procedure manual to provide a method of conduct for its meetings, hearings and other activities. This policy and procedural manual shall not conflict with the City’s Code of Ethics contained in Chapter 1.04A SMC. In the event of a conflict, the Code of Ethics shall prevail.

### **1.2 ROBERT’S RULES OF ORDER**

Matters of procedure not otherwise provided for herein shall, insofar as practical, be determined by reference to Robert’s Rules of Order, Newly Revised.

## **Rule 2. Meetings**

**2.1 Scheduling and Announcement of Meetings.** The Ethics Commission shall schedule and announce its meet times consistent with City policy and the Open Public Meetings Act, Chapter RCW 42.30.

**2.2 Quorum- Voting.** Four members of the Commission shall constitute a quorum for transaction of business. A simple majority of the quorum is necessary to take action, other than action by the Commission in determining and issuing its written findings and conclusions regarding a complaint, inquiry or request for an advisory opinion, which shall require four affirmative votes of the Commission members present for the meeting.

**2.3. Meetings.** Regularly scheduled Commission meetings shall be held on the third Wednesday in March, June, September and December beginning at 4:00. P.M. Meetings shall be held in the Briefing Center located in the basement level of City Hall, W. 808 Spokane Falls Blvd.

A regular meeting may be cancelled or rescheduled or a special meeting scheduled at the direction of the chairperson consistent with the Open Public Meeting Act. All meetings of the Ethics Commission shall be open to the public.

**2.4 Agenda.** The chairperson shall prepare the meeting agenda with the assistance of City staff.

**2.5 Telephonic Participation.** Other than meetings to consider and decide complaints regarding violations of the Code of Ethics, Commission members may participate in meetings by phone with prior approval of the chairperson.

**2.6 Recusal.** Commission members who have a conflict regarding a specific complaint shall recusal himself or herself from hearing that complaint but shall remain a member of the Commission.

### **Rule 3. Commission Membership and Staff**

**3.1 Appointment and Terms.** Commission members' appointments and terms shall be in accordance with SMC 1.04A.080.

**3.2 Chairperson.** The Commission members shall elect a chair and vice-chair who shall serve for one year and may be reappointed by the Commission for one additional term.

**3.3 Restrictions on Commission Members.** Commission members are subject to certain restrictions relating to their employment and political activities as set forth in SMC 1.04A.130.

**3.4 Staff Director.** The staff director appointed by the City Attorney pursuant to SMC 1.04A.080 C shall assist the Commission, its chairperson and other assigned staff with its duties and obligations set forth in Chapter 1.04A SMC. As part of the employee training process under SMC 1.04A.120, the staff director may assist individual employees or officials with specific questions regarding compliance with the Code of Ethics that pertain to the employee or official. The staff director shall not provide direction or guidance to ethical issues related to allegations against employees or officials but shall direct those complaints to the Commission.

### **Rule 4. Complaint Process**

**4.1 Filing of Complaints.** Complaints shall be filed with the Commission chairperson or with the staff person assigned to assist the Commission pursuant to the process set forth in SMC 1.04A.100 and within the time period set forth in SMC 1.04A.150. Complaints must be written, signed under declaration by the complainant and directed to the Commission. The complaint shall set forth the facts which the complainant believes substantiates a violation of the Code of Ethics and which provisions of the code the complainant believes were violated.

Within five business days of the filing of the complaint with the Commission, the Chairperson, or his or her designee, shall inform the complainant that the Commission has received the complaint and shall provide a copy of the complaint to the employee or official (hereinafter referred to as the respondent) identified in the complaint as having violated the Code of Ethics.

**4.2 Recording of Complaints.** Upon receipt, complaints shall be assigned a reference number. The Commission shall maintain and keep current for public inspection a status sheet which shall contain with respect to each complaint: its reference number, the date received by the Commission, the name of the complainant, the name of the respondent, and its present status, including the date of any scheduled hearings.

#### **4.3 Adjudication Process**

(1) The Commission shall request an initial written response to the complaint from the respondent, which shall be filed with the Commission at least ten business days before the Commission holds an initial meeting to review the complaint. The initial response shall pertain to whether the complaint should be dismissed pursuant to SMC 1.04A.110 D. 1. a. –g. and shall not address the merits of the complaint.

(2) Within thirty calendar days of the receipt of the complaint by the Commission, the Commission shall schedule an initial meeting to review the complaint in order to make a determination consistent with SMC 1.04A.110 D.

(3) If the Commission determines the complaint alleges facts which, if found to be true by a preponderance of the evidence, would be sufficient to constitute a violation of the Code of Ethics, it shall meet with the respondent to create a stipulation resolving the complaint, the determination of compliance and the penalty, if any, to be imposed consistent with SMC 1.04A.110 E. Such meeting shall be open to the public.

**4.4 Complaint Hearing Process.** Complaints that are not resolved through adjudication under SMC 1.04A.110 D or the stipulation process under SMC 1.04A.E, shall proceed to an investigation process pursuant to SMC 1.04A.110 F.

#### **4.5 Notice of Hearing and Respondent's Answer**

(1) The Commission shall provide notice of the public hearing to the complainant and the respondent.

(2) The notice shall include the Commission's determination regarding jurisdiction and the factual allegations, as well as the date, time and place for the hearing. The notice shall provide that the respondent shall be entitled to appear in person or otherwise, with or without counsel, submit testimony, be fully heard, and present and cross-examine witnesses.

(3) The respondent may file a written answer to the complaint with the Commission any time after receipt of the complaint but not later than ten business days prior to the hearing date.

(4) Notice of the hearing shall be provided to all parties no less than fourteen day before the hearing date, unless the parties stipulate otherwise.

#### **4.6 Conduct of Hearings**

(1) Hearings shall be conducted consistent with SMC 1.04A.110.F. – K.

(2) All hearings conducted under this section are open to the public. The Commission's deliberations on a complaint shall be conducted consistent with SMC 1.04A.100 A. 2, the Open Public Meeting Act and other applicable regulations.

(3) The respondent shall be a party to the hearing and permitted to testify before the Commission. All parties involved in the complaint are prohibited from ex parte communication with the Commission. Neither the complainant nor any other person shall have special standing to participate or intervene in the investigation or consideration of the complaint by the Commission beyond that which is permitted by Chapter 1.04A SMC.

(4) The Commission decides issues before it based upon the preponderance of the evidence standard. That is, a violation must be more likely than not to have occurred before the Commission will hold for the complainant. The Commission shall rely, for its ultimate decision, upon evidence, whether or not technically admissible into evidence in a court of law, on which a reasonably prudent person would base significant decisions affecting his or her person or business.

#### **4.7 Prehearing Conferences**

(1) In any proceeding, the Commission on its own motion or upon request by a party or their authorized representative may direct the parties to appear at a specified time and place for a conference to consider:

- (a) Simplification of issues;
- (b) The necessity of amendments to the hearing notice;
- (c) The possibility of obtaining stipulations, admissions of facts and of documents;
- (d) Limitation on the number of witnesses; and

(e) Procedural and such other matters as may aid in the disposition of the proceeding.

(2) Following the prehearing conference, the chairperson shall issue an order reciting the action taken and decisions made at the conference.

(3) The format of the Prehearing Order shall be substantially the same in format and content as the specimen prehearing order attached as Exhibit "A" to these Rules.

#### **Rule 5. Procedures Applicable to Advisory Opinions**

The Commission shall issue advisory opinions upon request with regard to the application of the Code of Ethics pursuant to Chapter 1.04A.170 SMC and the rules adopted under the chapter. The following procedures apply to requests for advisory opinions:

(1) Requests for advisory opinions may be made by any person subject to the Code of Ethics. A request must be stated hypothetically unless the individual requests a specific opinion concerning his or her own conduct and situation. Requests must be written, signed, and directed to the chair of the Commission. Requests shall supply such information as the Commission requires enabling it to issue the opinion.

(2) Within five business days of the filing of the request for an advisory opinion with the Commission, the Chairperson, or his or her designee, shall inform the party filing the request that the Commission has received the request and of any subsequent meeting.

(3) The Commission shall within sixty calendar days either:

- (a) Issue a written advisory opinion; or
- (b) notify the person requesting such opinion that the request is denied and the reason(s) for the denial.

(4) Upon receipt, requests shall be assigned a reference number. The Commission shall maintain and keep current for public inspection a status sheet, which shall contain with respect to each request: Its reference number, the date received by the Commission, and its present status.

(5) The Commission shall make available to the public copies of the status sheets and advisory opinions issued by the Commission.

## **Rule 6 Penalties**

**6.1 Purpose.** The purpose of this rule is to set forth the criteria that the Commission may consider when imposing penalties for a violation of chapter 1.04A SMC.

### **6.2. Criteria for Determining Sanctions.**

In determining the appropriate penalties, including the amount of any civil penalty, the Commission may consider the following factors, as well as other factors, which the Commission may find appropriate in a particular case:

- (1) The monetary cost of the violation, including:
  - (a) The cost of the violation to the City;
  - (b) The value of anything received or sought in the violation;
  - (c) The amount of any damages incurred by the City as a result of the violation;
  - (d) The costs incurred in enforcement, including reasonable investigative costs;
- (2) The nature of the violation, including whether the violation:
  - (a) Was continuing in nature;
  - (b) Was motivated by financial gain;
  - (c) Involved criminal conduct;
  - (d) Impaired a function of the agency;
  - (e) Tended to significantly reduce public respect for or confidence in city government or city government officers or employees;
  - (f) Involved personal gain or special privilege to the violator;
- (3) Aggravating circumstances, including whether the violator:
  - (a) Intentionally committed the violation with knowledge that the conduct constituted a violation;
  - (b) Attempted to conceal the violation prior to the filing of the complaint;
  - (c) Was untruthful or uncooperative in dealing with the Commission or the Commission's staff;
  - (d) Had significant official, management, or supervisory responsibility;
  - (e) Had committed prior violations found by the Commission;
  - (f) Incurred no other sanctions as a result of the violation;
- (4) Mitigating factors, including:

- (a) Prior corrective action taken against the violator;
- (b) Prior recovery of damages to the state;
- (c) The unethical conduct was approved or required by the violator's supervisor or agency;
- (d) The violation was unintentional;
- (e) The violator relied on advice from Commission staff or designated ethics advisers;
- (f) Other mitigating factors deemed relevant by the Commission.

### **6.3. Process for Implementing Decision.**

The Commission may utilize all available procedures to implement its decision including providing a copy of the decision to the appropriate administrative officer or commission or board chairperson.