



Council Relations Policy

“It is vain to dream of a wilderness distant from ourselves.”
- Henry David Thoreau

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RESOLUTION NO. 344-03

A RESOLUTION ADOPTING THE CITY OF NAVASOTA COUNCIL RELATIONS POLICY.

WHEREAS, the Navasota City Council must bear the initial responsibility for the integrity of governance;

WHEREAS, the Council is responsible for its own development, its responsibilities, its own discipline, and its own performance;

WHEREAS, the development of the Council Relations Policy is designed to ensure effective and efficient governance;

WHEREAS, by adopting these guidelines, the Council acknowledges their responsibility to each other, to the City's professional staff, and to the public.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED BY THE CITY COUNCIL OF THE CITY OF NAVASOTA THAT:

The City of Navasota Council Relations Policy are adopted to serve as the guidelines to preserve the values and integrity of representative local government and democracy.

PASSED, APPROVED AND ADOPTED THIS THE 28th DAY OF JULY, 2003.

Patricia M. Gruner, Mayor

ATTEST:

Geraldine Binford, City Secretary

City of Navasota Council Relations Policy

The City Council for the City of Navasota is dedicated to providing democracy to America's doorstep. Opportunities must be created to allow citizens to have a say in their representative government, and this policy addresses the responsibilities the Council has to provide those openings. The City of Navasota Council Relations Policy is designed to make public meetings and the process of governance run more smoothly.

The integrity of the City of Navasota is built on the interaction between elected officials, City employees, and the citizens. The Council Relations Policy is intended to maintain a high level of integrity by providing a protocol for how Councilmembers treat one another, city staff, constituents, and others they come into contact with in representing the City of Navasota. The Council Relations Policy reflects the intentions of the Navasota City Council in defining the behaviors, manners, and courtesies that are suitable for various occasions. It is also designed to make public meetings and the process of governance run more smoothly.

The contents of the Council Relations Policy include:

- Overview of Roles and Responsibilities
- Policies and Protocol Related to Conduct
- Council Relations with One Another
- Council Relations with City Staff
- Council Relations with Boards and Commissions
- Council Relations with the Citizens
- Council Relations with the Media
- Sanctions
- Principles of Proper Conduct
- Glossary of Terms

The constant and consistent theme through all of the conduct guidelines is "respect." Councilmembers experience huge workloads and tremendous stress in making decisions that could impact thousands of lives. Despite these pressures, elected officials are called upon to exhibit appropriate behavior at all times.

Demonstrating respect for each individual through words and actions is the compass that can help guide Councilmembers to do the right thing in even the most difficult situations.

Overview of Roles and Responsibilities

Other resources that are helpful in defining the roles and responsibilities of elected officials can be found in the Navasota City Charter and in the Handbook for Mayors and Councilmembers (Home Rule Cities) published by the Texas Municipal League.

Mayor's Responsibilities

- Serves at the pleasure of the Council
- Acts as the official head of the City for all ceremonial purposes
- Chairs Council meetings
- Recognizes comments from citizens at public meetings
- Calls for special meetings
- Selects substitute for City representation when Mayor cannot attend
- Makes judgment calls on proclamations, special presentations, etc.
- Recommends subcommittees as appropriate for Council approval
- Serves as the liaison between the Council and the City Manager, City Attorney, and Municipal Judge in regards to employee relations
- Leads the Council into an effective, cohesive working team
- Signs documents on behalf of the City
- Works with City Manager to prepare Council agenda

Mayor Pro Tem's Responsibilities

- Serves at the pleasure of the Council
- Performs the duties of Mayor if the Mayor is absent or disabled
- Chairs Council meetings at the request of the Mayor
- Represents the City at ceremonial functions at the request of the Mayor

Councilmembers' Responsibilities

All members of the City Council, including those serving as Mayor and Mayor Pro Tem, have equal votes. No Councilmember has more power than any other Councilmember, and all should be treated with equal respect.

All Councilmembers should:

- Fully participate in City Council meetings and other public forums while demonstrating respect, kindness, consideration, and courtesy to others
- Prepare in advance of Council meetings and be familiar with issues on the agenda
- Represent the City at ceremonial functions at the request of the Mayor
- Be respectful of other people's time. Stay focused and act efficiently during public meetings.
- Serve as a model of leadership and civility to the community
- Inspire public confidence in Navasota government
- Provide contact information with the Navasota Police Department Dispatch Division (936-825-6410) in case an emergency or urgent situation arises while the Councilmember is out of town
- Demonstrate honesty and integrity in every action and statement
- Participate in scheduled activities to increase team effectiveness and review Council procedures, such as this Council Relations Policy

Meeting Chair's Responsibilities

The Mayor will chair official meetings of the City Council, unless the Mayor Pro Tem or another Councilmember is designated as Chair of a specific meeting.

- Maintains order, decorum, and the fair and equitable treatment of all speakers
- Keeps discussion and questions focused on the specific agenda item under consideration

Policies and Protocol Related to Conduct

Reflecting Council Opinions

Councilmembers should remember they speak only for themselves and not other Councilmembers.

Ceremonial Events

Requests for a City representative at ceremonial events will be handled by City staff. The Mayor will serve as the designated City representative. If the Mayor is unavailable, then City staff will determine if event organizers would like another representative from the Council. If yes, then the Mayor will recommend which Councilmember should be asked to serve as a substitute. Invitations received at City Hall are presumed to be for unofficial, personal consideration.

Correspondence Signatures

Councilmembers do not need to acknowledge the receipt of correspondence, or copies of correspondence, during Council meetings. City staff will prepare official letters in response to public inquiries and concerns. These letters will carry the signature of the Mayor unless the Mayor requests that they be signed by another Councilmember or City staff. If correspondence is addressed only to one Councilmember, that Councilmember should check with staff on the best way to respond to the sender.

Endorsement of Candidates

Council members have the right to endorse candidates for all Council seats or other elected offices. It is inappropriate to mention endorsements during Council meetings or other official City meetings.

Public Hearing Protocol

The applicant or appellant shall have the right to speak first. The Chair will determine the length of time allowed for this presentation. Speakers representing either pro or con points of view will be allowed to follow. The Chair will determine how much time will be allowed for each speaker, with 3 to 5 minutes the standard time granted. The applicant or appellant will be allowed to make closing comments. The Chair has the responsibility to run an efficient public meeting and has the discretion to modify the public hearing process in order to make the meeting run smoothly.

Councilmembers will not express opinions during the public hearing portion of the meeting except to ask pertinent questions of the speaker and staff. "I think" and "I feel" comments by Councilmembers are not appropriate until after the close of the public hearing. Councilmembers should refrain from arguing or debating with the public during a public hearing and shall always show respect for different points of view.

Main motions may be followed by amendments, followed by substitute motions. Any Councilmember can call for a point of order. Only Councilmembers who voted on the prevailing side may make motions to reconsider.

Council Relations with One Another

Councils are composed of individuals with a wide variety of backgrounds, personalities, values, opinions, and goals. Despite this diversity, all have chosen to serve in public office in order to preserve and protect the present and the future of the community. In all cases, this common goal should be acknowledged even as Councilmembers may “agree to disagree” on contentious issues.

IN PUBLIC MEETINGS

Practice civility and decorum in discussions and debate

Difficult questions, tough 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, Councilmembers to make belligerent, personal, impertinent, slanderous, threatening, abusive, or disparaging comments. No shouting or physical actions that could be construed as threatening will be tolerated.

Honor the role of the Chair in maintaining order

It is the responsibility of the Chair to keep the comments of Councilmembers on track during public meetings. Councilmembers should honor efforts by the Chair to focus discussion on current agenda items. If there is disagreement about the agenda or the Chair’s actions, those objections should be voiced politely and with reason, following procedures outline in parliamentary procedure.

Avoid personal comments that could offend other Councilmembers

If a Councilmember is personally offended by the remarks of another Councilmember, the offended Councilmember should make notes of the actual words used and call for a “point of personal privilege” that challenges the other Councilmember to justify or apologize for the language used. The Chair will maintain control of this discussion.

Demonstrate effective problem-solving approaches

Councilmembers have 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.

IN 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 discussions should be maintained in private conversations.

Be aware of the insecurity of written notes, voicemail messages, and e-mail

Technology allows words written or said without much forethought to be distributed wide and far. Councilmembers should take into consideration that anything sent out via fax, voicemail, e-mails, or correspondence could be distributed to the media and citizens. Written notes, voicemail messages and e-mail should be treated as potentially “public” communication.

Even private conversations can have a public presence

Elected officials are always on display – their actions, mannerisms, and language are monitored by people around them that they may not know. Lunch table conversations will be eavesdropped upon, parking lot debates will be watched, and casual comments between individuals before and after public meetings noted.

Council Relations with City Staff

Governance of a City relies on the cooperative efforts of elected officials, who set policy, and City staff, who implement and administer the Council's policies. Woodrow Wilson called this the politics-administration dichotomy, but governance of a municipality is really a team effort. Cooperation and mutual respect are essential from each individual for the good of the community.

Treat all staff as professionals

Clear, honest communication that respects the abilities, experience, and dignity of each individual is expected. Poor behavior towards staff is not acceptable.

Limit contact to specific City staff

Questions of City staff and/or requests for additional background information should be directed only to the City Manager, City Attorney, City Secretary, or Department Heads. The City Manager's Office should be copied on any request, except those to the City Attorney.

Requests for follow-up or directions to staff should be made only through the City Manager or the City Attorney when appropriate. When in doubt about what staff contact is appropriate, Councilmembers should ask the City Manager for assistance. Materials supplied to a Councilmember in response to a request will be made available to all members of the Council so that all have equal access to information.

Do not disrupt City staff from their jobs

Councilmembers should not disrupt City staff while they are in meetings, on the phone, or engrossed in performing their job functions in order to have their individual needs met.

Never publicly criticize an individual employee

Council should never express concerns about the performance of a City employee in public, to the employee directly, or to the employee's manager. Comments about staff performance should only be made to the City Manager through private correspondence or conversation.

Do not get involved in administrative functions

Councilmembers must not attempt to influence City staff on the making of appointments, awarding of contracts, selecting of consultants, or granting of City licenses and permits. The Navasota City Charter, Article V, also addresses the role of the City Council in regard to administrative functions.

Check with City staff on correspondence before taking action

Before sending correspondence, Councilmembers should check with City staff to see if an official City response has already been sent or is in progress.

Do not attend meetings with City staff unless requested by staff

Even if the Councilmember does not say anything, the Councilmember's presence implies support, shows partiality, intimidates staff, and hampers staff's ability to do their job objectively.

Do not solicit political support from staff

Councilmembers should not solicit any type of political support (financial contributions, display of posters or lawn signs, name on support list, etc.) from City staff. City staff may, as private citizens with constitutional rights, support political candidates but all such activities must be done away from the workplace.

Council Relations with the Citizens

IN PUBLIC MEETINGS

The Navasota City Council welcomes requests, suggestions, and viewpoints of residents of the City and considers the responsible presentation of these viewpoints as vital to effective municipal government. Councilmembers also recognize their responsibility for proper governance and the need to conduct its business in an orderly and effective manner. The Council therefore establishes the following procedures to receive citizen input during public meetings.

1. Amount of time allocated

The Mayor will be responsible for recognizing any speakers, maintaining proper order, and adhering to any time limit set. Ordinarily, each speaker shall be afforded three to five minutes in which to make their presentation to the Council, with a maximum of twenty minutes for all presentations. Groups of citizens who wish to be heard on the same topic should designate a spokesperson.

2. Protocol for addressing the City Council

There shall be a time designated for the City Council to hear from the public at the beginning of city council meetings held at city hall on the second and fourth Monday of each month. The number of speakers will be limited to the first ten speakers who appear to speak at the meeting. The Mayor or City Council, by a majority vote, reserves the privilege to extend the number of speakers.

If an item on the Council agenda for that meeting provides for a public hearing, the person wishing to make comments on that item shall speak at the time of the public hearing. (See Public Hearing Protocol under Policies and Protocol Relating to Conduct)

Requests to be heard regarding an item(s) on the regular agenda that does not have a public hearing should be made to the City Secretary prior to that item. A “request to speak” form, provided by the City, requesting to be heard regarding a specific agenda item(s) shall contain the citizen’s name, address, telephone number, and subject agenda item(s) number, which the speaker wishes to address. The form can be picked up at City Hall or in the Council Chambers, and must be turned in to the City Secretary prior to the item being addressed.

Speakers shall address the Council from the podium where a microphone insures that the audience can hear the speaker and a record of all comments may be made. If a speaker asks a question during the time designated for public comment under this policy, a council member may give specific factual information or a recitation of existing policy to the speaker. Any comment or discussion by any Councilmember about the subject of the inquiry shall only be made at the time the subject is scheduled for consideration on the Council agenda (Government Code 551.042).

3. Protocol for dealing with requests made by citizens

Citizens with specific requests should first discuss them with the City Manager or City staff. The Council will consider requests that remain unresolved after being addressed through proper administration channels. Citizens who have not attempted to resolve situations at lower levels will be directed to the City Manager.

4. Protocol regarding complaints against City personnel

Negative comments regarding City personnel by name or title may not be made in open session (due to confidentiality provisions contained in the Texas Public Information Act and other state and federal laws).

Specific complaints regarding municipal employees may be taken up with the employee's supervisor or City Manager.

Disruption of meetings by word or actions of any person may result in removal from the meeting by law enforcement officials.

IN UNOFFICIAL SETTINGS

Make no promises on behalf of the Council

Councilmembers will frequently be asked to explain a Council action or give their opinion about an issue as they meet and talk with constituents in the community. It is appropriate to give a brief overview of City policy and to refer to City staff for further information. It is inappropriate to overtly or implicitly promise Council action, or to promise City staff will do something specific (fix a pothole, remove a library book, plant new flowers in the median, etc.)

Make no personal comments about other Councilmembers

It is acceptable to publicly disagree about an issue, but it is unacceptable to make derogatory comments about other Councilmembers, their opinions and actions.

Remember that Navasota is a small town

Councilmembers are constantly being observed by the community every day that they serve in office. Their behaviors and comments serve as models for proper behavior in the City of Navasota. Honesty and respect for the dignity of each individual should be reflected in every word and action taken by Councilmembers, 24 hours a day, seven days a week. It is a serious and continuous responsibility.

Council Relations with Other Public Agencies

Be clear about representing the city or personal interests

If a Councilmember appears before another governmental agency or organization to give a statement on an issue, the Councilmember must clearly state: 1) if his or her statement reflects personal opinion or is the official stance of the City; 2) whether this is the majority or minority opinion of the Council.

If the Councilmember is representing the City, the Councilmember must support and advocate the official City position on an issue, not a personal viewpoint.

If the Councilmember is representing another organization whose position is different from the City, the Councilmember should withdraw from voting on the issue if it significantly impacts or is detrimental to the City's interest. Councilmembers should be clear about which organizations they represent and inform the Mayor and Council of their involvement.

Correspondence also should be equally clear about representation

City letterhead may be used when the Councilmember is representing the City and the City's official position. A copy of official correspondence should be given to the City Secretary to be filed as part of the permanent public record.

It is best that City letterhead not be used for correspondence of Councilmembers representing a personal point of view, or a dissenting point of view from an official Council position. However, should Councilmembers use City letterhead to express a personal opinion, the official City position must be stated clearly so the reader understands the difference between the official City position and the minor viewpoint of the Councilmember.

Council Relations with Boards and Commissions

The City has established several boards and commissions as a means of gathering more community input. Citizens who serve on boards and commissions become more involved in government and serve as advisors to the City Council. They are a valuable resource to the City's leadership and should be treated with appreciation and respect.

If attending a board or commission meeting, be careful to only express personal opinions
Councilmembers may attend any board or commission meeting, which are always open to any member of the public. However, they should be sensitive to the way their participation – especially if it is on behalf of an individual, business or developer – could be viewed as unfairly affecting the process. Any public comments by a Councilmember at a board or commission meeting should be clearly made as individual opinion and not a representation of the feelings of the entire City Council.

Limit contact with board and commission members to questions of clarification

It is inappropriate for a Councilmember to contact a board or commission member to lobby on behalf of an individual, business, or developer. It is acceptable for Councilmembers to contact board or commission members in order to clarify a position taken by the board or commission.

Remember that boards and commissions serve the community, not individual Councilmembers

The City Council appoints individuals to serve on boards and commissions, and it is the responsibility of boards and commissions to follow policy established by the Council. But board and commission members do not report to individual Councilmembers, nor should Councilmembers feel they have the power or right to threaten board and commission members with removal if they disagree about an issue. Appointment and re-appointment to a board or commission should be based on such criteria as expertise, ability to work with staff and the public, and commitment to fulfilling official duties. A board or commission appointment should not be used as a political “reward.”

Be respectful of diverse opinions

A primary role of boards and commissions is to represent many points of view in the community and to provide the Council with advice based on a full spectrum of concerns and perspectives. Councilmembers may have a closer working relationship with some individuals serving on boards and commissions, but must be fair and respectful of all citizens serving on boards and commissions.

Keep political support away from public forums

Board and commission members may offer political support to a Councilmember, but not in a public forum while conducting official duties. Conversely, Councilmembers may support board and commission members who are running for office, but not in an official forum in their capacity as a Councilmember.

Inappropriate behavior can lead to removal

Inappropriate behavior by a board or commission member should be noted to the Mayor, and the Mayor should counsel the offending member. If inappropriate behavior continues, the Mayor should bring the situation to the attention of the Council and the individual is subject to removal from the board or commission.

Council Relations with the Media

The media (newspapers, radio, television, etc.) frequently contacts Councilmembers for information and quotes.

The best advice for dealing with the media is to never go “off the record”

Most members of the media represent the highest levels of journalistic integrity and ethics, and can be trusted to keep their word. But one bad experience can be catastrophic. Words that are not said cannot be quoted.

The Mayor is the official spokesperson for the representative on City positions

The Mayor is the designated representative of the Council to present and speak on the official City position. If the media contacts an individual Councilmember, the Councilmember should be clear about whether their comments represent the official City position or a personal viewpoint.

All City press releases should go through the City Manager’s Office for distribution

The City Manager’s Office maintains up-to-date contact information for all local media outlets that cover Navasota. In order to insure that all media outlets are treated fairly, news releases should be submitted to the City Manager’s Office for review and distribution coordination. Some items may be best handled as a "media advisory" or a feature story suggestion. Other items may be best handled as correspondence to a particular group.

Choose words carefully and cautiously

Comments taken out of context can cause problems. Be especially cautious about humor, sardonic asides, sarcasm, or word play. It is never appropriate to use personal slurs or swear words when talking with the media.

Remember the media lives by a tight deadline

Because of the daily demands of the media business, deadlines are one of the most important factors for members of the media in determining what stories will be run. Because of these deadlines, it is essential for Councilmembers to quickly reply to members of the media when they call for information on a story.

Sanctions

Public Disruption

Members of the public who do not follow proper conduct after a warning in a public hearing may be barred from further testimony at that meeting or removed from the Council Chambers.

Inappropriate Staff Behavior

Councilmembers should refer to the City Manager any City staff who do not follow proper conduct in their dealings with Councilmembers, other City staff, or the public. These employees may be disciplined in accordance with standard City procedures for such actions. Please refer to the section on Council Relations with City Staff for more details on interaction with City staff.

Councilmembers Behavior and Conduct

City Councilmembers who intentionally and repeatedly do not follow proper conduct may be reprimanded or formally censured by the Council, lose seniority or committee assignments (both within the City of Navasota or with inter-government agencies). Serious infractions of the Council Relations Policy could lead to other sanctions as deemed appropriate by Council.

Councilmembers should point out the offending Councilmember infractions of the Council Relations Policy. If the offenses continue, then the matter should be referred to the Mayor in private. It is the responsibility of the

Mayor to speak with the offending Councilmember in private about the offenses. If the Mayor is the individual whose actions are being challenged, then the matter should be referred to the Mayor Pro Tem.

Principles of Proper Conduct

Proper conduct IS...

- Keeping promises
- Being dependable
- Building a solid reputation
- Participating and being available
- Demonstrating patience
- Showing empathy
- Holding onto ethical principles under stress
- Listening attentively
- Studying thoroughly
- Keeping integrity intact
- Overcoming discouragement
- Going above and beyond, time and time again
- Modeling a professional manner

Proper conduct IS NOT...

- Showing antagonism or hostility
- Deliberately lying or misleading
- Speaking recklessly
- Spreading rumors
- Stirring up bad feelings, divisiveness
- Acting in a self-righteous manner

It all comes down to respect

Respect for one another as individuals ... respect for the validity of different opinions ...
respect for the democratic process ... respect for the community that we serve.

Glossary of Terms

Attitude: The manner in which one shows one's dispositions, opinions, and feelings.

Behavior: External appearance or action; manner of behaving; carriage of oneself.

Civility: Politeness, consideration, courtesy.

Conduct: The way one acts; personal behavior.

Courtesy: Politeness connected with kindness.

Decorum: Suitable, proper, good taste in behavior.

Manners: A way of acting; a style, method, or form; the way in which things are done.

Point of Order: An interruption of a meeting to question whether rules or bylaws are being broken, such as the speaker has strayed from the motion currently under consideration.

Point of Personal Privilege: A challenge to a speaker to defend or apologize for comments that a fellow Councilmember considers offensive.

Propriety: Conforming to acceptable standards of behavior.

Protocol: The courtesies that are established as proper and correct.

Respect: The act of noticing with attention; holding in esteem, courteous regard.