

## *Preamble*

*The stability and proper operation of democratic representation government depends upon the continuing consent of the governed, upon the public confidence in the integrity of the government and upon responsible exercise of the trust conferred by the people. Government decisions and policy must be made and implemented through proper channels and processes of the governmental structure. The purpose of this code is to establish guidelines for ethical standards of conduct for county commissioners. It should not be considered a substitute for the law or a county commissioner's best judgment.*

*County commissioners must be able to act in a manner to maintain their integrity and independence, yet must be responsive to the interest and need of those they represent. County commissioners serve in an important advocacy capacity in meeting the needs of their citizens and should recognize the legitimacy of this role as well as the intrinsic importance of this function to the proper functioning of representative government. At the same time, county commissioners must know how to distinguish these roles and when each role is appropriate and they must act accordingly. County commissioners must be aware of their obligation to conform their behavior to standards of ethical conduct that warrant the trust of their constituents. Each county commissioner must find within his or her own conscience the touchstone of which to determine appropriate conduct.*

## **Canon One**

### *A County Commissioner Shall Obey the Law*

Duplin County Commissioners shall support the Constitution of the United States, the Constitution of North Carolina and the laws enacted by the Congress of the United States and the General Assembly pursuant thereto.

## **Canon Two**

### *A County Commissioner Should Uphold the Integrity and Independence of His or Her Office*

Duplin County Commissioners should demonstrate the highest standards of personal integrity, truthfulness, honesty and fortitude in all their public activities in order to inspire public confidence and trust in county government. Duplin County Commissioners should participate in establishing, maintaining, and enforcing, and should themselves observe, high standards of conduct so that the integrity and independence of their office may be preserved. The provisions of this Code should be construed and applied to further these objectives.

### **Canon Three**

#### *A County Commissioner Should Avoid Impropriety and the Appearance of Impropriety in All His or Her Activities*

A. It is essential that county government attract those citizens best qualified and willing to serve. Duplin County Commissioners have legitimate interest-economic, professional and vocational-of a private nature. Duplin County Commissioners should not be denied, and should not deny to other county commissioners or citizens, the opportunity to acquire, retain and pursue private interests, economic or otherwise, except when conflicts with their responsibility to the public cannot be avoided. Duplin County Commissioners must exercise their best judgment to determine when this is the case.

B. Duplin County Commissioners should respect and comply with the law and should conduct themselves at all times in a manner that promotes public confidence in the integrity of the office of county commissioner and of county government.

C. Duplin County Commissioners should not allow family, social, or other relationships to unduly influence their conduct or judgment and should not lend the prestige of the office of county commissioner to advance the private interest of others; nor should they convey or permit others to convey the impression that they are in a special position to influence them.

### **Canon Four**

#### *A County Commissioner Should Perform the Duties of the Office Diligently*

Duplin County Commissioners should, while performing the duties of the office as prescribed by law, give precedence to these duties over other activities. In the performance of these duties, the following standards should apply:

#### A. Legislative Responsibilities

1. Duplin County Commissioners should actively pursue policy goals they believe to be in the best interests of their constituents within the parameters of orderly decision-making, rules of the Board of County Commissioners and open government.
2. Duplin County Commissioners should respect the legitimacy of the goals and interests of other county commissioners and should respect the right of others to pursue goals and policies different from their own.

#### B. Adjudicative Responsibilities

1. Duplin County Commissioners should be faithful to the general and local laws pertaining to the office and strive for professional competence in them. They should be un-swayed by partisan interests, public clamor, or fear of criticism.
2. Duplin County Commissioners should demand and contribute to the maintenance of order and decorum in proceedings before the Duplin County Board of Commissioners.
3. Duplin County Commissioners should be honest, patient, dignified and courteous in those with whom they deal in their official capacity, and should require similar conduct of their staff and others subject to their direction and control.
4. Duplin County Commissioners should accord to every person who is legally interested in a proceeding before the commission full right to be heard according to law.
5. Duplin County Commissioners should dispose promptly of the business of the county for which they are responsible.

#### C. Administrative Responsibilities

1. Duplin County Commissioners should clearly distinguish legislative, adjudicatory and administrative responsibilities and should refrain from inappropriate interference in the impartial administration of county affairs by county employees. Commissioners should diligently discharge those administrative responsibilities that are appropriate, should maintain professional competence in the administration of these duties and should facilitate the diligent discharge of the administrative responsibilities of fellow commissioners and other county officials.
2. Duplin County Commissioners should conserve the resources of the county in their charge. They should employ county equipment, property, funds and personnel only in legally permissible pursuits and in a manner that exemplifies excellent stewardship.
3. Duplin County Commissioners should require county employees subject to their direction and control to observe that standards of fidelity and diligence that apply to commissioners as well as those appropriate for employees.
4. Duplin County Commissioners should take or initiate appropriate disciplinary measures against a county employee for improper conduct of which that commissioner may become aware.

5. Duplin County Commissioners should not employ or recommend the appointment of unnecessary employees and should exercise the power of employment only on the basis of merit, avoid favoritism and refrain from illegal discrimination and nepotism. They should not approve compensation of employees beyond the fair value of services rendered.

### **Canon Five**

*A County Commissioner Should Conduct the Affairs of the Board in an Open and Public Manner*

Duplin County Commissioners should be aware of the letter and intent of the State's Open Meeting Law, should conduct the affairs of the Duplin County Board of Commissioners consistent with the letter and spirit of that law and consistent with the need to inspire and maintain public confidence in the integrity and fairness of county government and the office of county commissioner. Consistent with this goal of preserving public trust, county commissioners should be aware of the need for discretion in deliberations when the lack of discretion would pose a threat to the resources of the county, to the reputation of current or potential county employees, to orderly and responsible decision making, to the integrity of other governmental processes or to other legitimate interests of the County.

### **Canon Six**

*A County Commissioner Should Regulate His or Her Extra-Governmental Activities to minimize the Risk of Conflict with His or Her Official Duties*

- A. Duplin County Commissioners should inform themselves concerning campaign finance, conflict of interest and other appropriate state and federal laws and should scrupulously comply with the provisions of such laws.
- B. Duplin County Commissioners should refrain from financial and business dealings that tend to reflect adversely on the Board or on county government or to interfere with the proper performance of official duties.
- C. Duplin County Commissioners should manage their personal financial interests to minimize the number of cases in which they must abstain from voting on matters coming before the Board.
- D. Information acquired by Duplin County Commissioners in their official capacity should not be used or disclosed in financial dealings or for any other purpose not related to official duties.

## **Canon Seven**

### *A County Commissioner Should Refrain from Political Activity Inappropriate to His or Her Office*

- A. Duplin County Commissioners have a civic responsibility to support good government by every available means, to continue to inform and educate the citizenry about the affairs and processes of county government, and to make themselves available to citizens of the county so that they may ascertain and respond to the needs of the community. In doing so, Duplin County Commissioners may and should join or affiliate with civic organizations whether partisan or non-partisan, may and should attend political meetings, may and should advocate and support the principles or policies of civic or political organizations consistent with the Constitution and laws of the United States and North Carolina.
  
- B. Candidates for the office of county commissioner, including incumbents:
  - 1. Should inform themselves concerning the laws of this state with regard to campaigns and relevant disclosure requirements and should scrupulously comply with the provisions of such laws;
  - 2. Should maintain the dignity appropriate to the office, and should encourage members of their families to adhere the same standards of political conduct that apply to commissioners;
  - 3. Should not make pledges or promises of conduct in office that they will not or cannot perform or would be illegal if it were performed;
  - 4. Should not misrepresent their identity, qualifications, present positions, or other fact; and
  - 5. Should avoid pledges or promises of conduct in office other than the faithful and impartial performance of the duties of the office.