



CITY OF DALLAS

Memorandum

Date: December 26, 2007

To: The Dallas City Council and Appointed City Officials

From: Mayor Tom Leppert
Mayor Pro Tem Elba Garcia
Deputy Mayor Pro Tem Dwaine Caraway

Subject: Elements of a More Comprehensive Council Ethics Program

It is critical that our citizens maintain the highest trust in their City officials, elected and appointed. As the governing body for the City of Dallas, it is the Council's responsibility and duty to establish the appropriate ethical climate and set the "tone at the top" for City operations. We should take pride in our collective efforts to address important ethical issues during this term. Nonetheless, with recent events and the continuous challenges of public office, it is imperative that we constantly identify opportunities to improve our ethical climate and to strengthen our processes and procedures.

With this in mind, there are several areas that continue to be raised as possible concerns and opportunities for improvement. Those areas include:

- Transparency in campaign finance reporting

There is a trend towards electronic filings to better leverage the use of technology and improve accessibility. Currently, City of Dallas filings are manual.

- Role of lobbyists and proper recognition and disclosure of lobbying efforts

A number of public entities have established a methodology to register individuals lobbying the Council and staff on various issues. Advantages include better and clearer definitions of roles to both the City and the public.

- Distribution of tickets for various events at City related venues to Council members and staff

Historically and currently, questions are being raised regarding the appropriateness and policies of distributing tickets at no cost to Council and staff. There is a need to better define policies in this area.

- Influence in entitlement and zoning issues

- Perceived role of campaign donations as an undue influence in the decision making process.
- Perceived lack of oversight by the entire Council on zoning issues, which creates the potential for abuse
- Solicitation of donations for special events

In a number of cases, private entities are approached for goods and services.

Through a range of conversations with Council members, City staff and outside, interested parties, a number of potential actions have been identified. While no action can ensure complete compliance and prevent any misstep, additional steps can be taken to address the areas identified above. In some cases, we have initiated implementation and in other areas potential actions are presented here for further consideration.

We are planning to conduct regular Council sessions on ethics issues. These would be conducted at regular intervals throughout the year and be led by nationally recognized leaders in the area of public ethics. The sessions would relate potential issues and various situations that have arisen elsewhere. The sessions would be largely “case” driven, rather than lecture, and be designed to engage Council discussion. Through the analysis of individual situations and circumstances, we can gain a better understanding of issues as they arise and how to work them through in a collective fashion.

The issue of electronic filing of campaign finance reports to improve transparency has been raised at various times in the past, most recently during the past election cycle. It is already being used on the Federal and State level, and in some Texas cities. The City Secretary has identified a program currently being used by San Antonio that will be utilized here in the next election to facilitate electronic filing of reports. It can be viewed on the web site for the San Antonio City Clerk. This will make the process both easier for the filer and more accessible for those seeking to review/analyze the information. The City Secretary is developing policies for the filing process for your review.

Further, there are a number of concepts that have been raised and are being put forward for consideration. These are put forth as a starting point for discussion to define policies and guidelines in the key areas and are not intended as final/complete proposals.

1. Evaluate the registration of lobbyists with the City

With the objective of transparency, a growing number of cities, as well as states, require lobbyists to register prior to discussions with elected or appointed officials. In this way, the public potentially has a clearer understanding of the individuals and firms interacting with the Council members and City staff on key issues.

2. Limit funds or donations of goods and services to a Council person (or candidate for office) from a zoning applicant for a period prior and a period after the hearing/decision before the Council.

There continues to be a concern at the possible influence of campaign donations on key development issues. Prohibiting donations from a developer in the timeframe surrounding the consideration of a project would help to address this concern. While the actual timeframe is subject and open to debate, three months on either side would, at a

minimum, take a donation out of the immediate realm of the decision making.

3. Ban or define a policy regarding the acceptance of tickets to events or functions where the City has a contractual or funding relationship.

Currently, there is not a clear understanding of the guidelines for accepting tickets for events at either City facilities or other venues where there may be a relationship with the City. Venues and groups that may receive funding or have contracts with the city routinely make tickets available to Council members and staff, which creates the potential for a perceived or real conflict of interest. Potential options range from bans to specific limitations and clearer overall policies.

Ethical issues continue to be an important focus for both the Council and the public. Hopefully, the programs and actions presented here will send a clear message reinforcing the Council's commitment to integrity and ethical values.

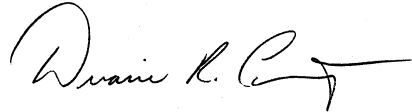
We look forward to discussing this in more detail. In the meantime, please feel free to call with any questions or comments.



Tom Leppert
Mayor



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