

# HINGHAM BOARD OF SELECTMEN

## CODE OF CONDUCT

### Introduction

The undersigned members of the Board of Selectmen adopt this Code as a guide to inform and govern our behavior toward each other, and toward town employees and volunteers, other government officials, and the people of Hingham. We have been elected by the citizens of Hingham to collectively exercise the executive authority of our town government, except for authority assigned to another board, committee or individual. In the exercise of our authority, we commit ourselves to the faithful execution of the laws of the Commonwealth and the Bylaws of the Town and to the implementation of Town Meeting decisions. We will strive to conduct ourselves in a collegial and professional manner, mindful that our guiding principle is to act in the best interests of the town after thorough preparation and careful consideration of relevant facts and circumstances, and mindful also that there may be good faith disagreements over where the best interests of the town may lie in any particular decision. We will strive to be the standard bearers of civil and productive discussion in our local governance. In addition to complying with the laws and regulations governing our office, including the letter and spirit of the State's Ethics Laws and Regulations, we will abide by this Code of Conduct.

**A. Standards of Civility.** We acknowledge that as individual members and as a Board our conduct influences the tone of discussion and debate on the issues before the town. We will treat each other, town employees and volunteers, and members of the general public with courtesy and respect. We subscribe to the tradition of our Town Meeting that "no speaker is allowed to indulge in personalities, but must confine his or her remarks to the matter before the meeting." Personal attacks have no place in public debate in Hingham and we will not engage in or condone such conduct or permit such personal attacks to occur at our meetings. We will likewise expect all town employees, committees and boards under the supervision of our Board to treat people with courtesy and respect and to conduct their business in a manner consistent with the principles of public discourse espoused in this Code.

**B. Exercise of Board Authority.** The authority of the Board can only be exercised as a Board. We will conduct the business of the town in a manner that is inclusive, transparent and professional. Except for matters properly taken up in executive session, all decisions of the Board will be made in public sessions and those sessions will ordinarily be broadcast by H-CAM. We will consider carefully the views expressed by each member of the Board and by those who appear before us and participate in our public hearings and meetings, mindful that we are not infallible and that the townspeople justifiably expect us to bring our collective, informed judgment to bear on the issues that come before the Board. We each represent the entire community and will strive to exercise our authority in the best interests of the town. No individual member can or should speak for the Board as a whole unless authorized to do so by the Board, nor should a member suggest or imply that the member speaks for the Board in the absence of authority to do so. Once a decision of the Board has been made, we will abide by that decision regardless of our individual vote until and unless the decision is rescinded or set aside.

We will strive to create an environment in which all committees and boards under the supervision of the Selectmen, or upon which a member of the Board may serve, are encouraged to exercise their best judgment in carrying out their charge or responsibility.

**C. Conducting Town Business.** We will abide by the Open Meeting Law and regulations and see that those requirements are communicated to and followed by all boards and committees within our supervision. In addition, we will adopt procedures to inform individuals serving the town at the request of the Board about the ethics and open meetings laws as well as our expectations for their service consistent with this Code.

We will post our meeting agendas in a timely fashion and in full compliance with the Open Meeting Law so that the public is informed of the matters to be considered at our meetings, the votes that may be taken, and whether or not we will enter and/or return from an executive session. We will be responsive to requests from the public for information to which the public is entitled and will post relevant public data on our website. We will endeavor to communicate openly and honestly and work together on the business of the town.

**D. Relations with Town Administrator and Other Town Employees.** The Board has previously voted to implement the Town Administrator Bylaw setting forth Town Meeting's expectation about the delegation of authority to the town administrator. We will oversee and evaluate the performance of the town administrator and work cooperatively with him or her on the business of the town. We will set policy objectives, while respecting the town administrator's responsibility to administer and supervise town departments. We understand that our role is primarily one of policy-making and general oversight of the town's executive branch, not one of day-to-day administration of the activities of town boards, departments, and employees. We will set policy goals at least annually and will undertake, direct, supervise, and delegate steps to implement those goals as appropriate. We will establish sound, clearly-defined policies so that the town administrator and staff are well informed as to the Board's expectations and direction.

We will respect and support the administrative chain of command. An individual member cannot make decisions for the Board, so we must work as a group to marshal the resources of the town to address citizens' concerns and needs. In practice, this means that in the event an individual member has a question or receives a complaint, question or concern from citizens or others, we will ordinarily work with the town administrator to get answers to our questions. Frequently it may be the town administrator who responds on behalf of the Board to the public about complaints and concerns. Members may communicate directly with department heads or employees on matters including town business. But individual members will avoid ordering specific actions or the expenditure of town resources or deployment of town employees because such instructions may be issued only by the Board as a whole or by the town administrator. Direct requests to town employees may have the unintended effect of hindering the effective function of the town and its departments, so board members will usually work through the chain of command to enlist the support and skills of town employees in addressing the needs of the community. Since it is important for all of us to be fully informed on matters affecting the town, we will (subject to any applicable confidentiality restriction) individually and as a Board share relevant information we have obtained ourselves or received from other sources with the town administrator and the town administrator will likewise keep members of the Board informed.

As provided by Hingham Bylaws and delegated by this Board, the town administrator has the authority for the general administration of town departments and specifically for the hiring, supervision and discipline and termination of all

town employees except those hiring and termination decisions reserved to the Board under the Bylaw. We recognize the division of authority and we will support and cultivate an environment of professional growth within all town departments. We understand that town employees work for the town and not for the Board itself. We further understand that the staff of the Selectmen's Office provides support to the Board as a whole. We will treat all employees as professionals, with clear, honest communication that reflects respect for the employee's abilities and experience and the dignity of the individual.

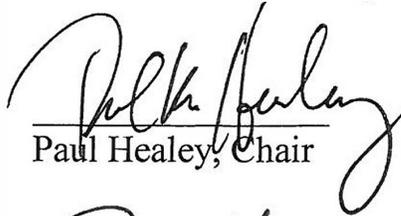
#### **E. Relations with Members of the Public.**

We encourage the public to communicate to us their questions, comments, constructive criticism, and suggestions about all aspects of town government and about our individual and collective performance. We suggest that with respect to specific operational concerns, citizens initially communicate directly with town departments or employees and/or with the town administrator. In the event the matter is not addressed satisfactorily, a citizen should feel free to communicate with the board or an individual selectman. Members will ordinarily field such complaints by asking the town administrator for a report (except for issues involving the town administrator personally, which will be dealt with pursuant to town personnel policies), with any additional investigation to be determined in the discretion of the Board. We will develop a protocol with the town administrator to receive complaints, questions or concerns from the public which protocol shall include an expectation that all members of the Board be informed of significant issues, that the town administrator set out a timeline for a response, and that each Board member be informed of the resolution or response in accordance with the established protocol. We intend to be responsive and accountable for our stewardship of the town and welcome all information, advice, and commentary that will assist us in fulfilling the responsibilities of our office.

#### **Conclusion**

It is truly a privilege to serve as a member of the Board of Selectmen for the Town of Hingham. You, the citizens of the town, have placed your faith in us to serve in the best interests of the entire community. This Code is an expression of our expectations of one another and serves as our promise to you that we will strive to the best of our abilities to fulfill our duties as a Board in accordance with the highest standards of governance set by our predecessors since the founding of Hingham in 1635.

Code of Conduct Adopted September 3, 2015,

  
Paul Healey, Chair

  
Paul Gannon

  
Mary Power