TOWN OF NORTHFIELD

21 Summer Street, Northfield, New Hampshire 03276
Tel. 603-286-7039 Fax 603-286-3328
www.northfieldnh.org

TO: Budget Committee
CIP Committee
Conservation Commission
Energy Committee
Planning Board
Selectboard
Zoning Board of Adjustment

FROM: Glenn Smith, TA
DATE: February 25, 2009
SUBJECT: Code of Ethics

At its meeting earlier this week the Northfield Selectboard adopted a Public Officials Code of Ethics to provide guidance to both new and long-term elected and appointed officials in town. A copy of the new Code of Ethics is attached to this note.

Often towns adopt a Code of Ethics in response to a particular controversy. The Selectboard wants you to know that this is not the case here in Northfield. Rather, the Board members simply realize that every individual who steps up to the plate to serve the people of Northfield brings a different perspective to their position. Many times there are honest differences of opinion between citizen volunteers as to what is or is not appropriate behavior. When is it appropriate for a member of one Board to appear before another Board? Is it appropriate for a member of a Town Board or Commission to endorse a candidate in a local election? What constitutes a conflict of interest? No document can answer all of these questions, but Northfield's Code of Ethics is intended to give you some guidance if you are ever faced with any of these issues in your capacity as a Town official.

As always, the Selectmen want you to know how much they appreciate the fact that all of you continue to give your time, effort and expertise to the betterment of our community. Northfield is the great place it is because of your dedication and service.

CODE OF ETHICS

For Public Officials of the Town of Northfield
Adopted by the Northfield Board of Selectmen on February 24, 2008

Preamble

The citizens of Northfield are entitled to have fair, ethical and accountable local government which has earned the public's full confidence for integrity. The effective functioning of democratic government therefore requires that:

- Public officials, both elected and appointed, comply with both the letter and spirit of the laws and policies affecting the operations of government;
- Public officials be independent, impartial and fair in their judgment and actions;
- Public office be used for the public good, not for personal gain; and
- Public deliberations and processes be conducted openly, unless legally confidential, in an atmosphere of cooperation.

To this end, the Northfield Board of Selectmen has adopted a Code of Ethics for our public officials to assure public confidence in the integrity of local government and its effective and fair operation.

1. Act in the Public Interest

Recognizing that stewardship of the public interest must be their primary concern, officials will work for the common good of the people of Northfield and not for any private or personal interest, and they will assure fair and equal treatment of all persons, claims and transactions coming before them.

2. Comply with the Law

Officials shall comply with Federal and State laws, as well as the Town of Northfield's ordinances and policies in the performance of their public duties.

3. Conduct of Officials

The professional and personal conduct of officials must be above reproach and avoid even the appearance of impropriety. Officials shall refrain from abusive conduct, personal charges or verbal attacks upon the character or motives of other officials, the staff or public.

4. Respect for Process

Officials shall perform their duties in accordance with the processes and rules of order which have been established by their respective board, commission or committee, and which govern the deliberation of public policy issues, meaningful involvement of the public, and the ability of Town

staff to implement policy decisions as authorized by the Board of Selectmen.

5. Conduct of Public Meetings

Officials shall prepare themselves for public issues; listen courteously and attentively to all public discussions; and focus on the business at hand. They shall refrain from interrupting other speakers; making personal comments not germane to the business of the body; or otherwise interfering with the orderly conduct of meetings.

6. Endorsement of Candidates

Officials have the right to endorse candidates for all Board of Selectmen seats or other elected offices. It is inappropriate to mention endorsements during public meetings or other official Town functions.

7. Keep political support away from public forums

Board and Commission members may offer political support to a Selectman, but not in a public forum while conducting official duties. Selectmen may also support Board and Commission members who are running for office, but not in an official forum in their capacity as a Selectman.

8. Communication

In order to ensure that decisions are based on all available information, officials shall publicly share substantive information that is relevant to a matter under consideration by a board, commission, or committee, which they have received from sources outside of the public decision-making process.

9. Conflict of Interest

In order to assure their independence and impartiality on behalf of the common good, officials shall not use their public positions to influence government decisions in which they have a material financial interest, or where they have an organizational responsibility or personal relationship, which may give the appearance of a conflict of interest.

10. Gifts and Favors

Officials shall not take any special advantage of services or opportunities for personal gain, by virtue of their public office that is not available to the public in general. They shall refrain from accepting any gifts, favors or promises of future benefits which might compromise their independence of judgment or action or give the appearance of being compromised.

11. Confidential Information

Officials shall respect the confidentiality of information concerning the property, personnel or affairs of the Town. They shall neither disclose confidential information without proper legal authorization, nor use such information to advance their personal, financial or other private interests.

12. Use of Public Resources

Officials shall not use public resources not available to the public in general, such as Town staff time, equipment, supplies or facilities, for private gain or personal purposes.

13. Representation of Private Interests

In keeping with their role as stewards of the public interest, Public Officials shall not appear on behalf of the private interests of third parties before any Board, Commission, Committee or proceeding of the Town. When presenting their individual opinions and positions, members shall explicitly state they do not represent their body or the Town of Northfield nor will they allow the inference that they do.

14. Advocacy

Officials shall represent the official policies or positions of the Town to the best of their ability when designated as delegates for this purpose. When presenting their individual opinions and positions, members shall explicitly state they do not represent their body or the Town of Northfield nor will they allow the inference that they do.

15. Policy Role of Officials

Officials shall respect and adhere to the Board of Selectmen structure of government. In this structure, the Board of Selectmen determines the policies of the Town with the advice, information and analysis provided by the public, other boards, committees, commissions, and Town staff.

Public Officials therefore should not interfere with the administrative functions of the Town or the professional duties of Town staff

16. Independence of Boards and Commissions

Because of the value of the independent advice of boards and commissions to the public decision-making process, Public officials shall refrain from using their position to unduly influence the deliberations or outcomes of proceedings. When presenting their individual opinions and positions, members shall explicitly state they do not represent their body or the Town of Northfield nor will they allow the inference that they do.

17. Positive Work Place Environment

Officials shall support the maintenance of a positive and constructive work place environment for Town employees and for citizens and businesses dealing with the Town. Officials shall recognize their special role in dealings with Town employees to in no way create the perception of inappropriate direction to staff.

18. Implementation

As an expression of the standards of conduct for public officials expected by the Town of Northfield, this Code of Ethics is intended to be self-enforcing. It therefore becomes most effective

when officials are thoroughly familiar with it and embrace its provisions.

For this reason, ethical standards shall be included in the written orientation materials for candidates for all Town positions, applicants to boards, committees, and commissions, and newly elected and appointed officials. All Public Officials shall annually review the Code of Ethics, and the Board of Selectmen shall consider recommendations to update it as necessary.

19. Compliance and Enforcement

The Northfield Code of Ethics expresses standards of ethical conduct expected for all Public Officials. Officials themselves have the primary responsibility to assure that ethical standards are understood and met, and that the public can continue to have full confidence in the integrity of government.

The chairs of boards, committees and commissions have the additional responsibility to intervene when actions that appear to be in violation of the Code of Ethics are brought to their attention.

A violation of this code of ethics shall not be considered a basis for challenging the validity of a board, committee, or commission decision.