

**Powhatan County
Board of Supervisors
Commitment to Excellence in Service**

Among the felicities which have attended my administration, I am most thankful for having been [fortunate enough] to have colleagues so able, so disinterested, and so harmonious. Scarcely ever has a difference of opinion appeared among us which has not, by candid consultation, been amalgamated into something which all approved; and never one which in the slightest degree affected our personal attachments. The proof [will be in the effectiveness of our governance and the reputations—individually & aggregately—we leave in the minds of the people—that we have been worthy].

Thomas Jefferson

A. RULES OF ENGAGEMENT

1. We honor the fact that we have been elected by the majority of the citizens and will behave accordingly. We commit to represent the County as a whole in our decisions.
2. We recognize our responsibility to maintain a professional and civil image in the public's eye. We commit to Code of Ethics/Standards of Conduct shown in Sections B & C.
3. We commit to respect each other at all times, even when we disagree or are at loggerheads. We commit to looking for each other's honorable intent, rather than assuming dishonorable motivations.
4. We understand that differences of opinion, and even conflict, are inevitable. We will work above-board and treat each other with dignity while we try to understand each other's position and seek meaningful compromise or creative synergy.

Even when we come down on opposite sides of an issue, even if regularly so, we will maintain our collegiality, our respect, and our civility with each other.

We understand that any one of us may be angry in a public meeting about one thing or another; even when so, we shall not speak in anger.

We will argue our positions, passionately, of course; however, when a decision is made, we commit to come out of the meeting throwing our collective support behind the energetic implementation of the decision.

5. When we have a difference of opinion, or some other issue, with a peer, we

commit to addressing the issue (privately) directly with that peer.

6. We agree that all contacts/information from any source, including staff, is communicated to all members of the Board.
7. We acknowledge that a good rule of thumb for us during our deliberations is patience, viz.: “when we as individuals or we as a Board are unsure of the facts or of the best path forward, we should seriously consider deferring”.
8. We agree to beware of forming cabals among us, and especially applicants’ “threat” to build a cabal of other supervisors to get what they want.
9. We agree that the primary communications vehicle among us (and between staff and us) is telephone.
10. We shall not show disloyalty to our staff. We shall not blind-side staff in public meetings or use staff as a whipping boy. Specifically, as possible, we agree to use our time between receiving our meeting packets and our actual public meeting to work with the Planning Commission members and staff to get clarity, ask questions, get additional data/documents...rather than do it in the public meeting. No gotchas.

We intend to communicate the attached “Covenant with Staff” (Section E) to every member of the Administration.

11. We agree to make the County Administrator part of our team.
12. We agree to read our packets before coming to the meetings.
13. We as a whole are the Audit Committee.

B. CODE OF ETHICS

Recognizing that persons who hold public office have been given a public trust and that the stewardship of such office demands the highest levels of ethical and moral conduct, any person serving on the Powhatan County Board of Supervisors should adhere to the following Code of Ethics:

1. Uphold the Constitution, laws and regulations of the United States and of all governments therein and never knowingly be a party to their evasion.
2. Put loyalty to the highest moral principles and to the County as a whole above loyalty to individuals, districts, or particular groups.

3. Give a full measure of effort and service to the position of trust for which stewardship has been granted; giving earnest effort and best thought to the performance of duties.
4. Seek to find and use the most equitable, efficient, effective, and economical means for getting tasks accomplished.
5. Adopt policies and programs that support the rights and recognize the needs of all citizens regardless of race, sex, age, religion, creed, country of origin or handicapping condition.
6. Avoid adopting policies, supporting programs or engaging in activities that discriminate against or offend individuals because of race, sex, age, religion, creed, country of origin or handicapping condition.
7. Ensure the integrity of the actions of the Board of Supervisors by avoiding discrimination through the dispensing of special favors or unfair privileges to anyone, whether for remuneration or not. A member should never accept for himself or herself or for family members, favors or benefits under circumstances that might be construed by reasonable persons as influencing the performance of governmental duties.
8. Make no private promises of any kind binding upon the duties of any office, since a public servant has no private word that can be binding on public duty.
9. Engage in no business with the County government, or the school system, either directly or indirectly, which is inconsistent with the conscientious performance of government duties except as may be consistent with the conflict of interest statutes in the Code of Virginia.
10. Never use any information gained confidentially in the performance of governmental duties as a means of making private profit.
11. Expose through appropriate means and channels, corruption, misconduct, or neglect of duty whenever discovered.
12. Adhere to the principle that the public's business should be conducted in the public view by observing and following the letter and spirit of the Freedom of Information Act using closed sessions only to deal with sensitive personnel, legal or contractual matters as provided by the Code of Virginia.
13. Avoid using the position of public trust to gain access to the media for purposes of criticizing colleagues or citizens, impugning their integrity or vilifying their personal beliefs.

14. Make sure, when responding to the media, that a clear distinction is made between personal opinion or belief and a decision made by the Board.
15. Review orally and in public session at the annual organizational meeting each of these principles.
16. Pledge to honor and uphold these principles, ever conscious that public office is a public trust.

C. STANDARDS OF CONDUCT

Recognizing that persons holding a position of public trust are under constant observation by the media and interested County residents, and recognizing that maintaining the integrity and dignity of the public office is essential for maintaining high levels of public confidence in our institutions of government, every member of the Powhatan County Board of Supervisors should adhere to the following Standards of Conduct:

1. Avoid during public meetings and during the performance of public duties the use of abusive, threatening or intimidating language or gestures directed at colleagues, citizens, or personnel.
2. Pay all taxes due to the County, state, or national government.
3. Avoid a private lifestyle that casts public doubt upon the integrity and competence of the County Government.
4. Make a conscientious effort to be well prepared for each meeting.
5. Recognizing the dignity of each individual, the Board shall attempt to avoid offering public criticism of colleagues or County employees.
6. Work to create a positive environment in public meetings where citizens will feel comfortable in their roles as observers or participants.
7. Maintain an attitude of courtesy and consideration toward all colleagues and staff during all discussions and deliberations.
8. Be tolerant. Allow citizens, employees, or colleagues sufficient opportunity to present their views.
9. Be respectful and attentive. Avoid comments, body language or distracting activity that conveys a message of disrespect for the presentations from citizens, personnel or colleagues.

10. Be concise. Avoid the practice of taking more time to address an issue before the body than is necessary and essential for an adequate consideration of those matters being discussed.
11. Provide appropriate mechanisms for disciplining members who violate the Code of Ethics and Standards of Conduct by using, as a final measure of discipline, censure or removal from the position.
12. Board members will follow the procedure of communicating directly with the County Administrator and/or the Chairman of the Board on all County matters.

D. CITIZENS AND MEDIA CONTACTS

1. In responding to questions, from the media or citizens, Board members should:
 - a. Remind the listener that they are not speaking for the entire Board;
 - b. Clarify their position on a particular item;
 - c. Make "no public comment" on executive session matters in reference to individuals, real estate, and other areas addressed pursuant to Section 2.1-344 of the Code of Virginia.
2. Each Board member must remember that personnel matters are to remain confidential and that it is the obligation of the Board and its membership to protect the privacy of the individual.
3. The Board will focus on issues and avoid making public comments about individuals, staff members, fellow Board members, community residents or media representatives. The Board Chairman should be the main media contact for County matters. When requested to do any interview, the Board member asked should contact the Chairman and the County Administrator to tell them of the nature of the interview. In turn, they will tell the other Board members of the circumstances of the interview. This procedure does not preclude any member from responding to individual questions from the media.

E. A COVENANT BETWEEN THE BOARD OF SUPERVISORS AND STAFF

1. We, as the Board, and the staff are a team; that team operates Powhatan County Government. We cannot do it without staff; staff cannot do it without the Board.
2. We expect excellent, professional, competent, & comprehensive staff work from the administration. We shall give them the same kind of Board work.
3. We will thank those who make mistakes while trying to learn or implement new

ideas, procedures, or deal with new subject matters, because their mistakes save us all from having to make the same mistakes as we learn how to operate the County (& to continue to improve our operations).

Note that this specific covenant has implicit in it the expectation that staff will continually initiate, explore, push the envelope & offer ideas & best practices for the Board's (& Planning Commission's) consideration.

4. We will not long tolerate mistakes made because of laziness or un-interest.
5. We acknowledge that County staff is sometimes overloaded. We accept that mistakes born out of overload are more the Board's problem than staff's.
6. We acknowledge that staff is often confronted with issues of an interpretational nature and it is our responsibility as a Board to work with staff in reconciling these issues in establishing sound policies.
7. All members of the Powhatan County team are human; mistakes will happen. the response of each and all of us to a mistake is to acknowledge the mistake, assess the damage, contain the damage, repair the damage & correct the mistake if possible. (It goes without saying, also "learn from the mistake"). It is unnecessary to hide the mistake, deny the mistake, or blame others. These negative responses waste time, divert energy from our forward progress, and set us against one another. This damages the team.