

Town of Bridge Creek Code of Ethics and Disclosure Statement

This document outlines the Code of Ethics and Disclosure Requirements for the Town Chair, Town Supervisors, Town Clerk, and Town Treasurer of the Town of Bridge Creek. It serves to guide officials in their conduct and ensure transparency in public service, consistent with Wisconsin Statutes. Adherence to these principles and requirements is essential for maintaining public trust and the integrity of Town governance.

I. Code of Ethics for Town of Bridge Creek Officials

As public officials serving the Town of Bridge Creek, the Town Chair and Supervisors are committed to the highest standards of ethical conduct. This Code of Ethics is guided by **Wisconsin Statute § 19.59**, which outlines ethical principles for local government officials, and aims to ensure that all actions and decisions are made in the best interest of the Town and its residents.

Core Principles:

1. **Public Interest First:** Officials shall always place the public interest above any personal, private, or partisan interests.
2. **Impartiality:** Decisions and actions shall be made fairly, impartially, and without bias or prejudice.
3. **Integrity:** Officials shall conduct themselves with honesty and integrity in all official dealings. They shall not use their public position for private gain or the appearance of private gain.
4. **Transparency:** All governmental processes, decisions, and actions shall be conducted openly and transparently, within the bounds of applicable law (e.g., Wisconsin Open Meetings Law, **Wis. Stat. ch. 19, sub. V**).
5. **Accountability:** Officials are accountable to the public they serve and shall perform their duties with diligence and a commitment to responsible stewardship of Town resources.
6. **Respect:** Officials shall treat all individuals with respect, courtesy, and fairness.
7. **Compliance with Law:** Officials shall uphold and adhere to all federal, state, and local laws, including but not limited to the Wisconsin Statutes, Town ordinances, and policies. This specifically includes avoiding **misconduct in public office** as defined in **Wis. Stat. § 946.12** and avoiding **private interest in a public contract** as defined in **Wis. Stat. § 946.13**.

II. Disclosure Statement and Requirements

To ensure transparency and prevent conflicts of interest, the Town Chair, Town Supervisors, Town Clerk and Town Treasurer are required to adhere to specific disclosure requirements as mandated by Wisconsin Statutes and local policy.

A. Disclosure of Financial Interests and Potential Conflicts of Interest:

Officials are required to disclose any financial interests that could reasonably be expected to create a conflict of interest in the performance of their official duties. While **Wis. Stat. § 19.46** primarily pertains to state public officials, the principles of disclosing interests apply to local officials through **Wis. Stat. § 19.59** and general ethical conduct.

Specific Disclosure Obligations (Referencing Wis. Stat. § 19.59):

1. **Prohibition on Private Gain (Wis. Stat. § 19.59(1)(a)):** No Town official may use his or her public position or office to obtain financial gain or anything of substantial value for the private benefit of himself or herself, his or her immediate family, or an organization with which he or she is associated.
2. **Disclosure of Economic Interests (Wis. Stat. § 19.59(1)(c)):** While not requiring a formal "Statement of Economic Interests" form like state officials, Town officials are expected to openly disclose any personal economic interest (including that of immediate family or associated organizations) that would be affected by any matter coming before the Town Board. This disclosure should be made publicly at a Town Board meeting prior to any discussion or vote on the matter.
 - **Example:** If a Town Board member owns property adjacent to a proposed zoning change, they should declare this interest before the Board discusses or votes on the change.
3. **Abstention from Voting (Wis. Stat. § 19.59(1)(e)):** An official should abstain from voting on any matter in which they have a direct personal financial interest, or in which an immediate family member or an organization with which they are associated has a direct financial interest, if that interest is distinct from the interests of the general public. It is advisable to state the reason for abstention for the public record.
4. **Prohibition on Accepting Gifts (Wis. Stat. § 19.59(1)(b)):** No Town official may solicit or accept, directly or indirectly, any gift or anything of substantial value, or a future promise of a thing of substantial value, that could reasonably be expected to influence their official actions or judgment. This does not prohibit bona fide personal gifts clearly unrelated to official duties.
5. **Confidential Information (Wis. Stat. § 19.59(1)(f)):** No Town official shall use or disclose confidential information gained in the course of their official duties for personal gain or for the benefit of any other person or entity.

B. Private Interest in Public Contracts (Wis. Stat. § 946.13):

Officials must be particularly mindful of **Wis. Stat. § 946.13**, which prohibits public officials from having a private interest in a public contract. This statute makes it a crime for a public official to:

- Bargain, make, or in any manner execute a contract in his or her capacity as a public officer or public employee in which he or she is peculiarly interested.
- Derive any profit or advantage from a contract made by the public body or agency with which he or she is connected, if he or she made or participated in making the contract in his or her official capacity.

C. Misconduct in Public Office (Wis. Stat. § 946.12):

Officials are also bound by **Wis. Stat. § 946.12**, which broadly prohibits misconduct in public office. This includes, but is not limited to:

- Intentionally failing to perform a known mandatory duty required by law.
- Exercising a discretionary power in a manner inconsistent with the duties of the office or the rights of others and with intent to obtain a dishonest advantage for himself or herself or another.
- Accepting a fee or reward for performing or refraining from performing an official act, except as authorized by law.

D. Annual Disclosure (If Adopted by Ordinance):

While not universally mandated for all local officials by state statute, the Town of Bridge Creek **may adopt an ordinance** requiring annual disclosures of certain financial interests or business relationships. If such an ordinance is adopted, all Town Chair and Supervisors will be required to comply with its specific filing and content requirements. Officials will be notified if such a local ordinance is enacted.

III. Reporting Violations and Seeking Guidance

Any concerns regarding potential ethical violations or conflicts of interest should be brought to the attention of the Town Chair or, if appropriate, to the attention of legal counsel for the Town or the District Attorney's office.

Officials who are uncertain about a potential conflict of interest or ethical dilemma are strongly encouraged to seek guidance from the Town's legal counsel before taking action. Timely disclosure and proactive consultation are key to maintaining ethical conduct and avoiding potential violations.

By serving as the Town Chair or a Town Supervisor, individuals commit to upholding this Code of Ethics and fulfilling all disclosure requirements.