



**City of Sebastopol**

**CITY OF SEBASTOPOL CITY COUNCIL  
AGENDA ITEM REPORT FOR MEETING OF: April 7, 2026**

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**To:** Honorable City Councilmembers

**Requestor:** Ad Hoc Committee: City Council Protocols Handbook  
Mayor McLewis and Vice Mayor Maurer

**Responsible Department:** Interim City Manager  
City Attorney

**Subject:** Consideration of Inclusion of City Council Policies and Procedures for City Council Handbook (Policies 11 through 15)

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**RECOMMENDATION**

That the City Council consider Policies 11 through 15 to be incorporated into the City Council Policies and Procedures Handbook.

**PROCESS OF AGENDA ITEM**

- Presentation of the item by the Requestor or responsible staff
- Council questions and discussion
- Public comment
- Council deliberation and action

**EXECUTIVE SUMMARY**

The City Council periodically reviews and updates the City Council Policies and Procedures Handbook to ensure that Council operations remain clear, transparent, and consistent with best governance practices.

Policies 11 through 15 are proposed additions intended to clarify procedures related to Councilmember travel, participation in regional bodies, and related administrative processes. Incorporating these policies into the Handbook will provide clearer guidance for Councilmembers and staff and promote consistent application of these practices.

**BACKGROUND**

The City Council Policies and Procedures Handbook provides guidance regarding the roles, responsibilities, and operational procedures of the City Council. Over time, new situations arise that benefit from clearer policy direction or formal documentation within the Handbook.

Policies 11 through 15 were developed to address operational matters related to Councilmember representation and administrative procedures that support the Council’s work.

**DISCUSSION**

Formalizing these procedures within the Handbook helps ensure that expectations and processes are clearly documented and consistently applied.



## City of Sebastopol

Adoption of Policies 11 through 15 will provide additional clarity regarding Councilmember activities related to travel, participation in regional organizations, and related administrative practices.

### **STAFF ANALYSIS**

Documenting these procedures within the Handbook supports transparency and promotes effective governance by providing a clear reference for Council operations.

### **CITY COUNCIL GOALS / PRIORITIES / GENERAL PLAN CONSISTENCY**

This action supports the City Council's goals and priorities, including:

- High-Performance Organization
- Restoring public trust through transparent and consistent governance practices
- Improving public communications and community engagement

### **PUBLIC COMMENT**

As of the preparation of this staff report, staff has not received public comments. Any written public comments received after publication of this report will be provided to the City Council as supplemental materials prior to or at the meeting. Members of the public may also provide oral comments during the public comment portion of the agenda item.

### **PUBLIC NOTICE**

This item was noticed in accordance with the Ralph M. Brown Act and was made available for public viewing and review at least 72 hours prior to the scheduled meeting.

### **FISCAL IMPACT**

None. Travel funds referenced in Policy 11 are already included in the approved annual City Council budget and are divided equally among members. No additional appropriations are required.

### **RESTATED RECOMMENDATION**

1. That the City Council consider and adopt Policies 11 through 15 to be incorporated into the City Council Policies and Procedures Handbook.

### **OPTIONS**

1. Provide direction to modify one or more of the proposed policies prior to adoption.
2. Decline to adopt the proposed policies.

### **Attachments:**

Policies 11 through 15

## Index of Policies

### City of Sebastopol City Council Policies and Procedures Handbook

#### Policy Number 1: Selection of Mayor

- Rotation system for selecting the Mayor (still requires vote of Council)

#### Policy Number 2: Selection of Vice Mayor

- Rotation system for selecting the Vice Mayor
- Criteria: Seniority and election vote count (still requires vote of Council)
- Role of Vice Mayor in the absence of the Mayor

#### Policy Number 3: Role of Mayor and Vice Mayor

- Responsibilities of the Mayor:
  - Presiding officer of meetings
  - Official head of the City
  - Authority to preserve order and enforce meeting rules
  - Spokesperson duties
- Responsibilities of the Vice Mayor:
  - Acting Mayor in the absence of the Mayor

#### Policy Number 4: Seating Selection

- Seating arrangements for Mayor, Vice Mayor, and Councilmembers
- Authority of the Mayor to assign seats
- Input solicitation from Councilmembers for seating preferences

#### Policy Number 5: Trainings

- **Required Trainings:**
  - Ethics Training (AB 1234 / Government Code § 53234)
  - Sexual Harassment Training (AB 1661)
  - Brown Act Training
  - **Add: Fiscal and Financial Training (SB 827)** – Effective January 1, 2026, all local agency officials must complete at least two hours of fiscal and financial training every two years. Newly appointed or elected officials must complete the training within six months of assuming office. Officials serving prior to January 1, 2026, must complete it by January 1, 2028 (unless their term ends earlier).
- **Recommended Trainings:**
  - Courses from the League of California Cities (CAL Cities), other agencies, and approved providers

### **Policy Number 6: Agenda Review Committee / Agenda Preparation**

- Composition of the Agenda Review Committee
- Procedures for agenda preparation and placement of items
- Deadlines for agenda item requests and staff reports
- Public comment rules and proclamation requests

### **Policy Number 7: Rules for Conduct of Meetings**

- Adoption of Robert’s Rules of Order
- Types of motions and voting procedures
- Rules for maintaining decorum and order during meetings

### **Policy Number 8: City Council Liaison**

- Definition and responsibilities of Council liaisons
- Communication, monitoring, and reporting duties
- Staff support for Council liaisons

### **Policy Number 9: Annual Board and Committee Assignments**

- Process for assigning Councilmembers and staff to committees
- Annual review and recommendations for committee assignments
- Application and summary forms for committee requests

### **Policy Number 10: Formation of Ad Hoc Committees**

- Definition and purpose of ad hoc committees
- Creation process and requirements under the Brown Act
- Reporting and deliverables for ad hoc committees

**Policy Number 11: Use of Travel Funds for City Council – City Council Conferences/Training (This is now being incorporated into the Council protocols handbook) Incorporates City Council Resolution Number 6684-2025.**

- Purpose
- Annual Travel Budget
- Out-of-State Travel
- Covered Expenses
- Exceeding the Budget

### **Policy Number 12: Ethics and Professional/Personal Conduct**

- Professional and Personal Conduct
- Ethical Leadership and Respectful Treatment
- Fiscal Responsibility
- Positive Work Environment

- Code of Conduct (Incorporates City Council Resolution Number 5744)

**Policy Number 13: Process of City Council Meetings**

- Meeting Preparation and Call to Order
- Proclamations and Awards
- Conflicts of Interest Statements
- Public Comment
- Consent Calendar
- Items on Agenda
- Second Public Comment
- Future Agenda Item Requests
- Reports
- Adjournment

**Policy Number 14: Conflicts of Interest and Ex Parte Communications**

- Political Reform Act and Conflicts of Interest
- Ex Parte Communications

**Policy Number 15: Best Practices for Councilmembers**

- Mayor and Councilmember Contact with City Staff
- Mayor and Councilmember Contact with Boards, Commissions, and Committees
- Best Practices for Council Meetings
- Regional Boards and Outside Agency Representation

**CITY COUNCIL POLICY NUMBER 11**  
**USE OF TRAVEL FUNDS FOR CITY COUNCIL: CITY COUNCIL CONFERENCES/TRAINING**

**Purpose**

The purpose of this policy is to establish clear and comprehensive guidelines for the allocation and management of travel funds for City Council members. This policy aims to ensure a fair and equitable approach to addressing the travel needs and expenses of all council members, promoting transparency and accountability in the use of public funds. By setting these guidelines, we strive to facilitate effective and efficient travel arrangements that support the council's work and responsibilities, while maintaining fiscal responsibility and integrity.

**Annual Travel Budget**

Each Council member will receive an annual budget as approved by the City Council and divided equally among all City Councilmembers to cover costs related to attending conferences, meetings, and training sessions. This budget will apply to travel within California and is designed to ensure that Council members can participate in essential events without financial barriers.

**Out-of-State Travel**

Any out-of-state travel or training requires prior approval from the City Council. This ensures that such travel is necessary and aligns with the Council's goals and priorities.

**Covered Expenses:**

The annual budget will cover the following expenses:

- Mileage for attending meetings where the Council member serves as a city-appointed representative.
- Travel expenses including economy class airfare, hotels, mileage and transportation related to attending conferences or training.
- Other associated costs, such as registration fees or meals (per reimbursement policy), where applicable. The total budget for each Council member will be inclusive of all these costs, ensuring comprehensive coverage of travel-related expenses.

Councilmembers must submit receipts for expenses incurred in order to receive reimbursement.

**Exceeding the Budget:**

- If a Council member exceeds their allocated funding from the approved budget they must either cover the excess expenses themselves or formally request additional funding from the City Council.
- In rare cases, a Council member may voluntarily transfer their unused funds to another member, subject to approval by the Council at a publicly noticed meeting. This allows for flexibility and mutual support among Council members.

CITY COUNCIL PROTOCOLS  
CITY COUNCIL: ETHICS AND  
PROFESSIONAL/PERSONAL CONDUCT  
CITY COUNCIL POLICY NUMBER 12

ADOPTED BY THE CITY COUNCIL AT THEIR CITY COUNCIL MEETING OF April 7, 2026

## CITY COUNCIL POLICY NUMBER 12 ETHICS AND PROFESSIONAL/PERSONAL CONDUCT

This policy consolidates and updates the professional and personal conduct requirements for City Councilmembers, along with fiscal stewardship and workplace environment standards. Councilmembers must conduct themselves above reproach and avoid even the appearance of impropriety.

**1. Professional and Personal Conduct** The conduct of Councilmembers, both professional and personal, must be above reproach. They must avoid even the appearance of impropriety and refrain from engaging in abusive conduct, personal attacks, or defamatory remarks against fellow members of the Council, boards, commissions, staff, or the public. Councilmembers are expected to maintain personal conduct that upholds the dignity of their office. They shall:

- Avoid engaging in actions or speech that would undermine public confidence in the Council or the City.
- Act with professionalism in all interactions, including social media and public forums.
- Refrain from actions or behaviors that could discredit the Council or the City.

Councilmembers shall sign this Code of Conduct annually at the meeting when the Mayor and Vice Mayor are elected.

The residents and businesses of Sebastopol are entitled to fair, ethical, and accountable local government. Public officials must:

- Comply with both the letter and the spirit of the laws and policies affecting government operations.
- Be independent, impartial, and fair in their judgment and actions.
- Use their public office for the public good, not for personal gain.
- Conduct public deliberations and processes openly (unless legally confidential) in an atmosphere of respect and civility.

**2. Ethical Leadership and Respectful Treatment** Councilmembers shall treat all individuals—fellow Councilmembers, City staff, and the public—with the utmost respect and courtesy. They shall:

- Engage in open, respectful, and constructive debate, valuing diverse perspectives.
- Avoid personal attacks, inflammatory language, or any behavior that disrupts the order and civility of public discourse.
- Demonstrate active listening, consider all viewpoints, and collaborate in good faith to achieve the best outcomes for the community.
- Foster an environment in which all participants feel safe and respected, promoting mutual understanding and cooperation.

**3. Fiscal Responsibility** Councilmembers shall act as stewards of public resources, ensuring that taxpayer money is spent wisely and efficiently. They shall:

CITY COUNCIL PROTOCOLS  
CITY COUNCIL: ETHICS AND  
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- Make budgetary and financial decisions based on the long-term health and welfare of the community.
- Avoid using public resources for personal or political gain.
- Support policies that encourage sustainable growth and responsible financial planning.

**4. Positive Work Environment** Councilmembers should foster a positive, respectful, and constructive work environment for City employees, residents, and businesses. They must avoid inappropriate interference with the professional duties of staff and recognize the importance of treating everyone involved with the City with courtesy and respect.

## CITY COUNCIL POLICY NUMBER 13 PROCESS OF CITY COUNCIL MEETINGS

Prior to starting the meeting, the Mayor will ask IT and City staff if we are ready to proceed with the meeting. IT and City staff will indicate yes or ask for more time. IT will start “Meeting is being recorded” and the Mayor will then start the meeting.

- Mayor will call meeting to order: “I am calling this meeting of the Sebastopol City Council to order at [time].”
- Mayor will ask the City Clerk to take roll call (in alphabetical order).
- Mayor will lead the Salute to the Flag.
- Mayor will ask if there is any remote participation from Councilmembers under AB 2449.
- Mayor will read the land acknowledgement.
- Mayor will provide information on History of Sebastopol
- Mayor will read Proclamations/Years of Service Awards as noted on the agenda. If there is a recipient present, the Mayor (or designee) will present the proclamation or award. The Mayor will ask the recipient if in attendance to come to the Council dais and receive the proclamation.
- Mayor will call for any Statements of conflicts of interest from Councilmembers. If a conflict is declared, the Councilmember will state it publicly, depart the meeting for that specific agenda item, and may return once the item is concluded.

PUBLIC COMMENT FOR ITEMS NOT ON THE AGENDA: Mayor will say the following:

This is an opportunity for members of the public to speak on matters within the jurisdiction of the City Council which are not otherwise on the agenda. Due to the length of recent City Council Meetings, it is strongly encouraged that written comments be submitted to the City Council by sending them by email to: [citycouncil@cityofsebastopol.gov](mailto:citycouncil@cityofsebastopol.gov) with Public Comment Written in the Subject Line.

Mayor will ask for City Clerk to take public comment.

- 2-minute time limit
- 20 minutes in total for first public comment period.

After public comment, Mayor may clarify a statement or ask that the member of the public contact City staff for a response.

Consent Calendar Items:

- Mayor will read all consent calendar items – per protocols; agenda item title can be shorted by Mayor.
- Mayor will ask if any Councilmember wants to remove a Consent Calendar Item. If an item is removed, it is moved to the end of the agenda for discussion/action.
- Mayor will open for Public Comment for Consent Calendar Items Only and ask City Clerk to handle public comment.
- After public comment, Mayor will ask for a Motion.
- Once received, Mayor will call for a Second.
- Mayor will ask City Clerk to take the Vote.

- City Clerk will take the vote and announce if the Motion passes or fails.

ITEMS ON AGENDA:

- Mayor will read agenda item title.
- Mayor will ask City Manager to introduce item or introduce staff member or presenter in charge of item.
  - Staff will then present the item and then if there is a presenter, ask the presenter to present the item,
- Mayor will ask for questions from the Councilmembers of City staff or presenter.
- Mayor will open for public comment or public hearing (depending on type of agenda item) and ask the City Clerk to handle public comment.
- After public comment/public hearing Mayor will return to City Council Discussion and/or Deliberations.
- After all Councilmembers comments or if there are no additional comments, Mayor will ask for a motion and then a second to the motion.
- Mayor will ask City Clerk to take the Vote.
- City Clerk will call the vote of each Councilmember (in alphabetical order)
- City Clerk will announce the results of the Motion (Pass or Fail)

After discussion and action items, second public comment is opened for items not on the agenda.

- Mayor will ask for City Clerk to take public comment.
- 2-minute time limit
- 20 minutes in total for first public comment period.

Mayor will ask Councilmembers for future City Council agenda item requests.

Reports:

Mayor will ask for the following reports:

City Manager and City Clerk will provide any pertinent general information received to the Council. These are non-action topics.

The City Council will then report out on any Committee or Subcommittee meetings they have attended.

The City Council will then report out on any individual correspondence (could be in person meetings/calls/emails/etc.) received that pertains to the City or Council jurisdiction or may be of interest to the Council.

Mayor will then adjourn the Regular City Council meeting to the next meeting.

CITY COUNCIL PROTOCOLS  
CITY COUNCIL CONFLICTS OF  
INTEREST AND EX PARTE COMMUNICATIONS  
CITY COUNCIL POLICY NUMBER 14

ADOPTED BY THE CITY COUNCIL AT THEIR CITY COUNCIL MEETING OF April 7, 2026

CITY COUNCIL POLICY NUMBER 14

CONFLICTS OF INTEREST AND EX PARTE COMMUNICATIONS

**1. Political Reform Act and Conflicts of Interest** State laws aim to eliminate actions by Councilmembers that may constitute a conflict of interest, ensuring all actions are taken in the public interest.

Newly elected officials must file a Statement of Economic Interest (Form 700) within 30 days of being sworn into office and annually thereafter. Form 700 must also be filed within 30 days of leaving office. Councilmembers serving on regional boards should verify separate filing requirements with those agencies.

If a Councilmember believes a potential conflict exists, they are encouraged to consult the City Attorney. Under the Political Reform Act, Councilmembers are prohibited from making, participating in, or influencing a governmental decision in which they know or have reason to know they have a financial interest.

If a conflict exists, the Councilmember must:

1. Publicly identify the financial interest.
2. Recuse themselves from both the discussion and the vote.
3. Leave the room until the matter is completed.

**Exceptions:** Consent calendar items (no need to leave the room) and speaking during public comment as a private citizen.

Councilmembers should consult the Fair Political Practices Commission (FPPC) website and the City Attorney for guidance.

**2. Ex Parte Communications** Ex parte communications (communications outside of a public meeting with applicants, representatives, opponents, or others seeking City action) are discouraged when intended to influence an official decision for personal or private interests.

Any Councilmember who has ex parte communications regarding a matter that will come before the Council should disclose the communication at the meeting. Written ex parte communications should be made part of the public record.

CITY COUNCIL PROTOCOLS

CITY COUNCIL: Best Practices for  
City Councilmembers

CITY COUNCIL POLICY NUMBER 15

ADOPTED BY THE CITY COUNCIL AT THEIR CITY COUNCIL MEETING OF April 7, 2026

CITY COUNCIL POLICY NUMBER 15

BEST PRACTICES FOR COUNCILMEMBERS

**1. Mayor and Councilmember Contact with City Staff**

- Always maintain professionalism and treat all staff with respect.
- Direct staff personnel issues to the City Manager.
- Comments about staff performance should be made only to the City Manager (privately).
- The City Council and its members shall deal with administrative staff solely through the City Manager.
- Councilmembers must not attempt to influence staff on employment appointments, contracts, consultants, development applications, licenses, or permits.
- Councilmembers should not solicit political support from City staff.

**2. Mayor and Councilmember Contact with Boards, Commissions, and Committees** The Mayor and Councilmembers should be mindful not to unduly influence decisions at the Planning Commission, Design Review Board, Public Arts Committee, Climate Action Committee, or other standing committees.

It is not appropriate for the Mayor or a Councilmember to make public comments at these meetings unless acting in their personal capacity.

**3. Best Practices for Council Meetings** Councilmembers must conduct themselves with honesty and integrity, prioritizing the welfare of the people of Sebastopol. They must:

- Be prepared for public meetings, listen attentively, and focus on the agenda.
- Refrain from interrupting speakers or making unrelated personal comments.
- Engage in open, respectful, and constructive debate.
- Avoid personal attacks or disruptive behavior.
- Demonstrate active listening and collaborate in good faith.
- Put constituents first at all times.
- Treat each other and the public with dignity, courtesy, and respect.
- Maintain confidentiality of closed session materials.
- Keep comments clear, concise, and on topic.
- Encourage diverse viewpoints while working toward consensus when possible.
- Be open and transparent about actions and decisions.
- Actively seek feedback from constituents.

**4. Regional Boards and Outside Agency Representation** Council representatives to regional boards shall keep the Mayor and Council informed through short written or oral reports during the “Mayor and Councilmember Reports” portion of the agenda.

If the primary liaison cannot attend, they should notify the chair and arrange for the alternate to attend.