

Code Of Ethics And The Municipal Treasurer

Professional competence and ethics are parallel concerns for the municipal treasurer. Officials at every level of government are faced with public skepticism. Today's treasurers find themselves watched more carefully by the public, their actions scrutinized for signs of bias or personal interest. Treasurers are held accountable as custodians of public funds, which places them in an especially delicate position.

Ethics are an inducement for treasurers to strive for higher levels of performance. The ethical municipal treasurer must always think in terms of the total public welfare, the overall good, the long-range effect, and eschew the temptation to please just the individual or group pressing its case.

Section 62.09(9)(d), Wisconsin Statutes, states that a treasurer "shall receive no compensation except the salary fixed by the council..." (Emphasis added). It should be obvious to all treasurers, except any engaged in outright corruption, that the only money they may legally accept for performing their duties is their salary. The troublesome area is that of "other compensation". Also, see section 946.12(5) Wisconsin Statutes.

Treasurers should politely refuse to accept any gifts that are offered to them personally. Such gifts, such as football tickets or other offers of free entertainment, are innocently offered, but such gifts may be difficult, if not impossible, to justify the actual intent, that makes it important to always refuse gifts. A treasurer should not directly or indirectly accept any gift, whether in the form of money, services, loan, travel, entertainment, hospitality, promise, or any other form, under circumstances in which members of the public could reasonably infer that the gift was intended to influence him or her, or could reasonably be expected to influence him or her in the performance of official duties, or was intended as a reward for any official action on the treasurer's part.

It cannot be emphasized enough that it is the appearance, not the actual intent, involved that can be so incriminating in the eyes of the public. Large segments of the public distrust all government officials, whether elected or not, and they will assume guilt, not innocence, whenever there is an opportunity to make a judgment. This is true to a certain degree in all municipalities, especially small communities, where everyone knows every other person's business and rumors easily run rampant.

Treasurers, and all local government officials, can take affirmative steps to safeguard themselves from the charge of unethical conduct in certain circumstances. The municipality's governing body and all of its officials can formulate and adopt some simple guidelines on unsolicited gifts. Guidelines can be established which allow a local official to accept such innocuous unsolicited gifts as meals and cigars up to a modest maximum dollar level. Guidelines can be very useful in establishing realistic parameters; public officials should not have to be altogether isolated from normal social practices among friends and associates on appropriate occasions. In the absence of any official guidelines, the wise course of conduct is for treasurers to decline any gifts.

Signature: _____
Printed Name: _____

DATE: _____