

10-21-2025

Dear Supervisor Brach-Williams and Members of the Town Board,

Attached is the Board of Ethics' consensus recommendation to update the 2023 Shelter Island Code of Ethics.

We're charged with periodically reviewing the Code to ensure it sets forth clear and enforceable, common-sense standards of conduct. Over the past several months, we've worked on this review alongside specific Ethics Opinions—some already forwarded to you, others confidential advisory opinions provided to employees who have sought our guidance. (Many of them are posted with permission on the [Opinions page](#) of our website to help guide other employees.)

Drawing on our practical experience—having handled more than twenty matters over the past few years—we believe these proposed revisions (in redline) make the code clearer and more workable in several modest but important ways:

- Purpose. The Statement of Purpose has been expanded to include context from the original Preamble, which is not visible in the online version of the code. It also highlights “common law” ethical standards—those that may evolve over time through court decisions, cannot be codified, and occasionally arise in our reviews.
- Section 8-5, Disclosures. Potential conflicts of interest must be disclosed to an employee's supervisor or in the public minutes of a board, but not necessarily in a separate writing to us as we'd suggested, too optimistically and bureaucratically, in the 2023 code. It's proved impractical for the Board of Ethics to solicit or collect such disclosures. We try to keep track of them in other ways, and we plan to do more employee training. Recusal continues to follow disclosure at both the employee and official levels.
- Section 8-10, Future Employment. We recommend revising subsection (B) to establish a one-year “cooling-off” period that prohibits certain employment, rather than appearances, after Town employment, and removes the draconian lifetime ban in the 2023 code. In our opinion this provides an appropriate safeguard against former employees leveraging prior positions without unduly limiting future employment opportunities.
- Section 8-18, Complaints. We propose allowing anonymous complaints.
- Section 8-21, Penalties. This section is redrafted to clarify that Ethics Board recommendations in response to complaints can't automatically become misdemeanors, but rather, go to the Town Board which may act on them or refer to a law enforcement agency.

We also suggest several technical and clarifying edits to provisions on gifts, exceptions, interests in contracts, and definitions, as well as correction of a drafting error, to align with state law.

These proposed changes reflect our collective judgment and are intended to make the Code of Ethics both clearer and more practical. We'd be pleased to answer any questions or discuss these recommendations in greater detail.

Thank you for your continued support of ethics in Shelter Island government.

Sincerely,
Shelter Island Board of Ethics
Duff Wilson, chair
Laura Cunningham
Deborah Grayson
Lois Morris
Robert Raiber
cc: Board of Ethics, Steven Leventhal