



**BOARD OF ETHICS  
CITY OF STAMFORD**

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June 18, 2014

The Honorable Joseph Coppola, Jr.  
[REDACTED]  
[REDACTED]

Re: Advisory Opinion

Dear Representative Coppola:

The Board of Ethics has reviewed your May 6, 2014 email to Ms. Bader requesting an advisory opinion as to a potential conflict of interest in your position as an elected member of the Board of Representatives, and as Chairman of the Public Works Committee thereof, arising as a result of your spouse's part-time employment by the City's Zoning Board of Appeals. We thank you for your email and for your request of an advisory opinion. All persons involved in municipal government are encouraged to address questions to this Board whenever they are uncertain about the proper interpretation of the Code of Ethics; the interests of good government and public transparency are furthered by doing so. We applaud your good example and hope that it is followed.

Section 19-4 of the City's Municipal Code of Ethics sets forth the following regarding conflicts of interest:

*"No officer or employee shall engage in any business or transaction or have a personal, immediate family or business interest, directly or indirectly, which is in material conflict with or incompatible with the proper discharge of his or her official duties or that by creating a divided loyalty might influence or impair his or her independence of judgment and action in the performance of said duties. A conflict of interest exists whenever an officer or employee will more likely than not benefit, disproportionately from other citizens of the city, directly or indirectly, from a decision over which they have influence."*<sup>1</sup>

Section 19-5(A) of the Code states the following:

*"Unless otherwise provided by law, an officer or employee shall not deliberate or participate in a decision or action by the agency of which the individual is a member or is employed if said individual or any member of his or her immediate family or a business with which he or she is associated would be likely to gain or*

<sup>1</sup> Stamford, CT., Code of Ordinances § 19-4 (2014), available at <https://www.municode.com/library>.

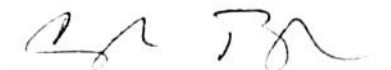

*lose a material benefit that is not common to the general interest of other citizens of the city.”<sup>2</sup>*

The situation you describe in your request has become moot (as the vote in question was held, with your recusing yourself from voting). Nevertheless, the Board believes it would be helpful, and responsive to your request, to render an opinion. A member of the City's Board of Representatives voting on a matter that could affect such member's spouse potentially gives rise to a prohibited conflict of interest and is deserving of analysis under the Code.

The Board is of the opinion that, based on the information you submitted to us, for you to have voted on the appointment of the City's Director of Operations would not have constituted a prohibited action under the Code solely because your spouse's position with the City falls within the ambit of the Operations Department. A vote in which you participate could implicate Code Sections 19-4 and/or 19-5 if the result thereof would directly affect your spouse's conditions of employment and/or compensation and thereby create a material, personal benefit for you that is not common to the general interest of citizens of the City. The facts as you describe them do not present a connection between the result of the vote in question and any effect on your spouse's employment sufficiently direct so as to constitute a prohibited conflict, in the opinion of the Board.

This advisory opinion is a public document. The opinions stated herein are expressly based on the accuracy and completeness of the information presented to the Board and are confined to the specifics of the question(s) put to the Board in rendering such opinions.

Sincerely,



<sup>2</sup> Id. at § 19-5.