

# Tips for Newly Elected Village Officials

(From a very wise administrator with many years of experience)

***It takes ~~two~~ four\* to tango.*** Even if you have an idea that surpasses the collective wisdom of all municipal knowledge, you still need at least three members of the Board of Trustees to agree with you to make it happen. Treat every public policy issue as a *collaborative* venture. If your idea or initiative does not work, move on and do not take it personally. There are plenty of other ideas you will bring to the table during your term of office.

***Read your stuff and ask questions.*** Many hours are put into preparing agenda items that appear in the meeting packet. The staff goal is to present elected officials with the information necessary to make an informed decision. This is a resource for your benefit as a policy maker. If you have questions or feel information is missing on any agenda item, let the Village Administrator or appropriate staff member know BEFORE the meeting.

***Hear all sides of the story.*** When approached with a “concern,” it is best not to commit to any action or express an opinion until you hear both sides of the issue. It is not uncommon for a neighbor, friend, business owner or petitioner to share a concern without providing you with all of the details. It is easier to say you will check into the matter to avoid the potential need to backtrack and change your position later.

***Executive sessions are confidential.*** There are no exceptions to this rule until the Village Board either takes official action on a matter, or votes to release executive session minutes. This applies to the specific topic of discussion as well as the content of the discussion. A breach of executive session is a betrayal of the trust of the elected and appointed members of the organization.

***One cannot have 10 number one priorities.*** Resources of time, funding and personnel are limited. New projects and initiatives take all of the above. Be sensitive to the initiation of new ideas, and realize that priorities may need to be re-aligned to accomplish new goals. Moreover, remember that *four to tango* thing to get your number one priority accomplished!

***Don't lose sight of the forest for the trees.*** The Village has adopted a plan to provide the strategic direction of the organization. This will likely be updated during your term of office to add your ideas! While you will be involved in making hundreds of decisions (some small, some large) during your term of office, always ask yourself how the next decision supports the strategic plan.

***Elected officials are a team.*** Despite the fact that each member of the Board of Trustees was individually elected, the Board is a single team. The level of discourse, civility, honesty and collaboration determines the public perception and effectiveness of the entire body. Debate and differences of opinion result in better outcomes when there is a spirit of trust and respect. Each member of the team

needs to support the decisions of the team once they are made. Undercutting the decision or working behind the scenes to discredit the action is disruptive to building a climate of trust and respect.

***Follow the chain of command.*** The Village Administrator supervises the staff. The President and Village Board supervise the Village Administrator. If there are concerns or issues to be addressed, the Village Administrator is the individual who needs to be contacted. Routine inquiries or questions should certainly be directed to the staff.

***Praise in public, criticize in private.*** A good rule to follow whether the recipient is a fellow elected official or a member of staff.

***And, we even pay them to work here.*** We have embraced the philosophy of paying at the median pay range of comparable communities. As a result, we will likely attract some employees from lower paying communities, and are likely to lose some employees to higher paying communities. Attracting and retaining quality employees help us all provide better services to residents. Please remember that employees work here because of a combination of economic rewards, working conditions, professional challenges and the knowledge that they are valued. This delicate balance needs to be nurtured.

***Remember the “smell test.”*** Public officials operate in a fishbowl. Our actions, comments and behavior are continually judged whether we like it or not. Sometimes appearances matter more than substance. If it smells, avoid it (even if it is legal). Trust and integrity take a long time to establish, but can be lost in a minute.

\* Sometimes five, but that is a lesson left for another time.