



Ombuds Office Operating Policy

Policy Number: PP 5-6

Effective Date: December 31, 2024

Approved By: Chris Blue, Manager

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POLICY

The Town of Chapel Hill Ombuds Office (“Ombuds Office” or “Office”) is charged with providing confidential, informal, impartial, and independent conflict resolution services to Town of Chapel Hill (“Town”) employees and community members. In carrying out its charge, the Office will abide by the International Ombuds Association (IOA)’s [Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics](#).

The Town supports the independence of the Ombuds Office. The Ombuds Office:

- Functions independently regarding case handling and issue management.
- Has access to staff and information as needed to do their job and as allowed by law.
- Reports to the Town Manager for administrative, budgetary, and evaluation purposes.

PURPOSE

The IOA recommends that ombuds collaborate with their organizations to develop a framework that meets the organization’s needs and abides by the IOA’s Standards of Practice and Code of Ethics. To follow this IOA best practice, the framework can be created even after an ombuds office is established. This policy and the attached procedures document how the Ombuds Office functions within the Town and in accordance with IOA standards.

R.E.S.P.E.C.T. VALUES

The Ombuds Office helps the organization live up to its commitment to the **RESPECT** values.

The Office serves as a resource to Town employees and community members that:

- recognizes each person’s **Responsibility** for their own actions.
- encourages **Safety** through self-care and care for others.
- supports sharing and honoring each other’s perspectives as embodied in our values of **Communication** and **Teamwork**.



Responsibility: We acknowledge that our duties impact the jobs of many other employees. We take ownership over our roles within the organization as a way to demonstrate our consideration for the time and efforts of our fellow employees as well as pride in our own work.



Safety: We strive to maintain our own mental and physical well-being and the well-being of those around us. We are dedicated to a work environment that minimizes risk of injury or accident. We are also dedicated to an environment that provides for honest and courteous discussion of workplace issues without fear of repercussion.

R.E.S.P.E.C.T.
VALUES
CONT.



Communication: We take part in constructive dialogues and set clear goals and expectations so we may better understand our roles in the workplace. Our organizational values serve as a common language when discussing each other's decisions and actions.



Teamwork: We participate in a cooperative work environment in order to support each other in our service to the community. We encourage an environment that fosters innovation and creativity.

APPROVAL

Chris Blue, Town Manager

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Ombuds Office Operating Procedures

Policy Number: PP 5-6

Effective Date: December 31, 2024

Approved By: Ross Tompkins, Ombuds

DEFINITIONS

The term **Ombuds** includes all Ombuds Office staff.

The term **visitor** refers to anyone who consults with the Ombuds Office.

IOA is the International Ombuds Association, the worldwide organization that sets the standards for the ombuds profession.

PROCEDURES

The Ombuds Office:

- Provides a safe place for visitors to confidentially share their concerns and explore strategies for resolving or managing an issue.
- Aims to help visitors help themselves to the greatest extent possible.
- Assists with managing interpersonal issues, raising concerns, and mitigating conflict within the Town.
- Informally discusses complaints, concerns, or questions about Town policies and decisions.
- Assists in understanding and assessing options and resources for addressing concerns about workplace conduct.
- Identifies trends and challenges within the organization and recommends changes to policy or practice when appropriate.
- Tailors its response to the situation and the visitor's concerns.

Code of ethics and standards of practice

- The Ombuds Office follows the [IOA's Code of Ethics and Standards of Practice](#). By doing so, the Office commits to consistently earning the trust placed in the Ombuds role and upholding the positive reputation of the Ombuds profession.
- Per the Standards of Practice, the Ombuds Office operates under the four principles of independence, impartiality, informality, and confidentiality. Compliance with these principles is essential to the success of the Ombuds Office.

PROCEDURES (CONT.)

1. **Independence:** The Ombuds works on their own without influence from or direction by other Town functions, including elected and appointed officials.
 - If the Ombuds has non-ombuds duties, those duties mustn't interfere with their ombuds duties. The Ombuds must clearly communicate when they are and aren't acting as the Ombuds.
 - The Ombuds has sole discretion over whether or how to engage regarding individual, group, or systemic concerns. Acting on their own initiative, the Ombuds may bring a concern to the attention of appropriate individuals.
2. **Impartiality:** The Ombuds shall remain neutral, unbiased, and absent of self-interest in the performance of their duties.
 - The Ombuds shall engage in fair process with the goal of all parties in a conflict feeling they're respected, heard, and provided a chance to learn.
 - The Ombuds' duty is to the principle of fairness. The Ombuds doesn't serve as an advocate for an individual or for the Town.
3. **Informality:** The Ombuds Office is an off-the-record resource. The Ombuds provides services on a voluntary basis and works outside the Town's formal problem-resolution and grievance processes. This means that:
 - No employee or community member can be compelled to seek help from the Ombuds Office.
 - The Ombuds Office doesn't participate in disciplinary or grievance processes.
 - The Ombuds Office doesn't conduct formal investigations.
 - The Ombuds Office isn't a mandatory reporter or an office of notice. Talking with the Ombuds isn't the same as filing a formal complaint or legal action.
4. **Confidentiality:** The Ombuds Office won't share the names of visitors, or any messages or information exchanged between the Office and a visitor. Unless required by law, the Ombuds Office only shares this information with permission or in cases of imminent risk of serious physical harm.
 - The Ombuds Office and the Town shall take reasonable measures to safeguard the security of confidential information.
 - The Ombuds may disclose confidential information about a specific matter to the extent the Ombuds decides it's necessary to defend themselves against a formal complaint of professional misconduct.

ONLINE
RESOURCES

[Town of Chapel Hill Ombuds Office](#)

[International Ombuds Association \(IOA\)](#)

PROCEDURES
APPROVED BY

Ross Tompkins, Town Ombuds

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