



# National Alliance of Preservation Commissions Code of Ethics for Commissioners and Staff

## Preamble

Preservation commissions have been established by local governments throughout the United States to promote the preservation and appropriate development of heritage resources in their communities. The National Alliance of Preservation Commissions (NAPC) is the only organization devoted solely to representing the nation's preservation commissions. Its mission is "to build strong local preservation programs through education, advocacy and training." As part of that mission, the NAPC has developed this Code of Ethics to promote and maintain the highest standards of honesty, integrity and professionalism among the commissioners and staff who serve their communities through preservation commissions.

These principles are derived from general societal values and recognized principles of professional responsibility. As societal values compete, so may ethical principles. The need for full public disclosure may compete with the need to respect confidential information, for example. The ethical commissioner or staff member must carefully balance various public and private interests based on the facts and context of each situation guided by the commitment to serve the public interest.

Individual commissioners should be knowledgeable, accurate, honest and forthright in their dealings with other commissioners, local elected officials and staff, applicants and the general public. Although not elected by the public, preservation commissioners are accountable for their actions in the communities they serve.

This Code of Ethics comprises guidelines for ethical conduct organized under three main categories:

*Responsibility to the Community*  
*Responsibility to the Profession*  
*Standards of Professional Conduct*

Under each category are statements of principle to guide preservation commissioners and staff in choosing ethical courses of action for heritage preservation in their communities. The NAPC endorses this Code as the ethical benchmark to which all its members should aspire. In the absence of professional licensure for preservation commissioners and staff, the adherence to a code of ethics is a matter of personal responsibility. However, preservation commissions may wish to adopt these principles and standards as a guide. Although stated in the plural, each suggested rule also applies to an individual commissioner or staff member.

## **Responsibility to the Community**

*The most effective historic preservation takes place locally, and all preservation commissioners and staff should remember that it is their duty, as public servants, to advance the greater good of the community.*

1. Commissioners and Staff should be advocates for the community's heritage resources, striving to protect their integrity while recognizing the rights of citizens, individually and collectively, to their beneficial use and enjoyment.
2. Commissioners and Staff should promote public awareness, appreciation, access and support for the preservation of heritage resources.
3. Commissioners and Staff should develop standards and guidelines that are appropriate for the resources and protect the community's unique character, environment and quality of life.
4. Commissioners and Staff should respect the diversity of heritage resources that may hold different meanings for various groups and communities.
5. Commissioners and Staff should respect the public's right to know by providing full, clear and accurate information and observing both the letter and spirit of open meetings and open records laws.
6. Commissioners and Staff should provide opportunities for meaningful public participation in the work of the commission.
7. Commissioners and Staff should make timely, fair, informed and impartial decisions that guarantee citizens' rights to due process and equal protection under the law.
8. Commissioners and Staff should be sensitive to the interrelatedness of their decisions and the long-term implications for the resources and the community.
9. Commissioners and Staff should seek compromises or search for alternatives where necessary to achieve overall preservation goals and provide substantial justice for citizens.
10. Commissioners and Staff should recognize that the historic built environment changes over time and encourage new development that respects the historic character and fabric that preceded it.
11. Commissioners and Staff should continually evaluate and update their plans, ordinances, standards, guidelines and procedures to ensure they meet the community's current and future needs.
12. Commissioners and Staff should always strive to make decisions that are in the best interest of the community.

## **Responsibility to the Profession**

*Preservation commissioners and staff are drawn from many disciplines and backgrounds. The common thread that joins them is their interest and commitment to preserve heritage resources in their communities. A multi-disciplinary profession has developed over the years from the historic preservation movement, and commissioners and staff have an obligation to advance the best interests of this profession in the context of their commission work.*

1. Commissioners and Staff should be mindful that they are representatives of the greater local, state, and national preservation community and conduct themselves in a way that brings credit to their commission and the profession.
2. Commissioners and Staff should share their knowledge and experience and contribute to the

development of other colleagues, particularly newly appointed commissioners, students, and interns.

3. Commissioners and Staff should actively promote heritage preservation and strive to increase the involvement of underrepresented groups.
4. Commissioners and Staff should support through their memberships and other contributions organizations that promote heritage preservation.
5. Commissioners and Staff should work collaboratively with related professionals and professional organizations whose actions also affect heritage conservation including, but not limited to, planners, code officials, architects, landscape architects, archaeologists, attorneys, realtors, and developers.
6. Commissioners and Staff should treat fairly and comment responsibly on the professional views of colleagues and members of other professions.
7. Commissioners and Staff should render all practicable assistance to other colleagues and organizations in an emergency when heritage resources are at risk.
8. Commissioners and Staff should acquire a depth of knowledge that will enable them to explain to others the role of heritage preservation in a complex, modern world.
9. Commissioners and Staff should recognize that the field of heritage preservation is constantly evolving and actively pursue continuing educational opportunities in order to maintain, refine and enhance their capabilities as practitioners.

### **Standards of Professional Conduct**

*As public servants, commissioners and staff are expected to conduct themselves in accordance with the law. These standards set forth both a baseline for such legal conduct as well as aspirational goals for ethical behavior that may require a conscientious effort to attain.*

1. Commissioners and Staff should thoroughly understand the legal framework of heritage preservation and consistently operate within the bounds of their authority and responsibility under the law.
2. Commissioners and Staff should treat all citizens fairly, impartially and with respect, and refrain from discrimination or harassment of any kind.
3. Commissioners and Staff should not accept gifts or favors under any circumstances where it might appear that acceptance could influence their judgment.
4. Commissioners and Staff should disclose all personal or financial advantages that might accrue to them, their business interests or family members either directly or indirectly from a recommendation or decision.
5. Preservation Commissioners and Staff who have an actual or apparent conflict of interest in a matter coming before them should recuse themselves entirely from deliberations and decisions.
6. Commissioners and Staff are obligated to utilize their knowledge and experience to make decisions and therefore should abstain from participating and voting only in cases of a *bona fide* conflict of interest.
7. Commissioners and Staff should not disclose confidential information obtained in the course of their duties, except as required by the law, or use confidential information to further a personal interest.
8. Commissioners and Staff should not abuse their office by advancing an agenda that is not in

the best interest of the community or heritage preservation.

9. Commissioners and Staff should seek the advice of colleagues or other professionals on matters that fall outside their expert knowledge or competence.

10. Commissioners and staff should be consistent in their actions and recommendations, treating similarly situated properties similarly and providing clear explanations when different treatment is required.

11. Commissioners and Staff should reveal illegal conduct on the part of other commissioners, staff, officials, applicants or their representatives to an appropriate higher authority.

12. Commissioners and Staff should not participate in deliberations or decisions without adequate preparation and knowledge of the matter before them.

13. Commissioners and Staff should avoid dishonesty, never misrepresenting facts or distorting information to achieve a desired outcome.

14. Commissioners and Staff should recognize the uniqueness of heritage properties, applying preservation theories, methods, and standards appropriate to each particular case.

15. Commissioners and Staff should be sensitive to ethical issues and ensure they are raised, critically analyzed, and addressed by the commission and other appropriate authorities.

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*This Code of Ethics was developed by members of the NAPC through an interactive process beginning with a series of facilitated sessions held during the July 2006 NAPC FORUM in Baltimore, MD. The resulting set of principles was further developed and refined by members during the following three-month period leading up to the November 2006 annual meeting of NAPC in Pittsburgh, PA. The effort was supported by the Board of Directors and staff of NAPC and coordinated by Professor James K. Reap, an attorney and member of the Board, with the involvement of the Historic Preservation Advocacy and Professional Development class in the Master of Historic Preservation Program at the University of Georgia. The NAPC would like to acknowledge the organizations whose guidelines and materials were relied on in developing this code: the American Institute of Architects (AIA), American Planning Association (APA), American Institute of Certified Planners (AICP), American Institute for Conservation of Historic and Artistic Works (AIC), and International Council on Monuments and Sites (ICOMOS).*