

FROM THE SCOTTSDALE REPUBLIC

# Ethics code essential to city

**H**ere's a suggestion for Scottsdale City Council members who want to rebuild trust with the public:

Enthusiastically applaud and quickly vote to adopt the ethics code a task force will present early next month.

"It's a comprehensive document," says Scottsdale Community College President Art DeCabooter, who chaired the council-appointed task force. "It's stringent, for sure."

It's a model for any city that wants to make ethical government a cornerstone. The first two sections are aspirational: Through yearly training and signing of the ethical code, officials and employees would commit to exercising ethical behavior. The third section gives the code teeth through an enforcement provision that could lead to removal from office.

"It exceeded my expectations," says Jim Derouin, the lawyer who got a cold reception from some council members when he proposed an ethics code last spring.

Derouin's interest in a code flows from his belief that too many Scottsdale leaders over the decades have come into office expecting to make a buck.

"I want to change that mentality of entitlement and establish an expectation of public service on behalf of the people," he says.

Among key provisions:

- Before joining their first meeting, city officials would be required to read the ethics code and sign a statement agreeing to comply with it.

- Officials would be required to file a form whenever a conflict of interest arose and refrain from participating in the decision-making process, which the code notes is "broader than just voting and includes being involved with any aspects of any decisions the City makes, such as



**Art DeCabooter**



**Jim Derouin**

contracting, sales, purchases, permitting, and zoning."

In other words, a council member could not guide a client through the City Hall process, then step aside just before a public vote.

When an issue in which an official has an interest comes up for consideration, the code requires the official to announce the conflict and leave the room while the matter is being discussed. No winks allowed.

- Open government is highlighted.

"City officials shall conduct themselves in a manner that fully adheres to and preferably exceeds state laws concerning open meetings and transparency of actions. Indeed, City officials are encouraged to employ a 'mindset of openness.'"

Executive sessions should be infrequent, and the city attorney should attend to make sure discussions don't stray.

Amen. We cannot say it loudly enough. Amen.

Writing the code was accompanied by vigorous debate, DeCabooter says. Every word has been thought through. It is an excellent guidepost for ethical government.

"I expect (the council) will applaud it, endorse it and undertake the steps to pass an ordinance to implement it," DeCabooter says.

We'll second that.

— Friday