

# Naples Ethics Commission getting to work after August referendum

By Brittany Carloni, Naples Daily News 12/1/2020

The independent ethics commission in the city of Naples is up and running after the August referendum in which voters authorized its creation.

The commission met for the first time in November after appointments by five governing authorities in Southwest Florida.

Commission members include:

- Laird Lile, appointed by Amira Fox, the state attorney for the 20th Judicial Circuit
- John Thomas Cardillo, appointed by Kathleen Smith, the public defender for the 20th Judicial Circuit
- Dudley Goodlette, appointed by Collier County Sheriff Kevin Rambosk
- Susan Jones, appointed by the Naples City Council
- John Lehmann, appointed by Collier County Commissioner Penny Taylor

In interviews with the Naples Daily News, commissioners said they hope the independent ethics board can bring to the city what voters wanted when they approved the referendum by 62% in August.

“I think the need for a commission that focuses on a subject matter like ethics is always important,” said Goodlette, who was voted chairman of the commission at the first meeting in November.

Goodlette is an attorney with Henderson Franklin. He was elected to the Florida House of Representatives in 1998 and served for eight years.

“I think that there’s an interest in the subject matter and we have to commit ourselves to some of the specific charges in the referendum, but look more broadly at what other local governments are doing, without suggesting that we have a problem to address immediately,” Goodlette said.

Under the charter amendment approved by the ethics referendum, the commission is charged to “develop and draft an amended ethics code.”

The charter amendment gives the independent ethics commission 180 days from its first meeting Nov. 17 to make those amendments to the city’s code.

a woman smiling for the camera: SusanJones© Courtesy of Susan Jones SusanJones

“My No. 1 hope is that (the commission) will prevent unethical behavior and that we’ll structure it in such a way that it does that,” said Jones, the commission’s vice chairwoman and a retired certified public accountant. “We’ll do it primarily by writing an ethics code and having the ability to write advisory letters or opinions that say this is or this is not OK.”

In addition, the commission is tasked with advising the Naples City Council on ethics matters, the charter amendment states. It is given the authority to receive and investigate ethics complaints and impose penalties for violating ethics procedures, according to the charter amendment.

The city's existing ethics code in the city's code of ordinances outlines guidelines for city employees, elected officials and advisory board members on items such as conflicts of interest and prohibited relationships. It also covers standards of conduct and what to do with conflicts when voting.

Lile, a Naples attorney that specializes in wills, estates and trusts, said he hopes the commission can establish a good foundation for the future in the city.

"It's a mandate from the electorate of the city of Naples, so we need to work hard to get it right and also in a practical way that will be long lasting, that won't be overly consumptive of resources, but will establish our framework for enforcement of the ethics code," Lile said.

The charter amendment also authorizes the board to provide ethics training to all employees and officials covered by the code.

Cardillo, an attorney with Cardillo Keith Bonaquist, said the commission has an opportunity to strengthen the framework under which the city currently operates.

a man wearing a suit and tie smiling at the camera: John Thomas Cardillo© Courtesy of John Thomas Cardillo  
John Thomas Cardillo

"I think we have a really good local government. Our residents are very informed," Cardillo said. "What I see this as is an opportunity to improve upon what we currently have and make it clear, probably more thorough."

"What we'll probably spend a lot of time doing is being there for more educational reasons," Cardillo said.

In the commission's first meeting in November, the board discussed initial actions it will need to take to fulfill the requirements under the charter amendment, such as acquiring the services of an ethics attorney and setting up a budget.

Commissioners also discussed what resources they may need from the city as they set up the new independent board, such as assistance from city staff members like the clerk's office.

Lehmann, who served as the vice president of the pro-charter amendment political committee Ethics Naples, said his goal for the commission is to "faithfully" implement the charter amendments and to ensure the process is effective.

a man wearing glasses and looking at the camera: John Lehmann© Courtesy of John Lehmann  
John Lehmann

"The overarching goal is to make sure we have a fair and responsive and transparent government that is respectful to everyone who participates," Lehmann said.

The commission's next meeting is Thursday, Dec. 10, at 9 a.m. at Naples City Hall.

Brittany Carloni is the city of Naples reporter at the Naples Daily News. Support her work by subscribing to our local news organization. Find her on Twitter as @CarloniBrittany.