Summer 2024 | Volume 21

Atlanta Ethics
In Action

2024 Financial Disclosure Season Wrap-Up

By: Ibidapo Onabanjo, *Ethics Advisor*
and Sherry Dawson, *Business Manager*

The Ethics Office strives to strengthen and improve the annual filing process for city officials, employees, board members, and NPU officers required to complete the city financial disclosure statement.

This year, for the first time in the history of the Ethics Office, all 27 city departments and boards collectively achieved a 90% or greater compliance rate. Further, 96% of all required filers completed and filed their 2024 City Financial Disclosure Statement. This is a testament to our shared commitment to transparency, accountability, and collective dedication to improving the process.

We are also pleased to report a significant increase in compliance rates. Of the 2,579 required filers, 94% (2,414 out of 2,579 persons) filed by the April 1, 2024 filing deadline, representing a 14% increase over last year's 80% filing rate. To date, 96% (2439 of the 2579 persons) of all required filers have completed their disclosure statements, which means that the increased training and engaged leadership support was impactful.

IN THIS ISSUE

- 2024 FINANCIAL DISCLOSURE SEASON WRAP-UP
- TRANSPARENT DIAMOND AWARDS
- MY FIRST YEAR ON THE GOVERNING BOARD OF THE OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL AND ETHICS OFFICE
- REPORTING ETHICS VIOLATIONS
- TRIVIA QUESTIONS: WIN PRIZES!!!
- ETHICAL REMINDER
- SPECIAL ANNOUNCEMENTS

Before the start of the filing season, Ethics staff reviewed and revamped the list of individuals who are required to file. *Section 2-814 of the City's Code of Ethics* covers the disclosure of income and financial interests. We identified city job positions that could raise potential conflicts and removed positions that did not meet the criteria of that provision. This step was critical to ensure the list of persons required to file was accurate.

We have made significant changes in our efforts to streamline the filing process. We created and implemented a *new standard of procedure* for the filing season, which included building a phone triage and email support system that allowed us to assist over 1,200 filers. We conducted comprehensive training sessions, equipping our financial disclosure *department partners* with the necessary knowledge and skills. Our citywide outreach strategies included hosting our annual *E-file Day* and five onsite E-file days for different departments and boards to make the filing process more accessible and user-friendly for all.

The 2024 filing season was very successful, however, we acknowledge and recognize the minor problems that did arise. These included routine issues such as invalid contact information for former employees and board members, end-user errors with filers forgetting to submit their statements and not remembering their passwords, and the system running slowly during higher traffic times. We promptly addressed these issues, ensuring minimal disruption to the filing process.

Our commitment to ongoing improvement is unwavering, and the significant increases we saw this year are a testament to the hard work and dedication of the Ethics Office staff, as well as collaboration with executive leadership and department partners to further that commitment. We are constantly working to make the process more efficient and user-friendly, and we appreciate the City's ongoing support and cooperation in this journey.

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Transparent Diamond Awards

By: Ibidapo Onabanjo, Ethics Advisor, Sr.

The Transparent Diamond Awards is an annual presentation ceremony hosted by the Governing Board of the Office of the Inspector General and the Ethics Office. The ceremony honors city boards and departments for their leadership, diligence, and persistence in encouraging their employees to comply with the annual City Financial Disclosure requirements in a timely manner.

This year marks the 17th annual Transparent Diamond Awards ceremony and the first year that all 27 city departments and boards collectively achieved a 90% or greater compliance rate! Hooray!

This year out of the 2,579 filers, 2120 were city employees who were required to file the City Financial Disclosure Statement. The following city departments received the 2024 Transparent Diamond Award for achieving 100% compliance:

- **Atlanta City Council**
- **Atlanta Citizens Review Office**
- **City Auditor's Office**
- **Department of Corrections**
- **Department of Customer Service (ATL 311)**
- **Department of Labor and Employment Services**
- **Department of Law**
- **Office of the City Solicitor**
- **Public Defender's Office**

The following departments received the *Honorable Mention Award* for achieving a 90% timely filing rate:

- **Atlanta Information Management (AIM)**
- **Atlanta Police Department**
- **Department of Aviation**
- **Department of City Planning**
- **Department of Enterprise Assets Management (DEAM)**
- **Department of Finance**
- **Department of Grants and Community Development**
- **Department of Human Resources**
- **Department of Parks & Recreation**
- **Department of Public Works**
- **Department of Procurement**
- **Department of Transportation**
- **Department of Watershed Management**
- **Executive Offices**
- **Municipal Court of Atlanta**

The following department received the *Blue Diamond Award* with the largest city department with required filers that achieved a 90% timely filing rate:

- **Atlanta Fire Rescue**

Please join us in congratulating this year's award recipients and recognizing their efforts to achieve this honor! More importantly, we thank these city departments for their commitment to supporting and sustaining an ethical culture.

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ETHICS OFFICE
TRANSPARENT DIAMOND
AWARD CERTIFICATE
2024
THIS CERTIFICATE IS AWARDED TO
Atlanta Beltline Inc.
JABU M. SENGONA,
ETHICS OFFICER
CHAIR OF
GOVERNING BOARD

My First Year On The Governing Board of the Office of Inspector General and Ethics Office

By: Terri Simmons, Member of the Governing Board

In the fall of 2022, I excitedly, albeit nervously, was sworn in as a member of the Governing Board of the Office of Inspector General and Ethics Office. Now that I've been on the board for over a year, I wanted to share a bit about my journey to get here and what I've learned. When the Gate City Bar Association president approached me about the appointment, I was particularly eager to serve because I just love Atlanta that much. My love affair with Atlanta started in my childhood when my late grandfather and dad, huge baseball fans, introduced me to the Atlanta Braves. Growing up my family would often make the 3.5-hour drive from Tennessee to catch a game and tour the city. My love affair deepened as I spent my undergrad years at Spelman College, and for over a decade, Atlanta has been where I live and proudly call home. I agreed to serve on the board because it's important to me that we have transparent, effective, and ethical governance. I've learned a lot to say the least, but I want to share some important lessons that stick out. First, I've learned to listen and ask questions. Through listening and asking questions, I've learned so much about the important missions of the Office of Inspector General and Ethics Office. That is, ensuring lawful, effective, efficient, and ethical administration of city government. Second, I've learned to use my talents. We all have unique talents and skills and it's important to use them because they add value. As one of the two attorneys on the board, I'm often using my legal training and knowledge to address issues regarding our bylaws, the city charter, or other functions of the board. Lastly, I've learned to connect and engage with the people our board serves. I've enjoyed engaging with those that live and work in the city, city employees, and officials, getting input, as well as talking about the board and what we do, so that we can continue to meet the needs of this great city we serve. I am so happy and honored to continue this work and I encourage you to attend a board meeting to learn more about what we do.

Reporting Ethics Violations

What would you do if you witnessed a city vendor or contractor inviting your co-worker out to lunch? What if you saw your supervisor harassing or bullying a co-worker? What if you witness a co-worker misusing city property? Would you stay quiet to avoid trouble with your boss or would you report these incidents?

In any of these examples, action should be taken. The City's **Ethics Office** encourages employees to report any suspected or observed wrongdoing. When we fail to report misconduct, we may think we are protecting our co-workers, the city's reputation, or ourselves. In fact, we are putting all of these at risk and should take action.

To recognize potential violations, we need to be familiar with the **Code of Ethics**. Examples of potential ethics violations may include:

- Accepting prohibited gifts or gratuities from a city vendor or contractor.
- Misusing city property, such as computers, printers or vehicles, to benefit ourselves or others.
- Acting on behalf of private interests which are in conflict with the best interests of the City.
- Leaking confidential city information about a city project to benefit a city contractor or prospective bidder on a city project.

Employees are encouraged to report any observed or suspected wrongdoing, which may be done different ways. The easiest way to report potential violations is by calling the **Integrity Line** at **1-800-884-0911** or submitting a web-based Integrity Line Report and this can be done anonymously. You may also send an email to the Ethics Officer at ethicsofficer@atlantaga.gov, talk with your direct supervisor or contact the Human Resources Department.

All reports made in good faith will be reviewed and investigated.

Credit: www.compliancewavelibrary.com/articles/ as adapted by LaDamian Boatwright and Janet Keene to reflect the City of Atlanta's Ethics Code.

How To Play:
The first 10 people to email the correct answers to **ethicstraining@atlantaga.gov** by **July 11, 2024,** will win **ETHICS SWAG!!!**

Ethics Challenge: Test Your Knowledge!!

Question 1

The period following your last date of service as a city employee or as a city board member is known as the "cooling off period" and lasts for one year.

A. True

B. False

Question 2

Sheila works for a city department in a decision-making role. She works closely with a vendor whose company provides playground equipment for parks in the City of Atlanta. The city vendor advises Sheila to invest in the company that makes the metal for the playground equipment.

If Sheila invests in the metal-making company, what provision of the Code of Ethics would she be violating?

A. Use of City Property

B. Confidential Information

C. Conflict of Interest

D. Gifts/Gratuities

Question 3

Bill sits on a board for the City of Atlanta. During the weekends, he joins a poker game hosted by a college friend and ends up losing $4,500 in one hand. Bill covers a portion of the debt using his own funds and issues IOUs for the remaining amount. However, on Monday, Bill's poker "friend" submits a bid for a city project that Bill oversees. In addition, the friend calls Bill's personal phone and offers to settle the rest of his debt.

If Bill approves his poker "friend's" bid, how will the Ethics Office classify the friend?

A. City Vendor

B. Prohibited Source

C. Bill's Friend

ETHICAL REMINDER

Ethics Code Ban on Gifts and Gratuities

Section 2-816 of the Ethics Code bans city officials and employees from accepting anything of value from a city contractor, vendor, client, customer, or other prohibited source. Types of gifts include but are not limited to, cash, meals, tickets, entertainment, or travel.

There are exceptions in the Ethics Code to the ban on gifts. The most important ones involve food, gifts to the City, and travel.

When in doubt about whether or not to accept a gift of any kind, please contact the Ethics Office.

Special Announcements

NEW STAFF MEMBERS!

LADAMIAN BOATWRIGHT

performs a wide variety of analytical and data management work related to the Ethics Office's operations and management systems, supporting and assisting with the financial disclosure process, and assists in reviewing and conducting financial disclosure audits. Mrs. Boatwright previously worked for the DeKalb County Government Finance Department as a Management Analyst where she performed audits, research, and analytical assistance for departmental operations. Mrs. Boatwright received her Bachelor of Science in Business Management from Jacksonville State University.

JUAN HERNANDEZ

serves as the Investigator Specialist for the Ethics Office. Mr. Hernandez graduated from Georgia State University in 2019. Subsequently, he obtained his Private Investigator license in 2021 from the Georgia Board of Private Detectives and Security Agencies. While obtaining his license, Mr. Hernandez worked in the private sector for a felony criminal defense investigation firm. Currently, Mr. Hernandez is expanding his knowledge of ethics and compliance investigations through work experience and professional development.

Special Announcements

NEW BOARD MEMBERS!

Andrew Cohen is professor and chair of philosophy at Georgia State University, where he has worked as a scholar, educator, and administrator for over 20 years. Cohen earned his Ph.D. in philosophy from the University of North Carolina at Chapel Hill. He is the author of Apologies and Moral Repair: Rights, Duties and Corrective Justice (Routledge, 2020), and Philosophy, Ethics, Public Policy (Routledge, 2015). He is also editor of Philosophy and Public Policy – (Rowman & Littlefield International, 2018), and, with Christopher Heath Wellman, Contemporary Debates in Applied Ethics (Wiley Blackwell, 2005, 2014). At Georgia State University, Cohen is the Director of Research for the Jean Beer Blumenfeld Center for Ethics. He also serves on GSU's two Institutional Review Boards, including as the Vice Chair of the convened board. Cohen was elected to the Board of Directors of the Association for Practical and Professional Ethics, where he is Treasurer and Chair of the Finance Committee. He was nominated to the Governing Board by the Seven Major Universities of Atlanta.

Richard Taylor s the founder and managing partner of ARRC Capital Partners, a real estate development firm with a focus on affordable housing, homelessness prevention and community advocacy. Prior to founding ARRC, Richard worked at a private equity fund and as an investment banker before that, specializing in mergers and acquisitions and strategic corporate advisory for public companies. As a developer, Richard is the only person to win the Regional Excellence Award from the Atlanta Regional Commission and the Community Impact Award from CoStar in successive years. He's been inducted to Outstanding Atlanta—the premier honor society for community involved people in Atlanta. He was nominated to the Governing Board by the Atlanta Planning Advisory Board.

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