

Planning Ethics: Navigating the Gray Areas of Everyday Decisions



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WHO WE ARE

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A Good Foundation

- Know and understand both the AICP Guiding Principles and the AICP Code of Conduct.
- If it feels wrong, it usually is!
- How would your action look in the light of day?
- Have some trusted go-to people who'll give you good advice.
- Understand the process for requesting an investigation

Scenario #1

The Case of the New Religious Center



RELEVANT ISSUES

- You have not completed or even substantially completed your review of the site plan and application for the mosque; however, it does appear complete.
- It normally takes about three weeks to process a zoning permit through all of the departments.
- One of the conditions in your ordinance is that the proposed use be compatible with surrounding land uses as determined by the zoning administrator.
- RLUIPA (Religious Land Use and Institutionalized Persons Act of 2000) prohibits discrimination based on religion.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Which Ethical Principles apply?
- Do the Rules of Conduct address the issue? How?
- What choices does the zoning administrator have?
- Is there a way to avoid this type of scenario? How?

Scenario #2

The Case of the Revised Opinion



RELEVANT ISSUES

- Your previous opinion is well documented.
- Your previous opinion was corroborated by other professionals and officials.
- The environmental conditions under which your previous opinion was rendered have not changed.
- Action taken on this case will establish a level of precedent for how the city views and deals with wetlands in the future.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Which Ethical Principles apply?
- Do the Rules of Conduct address the issue? How?
- What choices does the zoning administrator have?
- Is there a way to avoid this type of scenario? How?

Scenario #3

The Case of the Buried Treasure



RELEVANT ISSUES

- Nothing in your ordinance requires an archaeological survey or impact statement concerning historic sites nor does it explicitly require protection even if you know one exists.
- You did not include a map of known or suspected sites in your recent comprehensive plan because the archaeologists were concerned about vandalism and plundering.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Which Ethical Principles apply?
- Do the Rules of Conduct address the issue? How?
- What choices does the zoning administrator have?
- Is there a way to avoid this type of scenario? How?

Scenario #4

The Case of the Environmental Dilemma

RELEVANT ISSUES

- Neither the slime turtle nor the oak snake provide any known substantial benefit to humans beyond any they might have in their natural habitat.
- Neither animal is protected to the extent that federal or state laws prohibit or regulate habitat destruction.
- Neither animal is a cherished symbol, like the Bald Eagle, beloved like Bambi, nor charismatic like the Panda. (Would it matter if they were?)
- The UN Convention on Biological Diversity lists land use patterns as the greatest threat to the environment.
- Just because someone doesn't know or can't accept the importance of an issue doesn't make it less important.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Which Ethical Principles apply?
- Do the Rules of Conduct address the issue? How?
- What choices does the zoning administrator have?
- Is there a way to avoid this type of scenario? How?

Scenario #5

The Case of the Qualified Consultant

The Case of the Qualified Staff

RELEVANT ISSUES

- Economic forecasting requires working with computer models and economic data that requires knowledge and experience to use and interpret effectively and wisely.
- Stormwater reviews and inspections normally require a level of expertise that most planners do not have.
- It is not uncommon for any professional to be asked to expand their knowledge and range of experience to grow into new jobs and responsibilities. Planners in particular need to be knowledgeable about a wide range of subjects.

DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

- Which Ethical Principles apply?
- Do the Rules of Conduct address the issue? How?
- What choices does the zoning administrator have?
- Is there a way to avoid this type of scenario? How?

What Cases Have You Struggled With?



