**OTHER POLITICAL SUBDIVISIONS**

**CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

**LEGAL COMPLIANCE AUDIT GUIDE**

**CONFLICTS OF INTEREST**

Introduction

Rule: A public officer authorized to take part in the making of a sale, lease, or contract shall not voluntarily have a personal financial interest in the transaction or personally benefit financially from it. Minn. Stat. § 471.87.

Exceptions: For practical reasons, the legislature has created certain limited exceptions to the general prohibition. Exceptions apply to port authorities, seaway port authorities, economic development authorities, watershed districts, soil and water conservation districts, towns, school districts, hospital districts, counties and cities. Minn. Stat. § 471.88.

Part I of this questionnaire will assist you in making a determination as to whether an otherwise forbidden transaction fits within any of the statutory exceptions. As noted on page 2-5, if the entity being audited was formed as a joint powers entity under Minn. Stat. § 471.59, it is possible that an exception available to a member entity (for example a city, county, town or school district) may apply. Communicate with the entity being audited and review Minn. Stat. § 471.88 to determine whether this may be the case. It may also be helpful to review the exceptions listed in the Legal Compliance Audit Guide that would apply to the member entity. Care should be taken to determine whether any exception considered applies to the entity and contract being audited.

For the purposes of this checklist, “interested officer” shall mean a public officer or employee, as listed above, who directly or through his or her spouse (see “Discussion” below) has a prohibited position or interest in either the entity making or the subject matter of the sale, lease, or contract with the governing body. Examples include:

1. officer;

2. director;

3. employee (see “Discussion” below);

4. partner;

5. owner (complete or partial); or

6. shareholder.

Discussion: The determination as to whether a particular transaction involves an “interested officer” often calls for a judgment on the part of the auditor. A helpful concept to remember for analysis is that it is a conflict of interest to be on both sides of a contract or transaction.

Most problems in this regard arise in the examination of the “interest” the public officer has in the person or entity making the contract with the governing body. Two frequent problem areas are:

1. Contracts with Officer’s or Employee’s Spouse or Family Member.

It is not a conflict of interest per se for a governing body to contract or otherwise economically transact with a member officer’s spouse or family member. However, if the facts indicate an economic benefit to the member officer as a result of the contract or transaction, a conflict of interest exists. For example, if a husband and wife, one of whom is a public officer, share a common pool of funds and likewise share debts, conflicts may exist because there is benefit to the public officer or employee flowing from the economic benefit to his or her spouse. Likewise, if a governmental officer or employee and his or her spouse, in fact, do not economically benefit from each other, a conflict may not exist. This analysis would apply to all familial relationships. The auditor will need to factually determine whether an emancipated child living away from home has a financial interest with his or her parents.

2. Contracts with Companies in Which the Officer is an Employee.

If the involved governmental officer or employee is simply a company employee without managerial powers and receives the same salary or raise regardless of the company’s contract with the governing body, there probably is no conflict of interest. However, if said officer receives a bonus or commission or other benefit as a result of the contractual transaction between his or her company and the government entity, there is definitely a conflict of interest.

There are numerous aspects to be examined by the auditor in order to understand the totality of interests involved in a given contract or transaction between the governing body and an entity or person with a relationship to a member officer.

If, after review of the facts and applicable statutes, you are still unsure as to whether a particular set of circumstances constitutes a conflict of interest, you should contact an attorney for advice prior to preparing the “Audit Conclusion” at the end of this audit guide section.

Other Statutory Conflict of Interest Provisions

For public and local officials of metropolitan government units (as defined by Minn. Stat. § 10A.01, subds. 35, 22, and 24), see also Minn. Stat. § 10A.07.

Part I of this section does not apply to Housing and Redevelopment Authority (HRA) commissioners and employees, or to Economic Development Authorities (EDA) commissioners and employees. Commissioners and employees of these entities are governed by the provisions of Minn. Stat. § 469.009 (HRAs) or Minn. Stat. § 469.098 (EDAs). Auditors of these entities should review these statutes, which contain different standards and provide for disclosure and abstention in specified instances if specified procedures are followed.

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| Minn. Stat.  Section |  |  |  | **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST** | Yes | No | Workpaper  Reference |

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| **Part I. Contracts Generally**  [As noted on page 2-2, this Part I does not apply to HRAs or EDAs. For these entities, see the statutes cited on page 2-2.] | | | | | | | |
| § 471.87 | - | Unless a statutory exception applies, a public officer who is authorized to take part in any manner in making any sale, lease, or contract in official capacity shall not voluntarily have a personal financial interest in that sale, lease, or contract or personally benefit therefrom. | | |  |  |  |
|  | - | The governing body may contract for goods or services with an interested officer only by unanimous vote. See A, infra. In addition to the unanimous vote, one of the statutory exceptions must apply. See B, infra. | | |  |  |  |
| § 471.88,  subd. 1 | A. | Contract for Goods or Services/Unanimous Approval | | |  |  |  |
|  |  | 1. | If there were any sales, leases, or contracts between the governing body and an interested officer, was each contract a contract for goods or services? and | |  |  |  |
|  |  | 2. | If there were any sales, leases, or contracts between the governing body and an interested officer, did the governing body approve the transaction by unanimous vote? | |  |  |  |
|  |  | Note: In general, all members present must vote in order to produce a unanimous vote; except that the interested officer may abstain (as a practical matter). | | |  |  |  |
|  | B. | Statutory Exceptions | | |  |  |  |
| § 471.88,  subd. 2 |  | 1. | Designation of Bank or Savings Association | |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | If the transaction involved the designation of a bank or savings association as an authorized depository for public funds and as a source of borrowing: | |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | a. | Did the interested officer disclose to the governing body that he or she was a director or employee of the bank or savings association? |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | b. | Was such disclosure entered into the minutes of the governing body’s meeting prior to the first designation of the bank or savings association as a depository or at the time of the interested officer’s election, whichever was later? |  |  |  |
| § 471.88, subd. 3 |  | 2. | Designation of Official Newspaper | |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | If a transaction involved the designation of an official newspaper or publication of official matters therein: | |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | a. | Was the newspaper in which the officer had an interest the only newspaper complying with statutory or charter requirements relating to designation or publication? |  |  |  |

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| § 471.88,  subd.4 |  | 3. | Stockholder of Cooperative Association  If the transaction involved a contract with a cooperative association: | | |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | a. | Was the officer a shareholder or stockholder and not an officer or manager of the cooperative association? | |  |  |  |
| § 471.88,  subd. 5 |  | 4. | Contracts That Do Not Need to Be Bid | | |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | If an interested officer entered into a contract for goods and services with the governing body: | | |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | a. | Was the contract one that did not need to be bid? | |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | (See discussion of contracts that are subject to bidding on page 4-1.) (If the interested officer is a school board member and employee of the district, see Part B.7., infra, “Employment Contracts with School Board Members.” If the contract involves a class of employees that includes the spouse of a school board member; *see* Part B.12., infra, “School Board Member Spouse/Employee Class.”) | | |  |  |  |
| § 471.89,  subd. 2 |  |  | b. | Did the governing body, prior to performance of the contract, authorize the contract by adopting a resolution setting forth the essential facts and determining that the contract price was as low or lower than the price at which the commodity or service could be obtained elsewhere? | |  |  |  |
| § 471.89,  subd. 3 |  |  | c. | Prior to payment of the contract, did the interested officer file with the clerk of the governing body an affidavit stating: | |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  | (1) | the name of the officer and office held; |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  | (2) | an itemization of the commodity or services furnished; |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  | (3) | the contract price; |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  | (4) | the reasonable value; |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  | (5) | the interest of the officer in the contract; |  |  |  |
|  |  |  |  | (6) | that to the best of his/her knowledge and belief the contract price was as low or lower than the price at which the commodities or services could have been obtained from other sources? |  |  |  |
| § 471.89,  subd. 2 |  |  | d. | If the contract was entered into under emergency conditions, did the governing body adopt such a resolution prior to payment of the claims in which the facts of the emergency are also stated? | |  |  |  |

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| Minn. Stat.  Section |  |  |  | **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST** | Yes | No | Workpaper  Reference |

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| § 471.88,  subd. 6 |  | 5. | Contract with Fire Department | |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | If the governing body entered into a contract with a fire department in which an interested officer was a member: | |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | a. | Was the fire department a volunteer fire department? |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | b. | Was the contract for payment of compensation or payment of retirement benefits? |  |  |  |
| § 471.88, subd. 6a |  | 6. | Contract with Volunteer Ambulance Service | |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | Was the contract with a volunteer ambulance service for the payment of compensation to its members or for payment of retirement benefits to these members? | |  |  |  |
| § 471.88,  subd. 12 |  | 7. | Contract for Construction Materials or Services | |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | If an interested officer contracted with the government unit to provide construction materials or services, or both: | |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | a. | Was the contract done by a sealed bid process? |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | b. | Does the unit have a population of 1,000 or less according to the last federal census? |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | c. | When the question of the contract came before the governing body for consideration, did the officer refrain from voting? |  |  |  |
| § 471.88,  subd. 13 |  | 8. | Contract for Renting Space | |  |  |  |
|  |  |  | If a public officer rented space in a public facility, was the rate commensurate with that paid by other members of the public? | |  |  |  |
| §§ 471.87;  and 471.88 |  | 9. | Conflicts of Interest: All Other Contracts or Transactions  If there were any contracts or transactions between an interested officer and the governing body, were the contracts or transactions included in the exceptions above (B1-12)?\* | |  |  |  |

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| Minn. Stat.  Section |  |  |  | **CONFLICTS OF INTEREST** | Yes | No | Workpaper  Reference |

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|  | \*Note: If your audit involves a port authority, a public housing authority, a municipal band, a housing and redevelopment authority, an economic development authority, or a community action program or private consultant, review subdivisions 7, 9, 10, 11, or 14 of Minn. Stat. § 471.88 for additional exceptions.  In addition, if the other political subdivision was formed as a joint powers entity under Minn. Stat. § 471.59, it is possible that an exception available to a member entity (for example a city, county, town or school district) may apply. Communicate with the entity being audited and review Minn. Stat. § 471.88 to determine whether this may be the case. It may also be helpful to review the exceptions listed in the Legal Compliance Audit Guide that would apply to the member entity. |  |  |  |

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| **Part II. Purchase of Merchandise from Governmental Agency** | | | | | | |
| § 15.054 | A. | Political subdivisions are prohibited from selling property or materials owned by the political subdivision to its officers or employees. Employees may make purchases from political subdivisions if the following criteria are met. | |  |  |  |
|  |  | For all purchases: | |  |  |  |
|  |  | 1. | Was the property or materials purchased by the public employee not needed for public purposes? |  |  |  |
|  |  | 2. | Was the purchase made through sealed bids or public auction? |  |  |  |
|  |  | 3. | Was the employee not directly involved with the sealed bid or auction process? |  |  |  |
|  |  | 4 | Was the applicable “notice” law followed, and did the same require at least one week of published notice? |  |  |  |
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|  | Minn. Stat. § 15.054 does not apply to property or materials acquired or produced by political subdivisions for sale to the general public in the ordinary course of business. | | |  |  |  |
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| **Part III. Audit Conclusion** | | | | | | |
| The auditor must state a conclusion--based on this questionnaire and any other audit procedures performed--whether the client has complied with the legal provisions reviewed relating to conflicts of interest. | | | | | | |
| Conclusion: |  |  |  |  |  |  |
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