

Blueprint for a Better New Castle County Government

New Castle County should be the shining light of the Mid-Atlantic region. Our county has world-class talent, a high standard of living, excellent universities and beautiful parks, forests, and waterways. We are the corporate capital of the country, situated in an advantageous geographic position, with nearly a third of the American population living within a few hundred miles.

There is no reason why our county should not have a fair and functioning government that produces robust economic growth, sensible land use and safe streets. The current County Executive Tom Gordon, through his cronyism and self-indulgence, has held us back from growing, prospering and achieving our true potential.

*"The worst disease in the world today is corruption. And there is a cure: transparency."
- Bono*

We can do better. It starts with leadership, honesty, transparency and checks and balances. We must put an end to backroom dealing, the old insiders' game of "you scratch my back and I'll scratch yours" that goes on in the County Executive's office today. Residents need to be able to trust our County Executive and believe that our tax dollars are being spent wisely and sensibly.

As your County Executive, I will create a culture of honesty and trust and restore public confidence in our county government. This document is the first step in leading our county to a more ethical and transparent 2017. With your help, we can reshape the county government to become fair, open and equitable. The result will be a government that is successful, effective and responsive to the people of New Castle County.



A County Government You Can Believe In

There is a crisis of confidence in our New Castle County government.

As I travel across our county, voters young and old tell me that they have lost faith in the county's government. They have lost faith in its ability to be open and honest, treat everyone fairly and get things done competently and efficiently.

When you pay property taxes, or any taxes or fees, you should have absolute faith that your money will be spent to improve safety, economic opportunity and quality of life for all individuals, families and communities in New Castle County, not just for those who are politically connected.

But today, that is not the case. Quite simply, the current County Executive is making too many decisions based on principles of self-service, not public service.

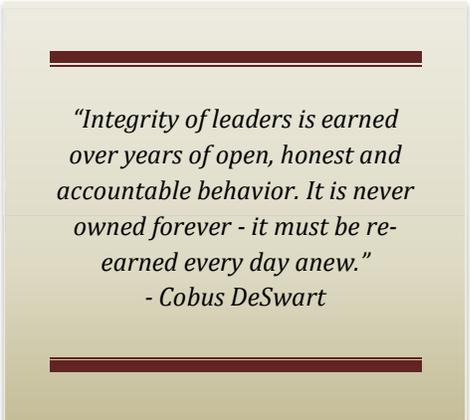
When our current County Executive took office in 2012, the county had sizable cash reserves. Over the past three and a half years, he has rapidly depleted those reserves through self-serving and reckless spending. As the County Executive continues to increase the salaries of his cronies, reward his friends with sweetheart deals, dole out patronage jobs, manipulate the Merit System based on friendship and favors, and discreetly offer financial handouts to allies, the county's cash assets, funded by your hard-earned tax dollars, are circling the drain.

The taxpayers deserve transparent, fair leadership in the public interest, not in the County Executive's self-interest.

Highest Quality Executive Leadership

They say that the employees of a company are its greatest asset. As a business owner, I learned very quickly that the most important decisions I made were hiring decisions. In Iraq, the greatest leaders were the ones who surrounded themselves with the best and brightest professionals, experts in their fields who did not always agree with their bosses.

Our government's success is no different as its success depends on the people who work for it, especially its leaders. That is why I will hire competent and ethical leaders in the executive office, qualified and prepared to serve, who will deliver a better government to all county residents.



*"Integrity of leaders is earned over years of open, honest and accountable behavior. It is never owned forever - it must be re-earned every day anew."
- Cobus DeSwart*

This will produce a government that is led by the best and the brightest. Our land use policy should be shaped by the sharpest and most experienced land use professionals. Our public safety policy should be shaped by the sharpest and most experienced public safety professionals.

Furthermore, hiring and personnel decisions must be open and transparent. You, the taxpayer, pay for the salaries, offices and chairs in which your county leadership sits each day. Unless there is a genuine confidentiality or privacy concern, you have the right to know how your money is spent. The current County Executive, for example, has used your taxpayer funds to hire family members of his closest aides into the government, into positions in which they are likely not the highest quality candidates. It is not appropriate to hire family members of Executive Office staff without a transparent process.

The first step to an ethical county government is recruiting, training and retaining only those individuals with the highest level of professionalism and ethics. These are the types of people who will work within both the letter and the spirit of the ethics code to build a government that serves all of us. That includes creating incentives and providing promotions to the top performing county employees, truly based on merit.

A critical step toward high-quality leadership and professionalism in county government is the elimination of nepotism.

Eliminating Nepotism

For as long as there have been governments, those with power and influence have faced the temptation to put friends, relatives and associates in roles in which they do not belong. The county's laws must eliminate this practice, especially at the highest level of our county government. The leaders you elect have an obligation to select the best person for the job. It is simply wrong to spend taxpayer dollars to hire or promote a person who is politically connected, yet professionally unqualified. The county code must therefore:

- prohibit an official from using his or her authority to benefit relatives and extended family, rather than just immediate family;
- prohibit an official from using his or her authority to benefit a person with whom the official has a financial interest;
- prohibit supervisors from participating in any disciplinary action affecting a relative; and
- prohibit a supervisor from being in the direct line of supervision over a family member.

*"Corruption has robbed us of our focus, our momentum and our need to think big and act swiftly. We have settled into managing the status quo. We are riding the successes of our past instead of shaping the landscape of our future."
- Mayor Muriel Bowser*

Transparency

The public has the right to know when a county official might be advancing his or her own personal interests at the expense of the taxpayer's interests.

When the county government publicly notices requests for proposals or signs contracts with private companies or organizations, you the taxpayer must have confidence that your government conducted the bidding processes impartially and awarded those contracts fairly. If a county employee or a county employee's family member has a private interest in that contract, all records relating to the bidding, awarding and negotiations must be made public. That way, the public can examine the records and ensure that the contract was awarded to the worthiest bidder, and not the most connected one.

The public also has a right to know who is lobbying the County Executive. Residents of New Castle County want to know, and deserve to know, what corporations, businesses, organizations and private interests are influencing their elected officials. As such, the county should require detailed disclosures of lobbying activities. This should entail:

- extending state lobbying laws to the county;

- requiring those with policy pending before the county and who meet with the County Executive to register with the Ethics Commission; and
- requiring lobbyists to make their activities public record by periodically filing reports.

However, it is not enough to make information available to the public. County government must make it easy for the public to access, understand and use the information. The government must therefore make ethics-related information available online, in a manner that is simple to find and easy to read.

For example, subject to privacy and confidentiality, publication of all substantive financial transactions, donations and any in-kind transactions should be readily available for public review. This requirement should include disclosure for expenses like the hundreds of thousands of dollars spent for the renovation of the County Executive's office early in his current term.

Furthermore, previous administrations have provided on the county website a check book of county expenses that facilitated public review of finances. The current County Executive has not provided this easy-to-read check book. We will work to ensure future administrations are required to present such information.

These reforms, along with other safeguards, will help the public and the media keep watch over county government and ensure that elected officials and other county leaders are discharging their duties responsibly.

A Culture of Ethics

Ethics is more than just a set of rules. It is a culture, a way of doing things. In order to establish a truly ethical, open and honest government, the County Executive must take action to create a culture of honesty and fairness. The County Executive should not only follow the law, but the County Executive should go far beyond the letter of the law.

The county government must establish the proper checks and balances to ensure that county officials act in an honest and ethical manner. This can be done in part by increasing the independence of the county Ethics Commission. We should seek an alternative method to fund the Commission, outside of the County Executive and County Council. The Commission should not be required to request funding from the very people it may be investigating.

Furthermore, the county code should require more community involvement in the nomination and appointment of Ethics Commission members. Ethics Commission members have a vital role in assuring citizens of quality governance. They monitor and investigate the officials and leaders who are tasked with serving the residents of this county. To ensure that Commission members truly serve the public interest, community groups and non-profit organizations should have a role in selecting some members of the Commission.

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New Castle County can and must do better. It starts by electing a County Executive who leads by example, setting a standard that far exceeds the legal standard in our ethics codes.

By implementing the reforms outlined in this document, the county will move away from corruption and political favoritism, and toward public service and fairness for all. The time for change is now. Let's band together to advocate for more honest and transparent county government.

Join the movement for a lean, clean and high-quality New Castle County government at www.mattmeyer2016.com.