

Florida Association of City Clerks Summer Conference 2026 – Fort Myers

Ethics in Practice for Florida City Clerks: Doing the Right Thing When the Rules are Not Always Clear

City clerks regularly encounter ethical risk because they serve as custodians of public records, gatekeepers of governmental processes, and neutral administrators. As a Florida city clerk, you are often held to a higher standard when navigating situations that involve both ethical judgment and legal considerations. This two-hour program focuses on practical, everyday scenarios faced by clerks and offers strategies grounded in professional ethics rather than legal advice. You will leave with usable tools, including neutral, process-based language and five core ethics principles to support sound decision-making and protect public trust.

Learning Objectives:

- Recognize common ethical risk situations faced by Florida city clerks
- Distinguish between legal compliance and ethical judgment
- Apply a simple ethics decision-making framework to real clerk scenarios
- Identify when to pause, document, escalate, or seek guidance

— A G E N D A —

- I. Welcome and Overview
- II. Introductory Activity
- III. Legal Compliance and Ethical Judgment
- IV. Decision-making Framework
- V. Pause Test
- VI. Wrap up



Special Note: This course is not legal advice.

Quote for the Day:

“Ethics is not just about following rules — it’s about public trust.”



Write a one sentence definition of ethics from your perspective.

A Truism:

City clerks are uniquely exposed to ethical risk as you serve as:

- Custodian of records
- Gatekeepers of processes
- Neutral administrator



Ethics vs. Law: What’s the Difference?

Law	Ethics
Minimum required	Higher standard
Enforced externally	Enforced internally
Black-and-white	Often gray
“Can I?”	“Should I?”

5 Core Ethical Principles for Florida City Clerks

1. Impartiality — treat everyone the same, regardless of position or influence
2. Transparency — Assume your actions may become public
3. Accountability — Own the results of your work even when executing directives
4. Confidentiality — Protect sensitive information appropriately
5. Public Interest — Public interest, the greater good, outweighs pressure or convenience

Clerk's Ethics Decision Tool — The PAUSE Test

1. Pressure — Who is applying pressure and why?
2. Appearance — How would this look on the front page?
3. Universal — Would I do this for any requester?
4. Standards — Does this align with my role and professional standards?
5. Escalate — Do I need guidance or documentation?

Know when to say:

- Let me check on that.
- I'll need that in writing.
- I need to elevate this.



Boundaries, Documentation, and Protection

Actions by Florida city officials that are often deemed legal under state statutes, but are considered unethical by public watchdogs include:

- Navigating Sunshine Law exemptions \
- Maneuvering through voting conflicts
- Utilizing their positions for personal gain
- Attacking staff publicly /

Does not technically break
criminal statues

Examples you have encountered or have knowledge of:



And finally ...

Jot down one or two ideas, or reminders, you gained today that are takeaways.

PROFESSIONAL PROFILE

Anne Schroeder, president of Schroeder Management Consultants, is a management consultant and trainer who provides consulting services and seminars to thousands of business and professional people every year. She travels coast-to-coast in Florida, and from California to Washington, DC to assist business, industry, government, nonprofit organizations, and education.

Anne has over 30 years' experience in developing organizations and their personnel. Her firm provides strategic planning initiatives, team development and interventions, customer service initiatives, organizational diagnosis and problem-solving, and customized seminars.

Anne's clients have included NASA, Ryder Systems, Coca Cola, American Lung Association, Jackson Memorial Hospital (Miami, FL), Lee County Tax Collector, The Salvation Army, and Florida Gulf Coast University. Anne was instrumental in leading Lehigh Regional Medical Center as it received the Sterling Award, Florida's version of the Malcolm Baldrige Quality Award. Several long-term system-oriented projects include work with two departments at FGCU, Lee County Library System, Orange County, Florida Supervisors of Elections, and USF, College of Education.

Anne is also a founding member of Dramatic Results, a theater-based training troupe that provides highly interactive programs focused on relevant organizational topics mixed with skits, magic illusions, and audience participation.

Anne has a master's degree from The Johns Hopkins University in Baltimore, Maryland, plus extensive training in organizational and creative problem solving from the University of Buffalo and from Synectics, Inc. in Cambridge, MA. In addition, Anne earned a Certificate Degree in Advanced Carpentry and along with her husband Ed, personally built their first home in Fort Myers, FL.





Florida Association of City Clerks – June 2026

Ethics in Practice for Florida City Clerks

Case Study #1: The Mayor’s Official Facebook Page

Scenario - The mayor of a Florida city maintains two Facebook pages: a personal campaign page, and an official “Mayor of Bayview” page administered by city staff. During election season, the mayor shares posts on the official city page that criticize an opponent, link users to the mayor’s campaign website, and encourage residents to “keep progress moving.” City staff help produce graphics and schedule the posts during work hours.

A resident files an ethics complaint alleging misuse of public position, misuse of public resources, and use of government staff for campaign purposes. The mayor argues that the posts discussed public issues, no city money was directly spent on campaign ads, and elected officials have free speech rights.

You are the Florida Commission on Ethics and review the complaint.

Discussion Questions

1. Which facts are most legally important?
2. Does it matter whether city staff assisted?
3. Does it matter whether the page is “official” versus personal?
4. Is this necessarily unethical, illegal, both, or neither?
5. What additional facts would you want before deciding?