

# COMMISSION POLICY 1-9

## Adopted March 5, 1997

### DEFENSE OF CITY OFFICIALS IN PROCEEDINGS NOT SUBJECT TO THE OREGON TORT CLAIMS ACT ("OCTA")

#### PURPOSE

It is in the public interest of the City of Oregon City that elected officers, members of official City boards, commission and committees, all City employees, and City agents be free of the fear of personal financial hardship resulting from having to defend claims and charges (other than "true" crimes punishable by imprisonment) which are beyond the scope of the OCTA and which arise out of the good faith performance of their duties. This policy is designed to be consistent with ORS 30.285 and shall be so construed.

#### APPLICABILITY

This policy applies to the City's elected officers (officers), members of official City boards, commissions and committees (officials), all City employees (employees), and City agents (agents).

#### DEFINITIONS

Malfeasance is failure to comply with ethical standards of conduct...*evildoing, ill conduct, the commission of some act which is positively unlawful, and/or the doing of an act which is wholly wrongful and unlawful.*

#### IN GENERAL

A. Except as otherwise provided by law, the City shall defend, save harmless and indemnify its officers, officials, employees or agents against any tort claim or demand, whether groundless or otherwise, arising out of an alleged act or omission occurring in the performance of duty.

B. In no event shall the resources of the City be committed to the defense of the City officer, official, employee, or agent unless the City Commission is satisfied that:

1. The act or omission does not constitute malfeasance in office; or
2. The act or omission does not constitute willful or wanton neglect of duty.

C. With respect to matters not covered by the OTCA, the resources of the City should not be committed to the defense of a City officer, official, employee or agent, unless the City Commission is satisfied that:

1. The act or omission of the officer, official, employee, or agent was in good faith and without malice and in course of official duties. Good faith is absent if the officer, official, employee or agent knew or reasonably should have known that the act or omission would violate a law, rule or regulation; and

2. The officer, official, employee, or agent did not act contrary to the advice of legal counsel.

D. In no event should the resources of the City be committed to the defense of a City officer, official, employee or agent charged with a crime punishable by imprisonment unless the Commission is satisfied that it is not a “true” crime in that:

1. The offense charged is based solely on the alleged negligence of the City officer, official, employee, or agent and the City officer, official, employee, or agent was not malfeasant in their position nor willfully or wantonly neglectful of official duty; or
2. It appears that the allegedly criminal act or omission was done or omitted as a conscious and good faith choice between evils in response to an emergency, or as a conscious and good faith attempt to protect persons from injury, disease, or to protect property from damage or destruction, either of which would have been likely and substantial had the City officer, official, employee, or agent not acted in the manner charged; or
3. The only basis for the charge is vicarious liability for the misconduct of a subordinate; and where the City officer, official, employee, or agent clearly did not participate in or condone the subordinate’s conduct knowing or having good reason to know it to be unlawful.

E. Ordinarily the commitment to defend a City officer, official, employee or agent will involve direct payment of defense costs as they are incurred. In any case, however, the City Commission may choose to commit only to reimbursement of validated expenses in the event the City officer, official, employee or agent is ultimately exonerated.

F. In no event will the office of the City Attorney be used to provide primary defense for a City officer, official, employee, or agent on a claim or charge outside the scope of the OTCA. The City Attorney may, however, provide information and assistance to the attorney retained to defend the case unless the City Attorney determines that such assistance would create a conflict of interest or otherwise violate the Code of Professional Responsibility governing attorneys.

G. Nothing in this policy should be construed to entitle any City officer, official, employee or agent to defense. The intent of this policy is to vest discretion with the City Commission with certain restrictions as to when defense funds may be provided. In each case the City Commission should be guided by considerations of what is in the best interest of the City of Oregon City subject to the above conditions and restrictions.