

# CITY OF DALTON TRAVEL POLICY AND PROCEDURE

Revised 3-7-23

## PURPOSE:

To provide guidelines for authorization and administration of travel expense reporting by City employees and elected officials. Objectives of these guidelines are: uniformity and fairness to all travelers, conservation of public funds, and a level of comfort while traveling that allows City business to be conducted in a professional manner.

## SCOPE:

These policies and procedures apply to all of the City's elected officials, employees, members of the advisory boards, and all others who are authorized to travel on City business.

## DEFINITIONS:

As used in this statement of policy, "**City Business**" shall pertain to either of the following:

1. "Business Travel" - travel for the purpose of conducting official City business.
2. "Professional/Educational Travel" - travel to attend meetings, conferences, and training programs for professional growth and development for the mutual benefit of the employee and City.

"**Authorizing party**" - individual authorized to approve or disapprove all travel-related requests. Individual is assumed to be in a level of authority such that they can accurately evaluate the need for and the cost and benefit of such travel.

"**Requesting party**" - individual who will be reimbursed for travel costs incurred.

## ADMINISTRATION:

1. Employees are expected to search out the most reasonably priced arrangements for their travel event taking into consideration their personal safety and a reasonable level of comfort.
2. The City does not contract with a specific travel agent. Employees may book travel arrangements through an agent of their choosing or by utilizing one of the many Internet sites available for such purposes.
3. Travel arrangements that include air, lodging and/or car rental should be made as far in advance as possible, preferably at least 30 days prior to the travel event, to insure the most economical and desirable arrangements.
4. Employees that have not been issued a City credit card are urged to use their personal credit card for payment of travel expenses incurred, thereby reducing/eliminating the need for cash advances. Timely submission of approved requests for reimbursement will provide employees with reimbursement funds in time to pay their credit card charges as they become due. Employees have the option to utilize per diem rates for professional and educational travel. However, reimbursement will not exceed the per diem rates in effect at the time the expense(s) were incurred.

## GUIDELINES FOR TRAVEL AUTHORIZATION:

1. Decisions as to which travel is authorized begin with the budgetary process. Travel needs must be anticipated and submitted in the annual budget for approval by the Mayor and Council.
2. The authorizing party's responsibility is to stay within his/her departmental budget's travel allocation as approved by the Mayor and Council.
3. Prior to approving a travel request, the authorizing party is responsible for determining that a sufficient unexpended appropriation remains in the travel - training budget to reimburse all expected costs of the travel.

4. Personal items, alcoholic beverages, and expenses of family members are not authorized. Expense reports must be prepared to reflect only actual expenses essential to the conduct of City business by the employee. The City will not pay for such items as movies, room service, pay per view, sporting events, and any other nonessential expenses.
5. Requests for travel, travel per diems, and actual expense reimbursement should be authorized as follows:

<u>Requesting Party</u>	<u>Authorizing Party</u>
Employee other than department head	Department Head
Department Head	City Administrator
City Administrator	Chief Financial Officer or Mayor
Elected Officials	City Administrator or Mayor
Boards, Commission, Authority	City Administrator or Mayor

**EXPENSE REIMBURSEMENT POLICIES:**

The following reimbursement guidelines are intended to set forth maximum standards. Employees and officials of the City are expected to spend funds prudently and in the best interest of the City.

**Lodging**

Reimbursement for lodging is authorized when the individual’s travel requires overnight accommodation. Overnight accommodations must be approved by the authorizing party. Receipts are required for all lodging costs.

1. Employees and officials are reimbursed for the cost of a standard hotel-motel room available in the travel vicinity. The minimum corporate, governmental, c o n f e r e n c e , or lowest special rate should be requested along with any other discounts which you might be entitled to receive (i.e. Senior citizen/AARP).
2. Advance registration, prepaid by City check, will be used whenever possible.
3. For in state travel, employees are responsible for obtaining tax-exempt forms from the Finance Department prior to travel. The forms are to be presented at the time of check-in. In some instances, if lodging is not prepaid by City check, as noted above in (2), the hotel-motel may not accept the exempt tax forms. It is the responsibility of the employee to ensure the necessary steps are taken to receive tax exempt status for lodging. Employees and officials will not be reimbursed for taxes eligible for exemption. If lodging has been paid with City credit card, the employee or official will be required to reimburse the City the taxes paid.
4. The City will pay only actual room rental costs supported by the hotel invoice or electronic booking receipt for each day that lodging away from home is required for business reasons. The employee is responsible for submission of the receipt and failure to do so will result in the employee or official not being reimbursed by the City. If paid with City credit card, the employee or official will be required to reimburse the City.
5. When two employees or officials share a room, one employee or official will pay and request reimbursement for the full lodging charge. The second employee or official shall not be entitled to any reimbursement since he/she did not incur any expense. In the rare instance where the hotel agrees to split the bill, each employee will be responsible for their share and each entitled to reimbursement.

## **Meals**

Employees are entitled to a per diem rate for meals and incidentals when traveling for City business. Actual receipts are not required when requesting reimbursement at the per diem rates in accordance with IRS regulations.

If an employee is attending training at a facility where meals are provided at a cost lower than per diem rate, the per diem rate can be reduced, at the discretion of the authorizing party.

## **Overnight Travel**

1. The per diem rate for overnight travel within Georgia will be the ***Georgia per diem rate less the incidental expenses*** as published by the U.S. General Services Administration and can be found at [www.gsa.gov/perdiem](http://www.gsa.gov/perdiem).
  - a. If meals are included in the conference cost, then the per diem rate will be reduced accordingly (i.e. lunch then subtract the per diem rate for lunch). In some instances, such as food allergies, and at the discretion of the authorizing party, this may be altered. If so, a comment is required in the comment section of the expense report.
  - b. For travel ***outside of Georgia***, the federal per diem rate from the U.S. General Services Administration can be used at the discretion of the authorizing party less the incidental expenses. Rates can be found at [www.gsa.gov/perdiem](http://www.gsa.gov/perdiem). The employee will attach a printout of the webpage and attach to the Travel Expense Report.
2. ***Day of travel to and from event*** will be paid at the per diem travel day rate as published by the U.S. General Administrative Services less the incidental expenses. For travel under 150 miles, the rate will be paid at 50% of the per diem rate less incidental expenses. A Google Map (or MapQuest map) must accompany the Travel Expense Report with beginning point being the employee's primary work station

## **Single Day Trips Outside Whitfield County**

Travel outside of Whitfield County for a conference, training, or other authorized City business is eligible for reimbursement at the discretion of the authorizing party and capped at the travel day per diem rate per the U.S. General Services Administration. Actual receipts will be required, if paying less than per diem rate, and attached to the Travel Expense Report.

## **Business Meals**

Management is required to meet with persons of other governments and professional associations in which the exchange of information will prove to be beneficial to the City. In this situation, it may be deemed appropriate to pay for the cost of the meals for the employee or official and the guest of the City.

Reimbursements are subject to the following:

- a. The requesting part is a Department Head, City Administrator, or Elected Official.
- b. A receipt is provided.
- c. Tips are capped at 20% of meal cost.
- d. A Travel Expense Report is submitted.

## **Transportation**

It is the responsibility of each employee and official to choose the least expensive mode of transportation that conforms to this policy.

### **Air, Rail, and Bus**

Air, rail, and bus is acceptable for destinations not within reasonable driving distance. Transportation will be obtained at the most economical rate. "Economy" or "tourist" level shall be obtained at the most economical mode of travel where available. Receipts are required for reimbursement or payment of transportation cost.

### **City Vehicles**

The use of a City vehicle is authorized for City business purposes only. City vehicles can only be driven by City employees or officials.

1. City employee responsibilities as driver of a City vehicle:
  - a. Must possess a valid Georgia driver's license.
  - b. Be insured by the City's vehicle insurance policy.
  - c. Be the only person to drive/operate the vehicle.
  - d. Seat belts must be worn at all times during operation of vehicle.
  - e. Forbidden to operate vehicle while under the influence of alcohol, drugs, or any medication that may impair the ability to operate the vehicle.
  - f. The use of tobacco in any form is prohibited in City vehicle.
  - g. Employee is required to immediately report any damage to the vehicle to his/her immediate supervisor or department head.
2. When more than one City employee is attending the same conference, meeting, training, etc. City employees will ride-share in City vehicles that are assigned to that department when feasible. If space is available in a City vehicle, but employee chooses to use personal vehicle, then that employee will not be reimbursed for mileage.
3. "Gas cards" assigned to City vehicles should be used for all gas and oil purchases while traveling. No other purchase, such as food or drinks, is allowed to be charged on the gas card.

### **Personal Vehicle**

Use of a personal vehicle is allowed for employees with authorized monthly auto allowances or when a City vehicle is not available within the department.

1. The reimbursement rate is the per diem business rate published by the Internal Revenue Service as a cents per mile reimbursement. This amount changes periodically and can be found on the Internal Revenue Service website. This rate covers fuel, maintenance, and liability and physical damage insurance costs of the personal vehicle.
2. Employees receiving a monthly auto allowance will not be reimbursed per mileage since the employee is being compensated for business use of vehicle on a monthly basis.
3. When more than one employee is attending a particular function, separate car allowances are not approved unless separate arrival and departure times are dictated by other City business or the vehicle will not accommodate the number of people attending the function (normally four persons) and another City vehicle is not available. It is the responsibility of the authorizing party to document and approve.
4. The employee must submit a Travel Expense Report documenting mileage driven for City business before reimbursement will be made. Reimbursement requests should be made at least on a monthly basis. The authorizing party is responsible for ensuring that the total number of miles is correct.
5. The starting point for travel is deemed the employee's primary workstation for the City of Dalton.

### **Rental Cars**

Rental vehicles are not to be used unless the cost is less than that of other available transportation such as taxis, shuttles, or mass transit.

1. The use of a rental car must be justified as an economical need and not as a matter of personal convenience. Vehicles may be rented when:
  - a. Local transportation is not available.

- b. The cost of local transportation equals or exceeds the cost of renting an automobile.
2. When renting a vehicle:
    - a. Rentals will be limited to “mid-size” cars with standard accessories, unless special circumstances dictate a larger vehicle.
    - b. Rentals will be covered by appropriate insurance, as required by applicable state laws.
    - c. City policies and procedures governing the use of vehicles will apply to rental vehicles.
    - d. Receipts are required for reimbursements of all rental car costs, including gasoline. The rental agreement must accompany the reimbursement request.

#### **Local Ground Transportation and Parking**

Local transportation and parking costs incurred while out of town for City business will be reimbursed. All reimbursement requests must have a receipt and be submitted with the Travel and Reimbursement Request.

### **REGISTRATION**

Registration fees for conferences, seminars, continuing professional education, and training events associated with City business and the professional development of employees in regards to their employment are reimbursable when supported by proper documentation. Proper documentation is that which provides information about the course (date, place, time) and course attendee. The following are examples of proper documentation:

- a. Registration form
- b. Brochure or agenda
- c. Screenshot from vendor website detailing event
- d. Email from agency conducting event

### **NON-ALLOWABLE EXPENSES**

It is the policy of the City to reimburse the City employee or official for all reasonable and necessary costs incurred while transacting City business; however, there are specific types of expenses which are considered personal in nature and not reimbursable. These expenses specifically include, but are not limited to:

- Air travel and other personal trip insurance
- Barber, manicurist, shoe polish
- Briefcases or other items of personal use
- Entertainment expenses (airline headsets, theater or movie tickets, sporting events)
- Personal reading materials
- Repairs, maintenance, or insurance on personal vehicles
- Traffic fines or court costs
- Unauthorized trips, gifts, donations, or club memberships
- Lost or stolen personal property while traveling on City business

### **PROCEDURES**

#### **Travel Advances**

Travel advances for lodging, meals, travel, registration, and incidentals will not be granted for authorized travel. The prepayment for hotels and registration as well as the provision of per diem reimbursement as stated herein alleviates the need for the use of travel advances.

#### **Expense Reimbursement Procedures:**

1. Upon returning from the properly authorized trip, the employee will present to the authorizing party a complete itemization of all trip expenses on a Travel Expense Report. This final expense statement, with all required receipts and deductions of any prepayments (registration fee, hotel, per diem amounts, etc.), will be submitted to the authorizing party within thirty (30) days after returning from the authorized trip. The authorizing party will review, sign, date, and properly submit the itemization of expenses to the Finance Department.

**Guidelines for completing the Travel Expense Report:**

- a. Overnight travel:
    - Must have a hotel receipt even if lodging prepaid by City check or credit card.
    - Must include a Google Map (or MapQuest map) from employee primary work location to travel destination.
    - Any exception must be noted on report (stayed in training facility, stayed with relative, etc.)
  - b. Registration:
    - Must have documentation of registration even if prepaid by City check or credit card (registration form, brochure, agenda, etc.).
    - If no registration fee applies (i.e. training provided free of charge), it must be noted on report along with documentation (i.e. email from agency, agenda, etc.).
  - c. Meals:
    - If claiming meal reimbursement or per diem associated with an event, must provide supporting documentation for event that evidences date, time, and place (brochure, agenda, registration form, etc.).
    - If claiming per diem rate for out of state travel, must provide print out of GSA website for that state and city/region evidencing rate.
    - If claiming a per diem rate less than maximum (meal included in registration, training facility provides food at lessor cost, etc.), it must be noted on report.
2. The Finance Department will audit Travel Expense Reports to determine mathematical accuracy, cross-reference amounts to receipts, and review appropriateness of expenses within guidelines of this policy. Upon determination of accuracy, the reimbursement request will be processed and payment made to employee or official.
  3. Submission of an inaccurate Travel Expense Report will be returned to the department for correction and resubmission.
  4. Any employee who knowingly submits a false claim for reimbursement may be subject to disciplinary action up to and including termination.