

**STERLING FINANCIAL CORPORATION**  
**AUDIT COMMITTEE CHARTER**  
**January 24, 2006**

**I. Authorization**

The Audit Committee of Sterling Financial Corporation (the “Company”) is a standing committee of the Board of Directors (“Board”) authorized by the Company’s Bylaws.

**II. Purpose**

The purpose of the Audit Committee is to assist the Board in fulfilling its oversight responsibility relating to:

- A. The integrity of the Company’s financial statements and financial reporting process and the Company’s systems of internal accounting and financial controls;
- B. The performance of the internal audit function;
- C. The annual independent audit of the Company’s financial statements, the engagement of the independent auditors and the evaluation of the independent auditors’ qualifications, independence and performance;
- D. The Company’s compliance with legal and regulatory requirements, including the Company’s disclosure controls and procedures;
- E. The fulfillment of the other responsibilities set out herein; and
- F. Monitor the Company’s compliance with the Code of Conduct. The report of the Audit Committee required by the rules of the Securities and Exchange Commission (“SEC”) shall be included in the Company’s annual proxy statement.

While the Audit Committee has the responsibilities and powers set forth in this Charter, it is not the duty of the Audit Committee to plan or conduct audits or to determine that the Company’s financial statements and disclosures are complete and accurate and are in accordance with generally accepted accounting principles and applicable rules and regulations. These are the responsibilities of management and the independent auditors. In carrying out its oversight responsibilities, as permitted under the Pennsylvania Business Corporation Law of 1988, as amended, the Audit Committee members are entitled to rely in good faith on the expertise, integrity and knowledge of management, the internal and independent auditors and corporate counsel.

**III. Membership and Structure**

The Audit Committee shall be comprised of at least three members of the Board, and the members shall meet the independence, experience, and expertise requirements of the NASDAQ Stock Market and other applicable laws and regulations (including the Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002).

All members of the Audit Committee will have a general understanding of finance and accounting practices and each member shall be free of any relationship that, in the opinion of the Board would, under

applicable laws and regulations, make the director not independent. The Board will determine if any member is a “financial expert” as defined by the SEC.

#### **IV. Authority**

The Audit Committee shall have the sole authority to select, evaluate, appoint, and replace the independent auditors subject to shareholder ratification and shall approve in advance all audit engagement fees and terms and all non-audit engagements with the independent auditors. The Audit Committee shall consult with management, but shall not delegate these responsibilities.

The Audit Committee shall have the authority, to the extent it deems necessary or appropriate, to retain special legal, accounting, or other consultants to advise the Audit Committee. The Company shall provide funding, as determined by the Audit Committee, for payment of compensation to the independent auditors and to any advisors employed by the Audit Committee. Any communications between the Audit Committee and legal counsel in the course of obtaining legal advice will be considered privileged communications of the Company, and the Audit Committee will take all necessary steps to preserve the privileged nature of those communications.

The Audit Committee may form and delegate authority to subcommittees, comprised of one or more members of the Committee, as necessary or appropriate. Each subcommittee shall have the full power and authority of the Audit Committee.

The Audit Committee may conduct or authorize investigations into any matter, within the Audit Committee’s scope of responsibilities, brought to its attention.

#### **V. Duties and Responsibilities**

The Audit Committee shall have the following duties and responsibilities:

##### **A. Meetings and Access**

1. Meet on a regular basis at least four times each year, including at least once each quarter. The Audit Committee may hold special meetings upon the call of the Chair of the Committee. At Committee meetings, a majority of the total members will constitute a quorum.
2. Meet separately, periodically, with management, independent auditors, chief audit executives and any other Company Committees that the Audit Committee determines appropriate
3. Minutes shall be kept by a member of the Audit Committee or a person designated by the Audit Committee.
4. Regularly report to the Board on the Audit Committee’s activities.
5. Annually review and evaluate its own performance.
6. Review and assess the adequacy of this Charter annually and recommend any proposed changes to the Board for approval.

## B. Financial Statement and Disclosure Matters

1. Review and discuss with management and the independent auditors the annual audited financial statements, including disclosures made in “Management’s Discussion and Analysis of Financial Condition and Results of Operations,” and recommend to the Board whether the audited financial statements should be included in the Company’s Annual Report on Form 10-K.
2. Prepare annually a report for inclusion in the Company’s proxy statement relating to its annual shareholders meeting. In that report, the Audit Committee will state whether it has:
  - a. reviewed and discussed the audited financial statements with management;
  - b. discussed with the independent auditors the matters required to be discussed by Statement on Auditing Standards No. 61, as that statement may be modified or supplemented from time to time;
  - c. received from the independent auditors written disclosures and the letter required by Independence Standards Board Standard 1, as that standard may be modified or supplemented from time to time, and has discussed with the independent auditors, the independent auditors’ independence.
3. Review and discuss with management and the independent auditors the Company’s quarterly financial statements prior to the filing of its Quarterly Report on Form 10-Q, including the results of the independent auditors’ reviews of the quarterly financial statements.
4. Discuss, in advance, the Company’s earnings press releases, including the use of “pro forma” or “adjusted” non-GAAP information. If the Company’s financial information and earnings guidance is provided to analysts and rating agencies to the extent required by applicable law or listing standards, the Committee will generally discuss this information. The Committee need not discuss in advance each instance in which the Company may provide earnings guidance.
5. Receive a disclosure from the Chief Executive Officer and Chief Financial Officer during their certification process for the Annual Report on Form 10-K and Quarterly Report on Form 10-Q’s about
  - a. any significant deficiencies in design or operation of internal controls or material weaknesses therein and
  - b. any fraud, whether or not material, involving management or other employees who have a significant role in the Company’s internal controls.
6. At least annually prior to the filing of the Audit Report with the SEC (and more frequently, if appropriate), review and discuss reports from the independent auditors on, among other things, certain:
  - a. Critical accounting policies and practices to be used;

- b. Alternative treatments of financial information within generally accepted accounting principles;
  - c. Other material written communications between the independent auditors and management, such as any management letter and the Company's response to such letter or schedule of unadjusted differences; and
  - d. Difficulties encountered in the course of the audit work, including any restrictions on the scope of activities or access to requested information, any significant disagreements with management, and communications between the audit team and the audit firm's national office with respect to difficult auditing or accounting issues presented by the engagement.
7. Discuss with the independent auditors the matters required to be discussed by Statement on Auditing Standards No. 61 relating to the conduct of the audit.
  8. Review and discuss with management and the independent auditors, at least annually, significant accounting and financial reporting issues, including complex or unusual transactions and judgments concerning significant estimates or significant changes in the Company's selection or application of accounting principles, and recent professional, accounting and regulatory pronouncements and initiatives, and understand their impact on the Company's financial statements.
  9. Review with the Audit Committee management's evaluation of the Company's internal control structure and procedures for financial reporting and review periodically, but in no event less frequently than quarterly, management's conclusions about the efficacy of such internal controls and procedures, including any significant deficiencies in, or material noncompliance with such controls and procedures.
  10. Discuss with management the Company's major financial risk exposures and the steps management has taken to monitor and control such exposures, including the internal audit risk assessment and internal audit plan.
  11. Review with management, at least annually, the Allowance for Loan and Lease Losses (ALLL) methodology employed by the Corporation and the loan review function as to their evaluation of the risk ratings assigned to appropriate loan

C. Authorization of the Company's Whistleblower's Policy

Establish procedures for the receipt, retention, and treatment of complaints received by the Company regarding accounting, internal accounting controls, or auditing matters, and the confidential, anonymous submission by Company employees of concerns regarding questionable accounting or auditing matters.

D. Oversight of the Company's Relationship with the Independent Auditors

1. The independent auditor shall report directly to the Audit Committee;
2. Receive and discuss a report from the independent auditors at least annually regarding:
  - a. The independent auditors' internal quality-control procedures;

- b. Any material issues raised by the most recent quality-control review, or peer review (if applicable), of the independent auditors, or by any inquiry or investigation by governmental professional authorities within the preceding five years respecting one or more independent audits carried out by the independent auditors;
  - c. Any steps taken to deal with any such issues; and
  - d. All relationships between the independent auditors and the Company, in order to assess the independent auditors' independence.
- 3. Approve guidelines for the retention of the independent auditors for any non-audit services and determine procedures for the approval of audit and non-audit services in advance. In accordance with such procedures, the Audit Committee shall approve in advance any audit or non-audit services provided to the Company by the independent auditors, all as required by applicable law or listing standards. Pre-approval authority may be delegated to one or more members of the Audit Committee.
  - 4. Review and discuss the scope and plan of the independent audit.
  - 5. Evaluate the qualifications, performance and independence of the independent auditors, including whether the provision of non-audit services is compatible with maintaining the auditors' independence, and taking into account the opinions of management and the Company's legal counsel. This shall include a review and discussion of the annual communication as to independence delivered by the independent auditors (Independence Standards Board Standard No. 1 - "Independence Discussions with Audit Committees.") The Audit Committee shall present its conclusions to the Board, and if so determined by the Audit Committee, recommend that the Board take additional action to satisfy itself of the qualifications, performance and independence of the auditors.
  - 6. Recommend to the Board, policies for the Company's hiring of employees or former employees of the independent auditors which guidelines shall meet the requirements of applicable law and listing standards.

#### E. Oversight of Internal Audit

The Audit Committee may contract for internal audit services as necessary to assess the adequacy and effectiveness of internal accounting controls, financial systems or financial statements, and the accuracy of management reporting and compliance with laws, regulations and Company policy. As used in this section, the “lead or coordinating auditor” refers to the Company’s internal auditor or if such services are outsourced, to the auditor primarily responsible for the Company’s internal audit functions.

1. Review and discuss the appointment and replacement of the lead or coordinating auditor.
2. Review and approve the internal audit risk assessment and internal audit plan.
3. Review and evaluate the adequacy of the work performed by the lead or coordinating auditor and ensure there are adequate resources to fulfill its duties, including implementation of the internal annual audit plan.
4. Review, annually, the loan review function as to their evaluation of the risk ratings assigned to appropriate loans.

#### F. Compliance Oversight Responsibilities

1. Review periodically with management and its compliance function any correspondence with, or other action by, regulators or governmental agencies, any material legal affairs of the Company and the Company’s compliance with applicable law.
2. Review and discuss the report of the lead or coordinating auditor regarding the expenses of, the perquisites paid to, and the conflicts of interest, if any, of members of the Company’s senior management.
3. Review and discuss with management and the independent auditor any correspondence with, or the findings of any examinations by, regulatory agencies, published reports or auditor observations that raise significant issues regarding the Company’s financial statements or accounting policies.
4. Obtain regular updates from management and Company counsel regarding compliance matters and legal matters that may have a significant impact on the financial statements or the Company’s compliance policies.
5. Advise the Board with respect to policies and procedures regarding compliance with the Company’s Code of Ethics including review of the process for communicating the Code of Ethics to Company personnel and for monitoring compliance.