Thinking About Running for Local Office?

This brochure was created to help potential candidates with answers to questions that they may have before making the final decision to run for local office. It is intended to help you think about the role you will play and the impact you will have on your community in an elected role. This brochure provides general information about:

- the characteristics of effective locally elected officials;
- the expectations of locally elected officials;
- the roles and responsibilities of locally elected officials; and,
- how local governments make decisions.

Why consider running for office?

As an elected official, you will be entrusted with making decisions that directly affect the daily lives of residents, families, local business owners and many others in the community. It is important to think about how you can best serve your community if you are elected.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- Why do I want to be an elected official?
- How will I best contribute to my community as an elected official?
- What are my objectives for holding office and do they reflect the needs of my community?

An effective local government requires dedicated, ethical and informed leaders who are committed to their communities. Perhaps you want to become an elected official so you can:

- be actively involved in the local democratic process;
- contribute your experience and knowledge to your community;
- address various issues in your community; or,
- lead change in your community.

What are some of the values elected officials need to uphold?

Effective local government leaders share a number of values, including:

INTEGRITY - being honest and demonstrating strong ethical principles;

ACCOUNTABILITY - an obligation and willingness to accept responsibility or to account for your actions;

RESPECT - having due regard for others' perspectives, wishes, and rights; displaying respect for the offices of local government, and the role of local government in community decision-making; and,

LEADERSHIP AND COLLABORATION - an ability to lead, listen to and positively influence others; coming together to pursue a common goal through collective efforts.

Refer to the Foundational Principles of Responsible Conduct brochure for information about the key values that guide locally elected officials' conduct. The brochure is available online at: www.gov.bc.ca/localgov-elected-officials-conduct

How do you you demonstrate these characteristics? Are they traits that come naturally to you or will you need to work to build and maintain them? What are your strengths and how will they help shape the way your local government moves forward if you are elected?

What are some of the characteristics of an effective elected official?

The most effective elected officials are:

DILIGENT - prepared for meetings, asking questions and participating respectfully in discussions to contribute to a positive environment so that effective decisions can be made;

RESPONSIBLE - understand the role of an elected official and municipal council (council) and regional district board (board) protocols and the legislative requirements that apply to elected officials, councils and boards, and the local government system as a whole;

PROACTIVE - address community and council and board issues proactively by working to find collective solutions and being able to make informed decisions;

COMMITTED - have the time, energy and motivation required to be effective and responsive to the community's needs;

PATIENT/TOLERANT - have patience and tolerance for others' points of view, and for the council or board's processes and procedures;

INFLUENTIAL - build relationships; provide facts; explain points of view; listen to concerns and provide real examples of the impact of not taking action; and,

SELF-AWARE - assess their strengths and weaknesses; know their biases and the types of behaviours and comments that can cause upset; aware of their impact on others.

What are the responsibilities of an elected official?

Mayors, councillors and board members are expected to contribute to the betterment of their local government, to provide leadership, and to serve and act on behalf of all the citizens of the community.

An elected official must:

- consider the well-being and interests of the community;
- contribute to the development and evaluation of policies and programs in respect to local government services;
- participate in council/board and committee meetings and contribute to decision-making;
- carry out other duties as assigned (such as heading committees); and,
- follow the rules set out by legislation, bylaws and policies that govern how council and board members exercise their authority.

What is the role of a council/board?

The role of a council/board is to:

- set strategic direction;
- adopt the local government's financial plan;
- broadly allocate resources to services, capital projects, programs and other priorities;
- represent citizens;
- engage with the community; and,
- make policies and adopt bylaws.

Refer to the **What is Local Government** video for detailed information about local government governing bodies and their representatives. The video is available online at: **www.gov.bc.ca/localgov-thinking-running-local-office**

What is the role of the mayor and the board chair?

The mayor and board chair have all the responsibilities of a municipal councillor or regional district board member plus a number of additional responsibilities. The mayor and board chair:

- are the spokesperson for the council/board, reflecting the collective decisions of the council/board;
- lead deliberations and collective decision-making, and recommend bylaws and resolutions;
- chair meetings, maintain the order and conduct of debate, ensure meeting rules are followed, and encourage the expression of differing viewpoints;
- create standing committees, appoint people to these committees and decide the committees' mandates; and,
- communicate with local government staff, primarily the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), and, on behalf of the council/board, provide general direction to staff about how to implement policies, programs and other council/board decisions.

What is the role of local government staff?

An elected official's interactions with local government staff are important to achieving the council/board's goals. The roles and responsibilities of elected officials and local government staff are distinct and interdependent.

STAFF:

- **implement the direction, decisions and policies of the council/board and manage the local government's resources;**
- **provide the council/board with information and professional advice to ensure informed decision-making; and,**
- **communicate local government policy and decisions to the public and other levels of government.**

Elected officials provide direction, while staff manage and implement the council/board's decisions and direction.

The relationship between the CAO and the mayor/board chair provides a critical link between the council/board and the CAO.

The CAO is typically the only member of staff directly hired by the council/board. The CAO is then responsible and accountable for hiring and supervising all other staff. The CAO is responsible for the overall management of the local government, ensuring policies and programs are implemented, and advising and informing the council/board about the local government's operation and affairs.

How do councils and boards make decisions?

Councils and boards are independent decision-making bodies and must work within their authority.

Some of the things that influence how councils and boards make decisions are:

- the local government's legal authority as outlined in Provincial legislation (e.g. *Community Charter* and *Local Government Act*);
- community needs;
- the local government's long-term plans and policies;
- the local government's finances and strategic direction;
- staff recommendations; and,
- conflict of interest and ethical conduct rules.

What is the role of collaboration in effective decision-making?

Being collaborative and working through conflict are critical components of being an effective elected official. Council and board members' ability to work together and resolve conflict respectfully are keys to council and board effectiveness and good governance. Collaboration is a key part of leadership.

Democracy is about having a diversity of views. You will be one voice at a table focused on making collective decisions. Often you will find early agreement at the table, and it is important to be prepared to manage situations that may not align with what you think is the correct course of action.

What are some of the demands elected officials face?

Being in elected office can be a very rewarding experience; making a difference in your community is both important and fulfilling. It can also be quite demanding.

Some of the demands of being in elected office include:

- a high volume of reading and learning in order to know your local government's policies, procedures and local government legislation;
- a substantial time commitment even when it may be considered only a "part-time" job;
- attending numerous meetings on a regular basis; and,
- public and potential media scrutiny.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER:

- How do you appropriately express your disagreement and work through it with others?
- Are you able to disagree while still maintaining a professional attitude and an open mind?
- How will you demonstrate the personal characteristics necessary to be effective, even in challenging situations?

What are some of the ways potential candidates can prepare for elected office?

Some ways you can prepare are to:

- look at your local government's key planning documents and reports;
- attend council or board meetings to learn about priority issues and projects in your community and observe what being on a council/board might be like;
- review your local government's website to understand its key priorities and initiatives;
- attend neighbourhood association meetings or get to know key groups in your community, such as the Chamber of Commerce, service groups, social agencies or environmental stewardship groups, to understand the diversity of interests in your area; and,
- research the Internet for information about local governments and basic facts about the local government system in B.C.

Further information:

Local government mailing addresses, telephone numbers, email addresses and websites are available online from CivicInfoBC at: www.civicinfo.bc.ca/directories

- Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing - **www.gov.bc.ca/localelections**
- Union of BC Municipalities - **www.ubcm.ca**
- Local Government Leadership Academy - **www.lgla.ca**
- Local Government Management Association of BC - **www.lgma.ca**

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LGLA
LOCAL GOVERNMENT LEADERSHIP ACADEMY

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Refer to the **What Every Candidate Needs to Know** brochure for information about the legislated rules for general local elections in B.C.

Refer to the **General Local Elections 101** brochure for detailed information about general local elections in B.C. These brochures are available from local governments throughout B.C. and online at:

www.gov.bc.ca/localelections

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