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Thinking About
Running for
Local Office?

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This brochure was created to help potential candidates with answers to questions they may have before making the final decision to run for local office.

The information in this brochure is intended to help you think about the role you will play and the impact you will have on your community as an elected official. This brochure provides general information about, the:

- principles of effective locally elected officials;
- characteristics of effective locally elected officials;
- responsible conduct of locally elected officials;
- roles and responsibilities of locally elected officials; and,
- decisions local governments (municipalities and regional districts) make.

QUESTIONS TO CONSIDER BEFORE RUNNING FOR OFFICE:

- **Why do I want to be a locally elected official?**
- **How will I contribute to my community as a locally elected official?**
- **What are my objectives for holding office and do they reflect the needs of my community?**
- **How will I work with my colleagues even if we have different points of view?**



Why consider running for office?

As a locally 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 and the expectations of being a locally elected official.

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; and/or,
- lead change in your community.

What are some of the principles locally elected officials need to uphold?

Effective local government leaders generally conduct themselves according to principles such as:

INTEGRITY - being honest and demonstrating strong ethical principles;

ACCOUNTABILITY - an obligation and willingness to accept responsibility or to account for one's actions;

RESPECT - having due regard for others' perspectives, wishes, and rights; displaying respect for the office 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 and the *Forging the Path to Responsible Conduct* guide for more information about the key values and principles that guide locally elected officials' conduct.

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

The most effective locally elected officials are:

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

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

PROACTIVE - address community and council and regional district 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 regional district 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; are aware of their impact on others.

How do 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 is responsible conduct of locally elected officials?

Responsible conduct is how locally elected officials conduct themselves in their relationships with elected colleagues, local government staff and the public – and is directly connected to how a community is governed. An elected official's relationships with their colleagues, local government staff and the public plays a significant role in helping carry out their responsibilities.

FOR REFLECTION:

- What does responsible conduct mean to you?
- How do you express your disagreement with others?
- How do you work through disagreement 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?

Responsible conduct is not optional – it is essential to good governance. Examples of good governance for you to consider include:

- providing for the stewardship of a community's public assets;
- providing services, laws and programs for the public's benefit; and,
- acting in a way that is accountable, transparent, ethical, respectful of the rules of law, collaborative, effective and efficient.

Many local governments across British Columbia utilize various tools to support responsible conduct including code of conduct bylaws, procedure bylaws and WorkSafeBC harassment and bullying policies.

Refer to the “*Forging the Path to Responsible Conduct*” guide for more information about the key values that influence the responsible conduct of locally elected officials.

Check out the panel discussion series “*Being an Effective Elected Official*” to hear from current local elected officials about the role.

What are the responsibilities of a locally elected official?

Mayors, councillors and regional district 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 citizens of the community.

An elected official must:

- consider the well-being and interests of the entire community;
- contribute to the development and evaluation of policies and programs with respect to local government services;
- participate in council/regional district 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 local government legislation (e.g., regularly attending meetings and declaring conflict of interest), bylaws (e.g., meeting procedures and code of conduct) and policies that govern how council and regional district board members exercise their authority.

What is the role of a council/regional district board?

Councils and regional district boards act as a political forum through which citizens, families and business owners within the local community express their collective vision. Councils and regional district boards also provide services and programs to the community.

The role of a council/regional district 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.

What is the role of the mayor/regional district board chair?

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

- are the spokesperson, reflecting the collective decisions of the council/regional district 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/or City Manager and, on behalf of the council or the regional district board, provide general direction to staff about how to implement policies, programs and other decisions.

What is the role of local government staff?

A locally elected official's interactions with staff are important to achieving the council/regional district board's goals. Locally elected officials provide direction, while staff manage and implement the council/regional district board's decisions and direction. The roles and responsibilities of elected officials and local government staff are distinct and interdependent.

All local governments must have at least two officer positions: one responsible for the local government's corporate administration and the other responsible for its financial administration. Local governments may establish any officer position in addition to the required positions.

Local governments in British Columbia often establish a CAO/City Manager position – although this position is not required by legislation. The CAO/City Manager is typically the only member of staff directly hired by the council or regional district board. The CAO/City Manager is then responsible and accountable for hiring and supervising all other staff.

LOCAL GOVERNMENT STAFF:

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

The relationship between the CAO/City Manager and the mayor/regional district board chair provides a critical link between the council/regional district board and staff.

How do councils and regional district boards make decisions?

Council and regional district board decisions may be influenced or informed by:

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

Within six months of a general local election, every municipal council and regional district board must consider whether to establish a new code of conduct bylaw or revise an existing one. If a local government decides not to do so, it will need to provide its reasons to the public. The council and regional district board will also have to reconsider their decision before January 1 of the year of the next general local elections.

Why is collaboration important in effective decision-making?

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

Democracy is about having a diversity of views. You will be one voice at a table focused on making collective decisions. Often you may 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.

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 demands locally 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.

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

Some ways you can prepare include:

- reading your local government’s key planning documents, reports, procedure bylaw and code of conduct bylaw (if available);
- attending council or regional district board meetings to learn about priority issues and projects in your community and observe what being on a council/ regional district board may be like;
- reviewing your local government’s website to understand its key priorities and initiatives;
- attending neighbourhood association meetings or getting to know key groups in your community, such as the Chamber of Commerce, service groups, social agencies or environmental stewardship groups, to better understand the diversity of interests in your area;
- reading the *Local Government Act*, *Community Charter* and the *Local Elections Campaign Financing Act* to gain an understanding of the legislative requirements that local governments must follow; and,
- researching the Internet for information about local governments and basic facts about the local government system in British Columbia.

Refer to the “*You’ve decided to run for local office*” webpage for information potential candidates may have before making the decision to run for local office.

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
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



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

Refer to the "***General Local Elections 101***" brochure for detailed information about general local elections in British Columbia.

Disclaimer

In the event that there is inconsistency between this brochure and the *Local Government Act*, the *Local Elections Campaign Financing Act*, or any other Act, the legislation shall prevail.