Consider Running for Municipal Council

Citizens guide for candidacy in municipal elections

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Introduction

This guide has been prepared for citizens who are thinking about running as a candidate for election in a Saskatchewan municipality. This guide is meant to be thought-provoking and provide a broad overview of municipal government, what you can expect and what is expected of you as a member of council, candidate eligibility, and the process to run for council.

This guide provides general information on:

- The purpose of a municipality;
- The roles and responsibilities of council and council members;
- Key standards and values needed for being an effective council member;
- Time commitment considerations;
- Actions to learn more about the municipality and expectations of council members;
- How to run for council; and
- Key documents required after being elected.

Disclaimer: This guide is NOT a substitution for legislation regarding election requirements. It is a candidate's responsibility to ensure they meet requirements and deadlines by communicating with the local municipal office, reviewing election information on www.saskatchewan.ca and reviewing *The Local Government Election Act, 2015* (LGEA) and *The Local Government Election Regulations, 2015*.

Citizens entrust elected council to make decisions that affect their daily lives.

Democratic Governance Begins at the Municipal Level

Municipalities are an autonomous level of government, closest to the people it serves and understands their needs best. **Municipalities need citizens to take on leadership roles as council members** to represent the people in the community and provide direction on policies, programs, and services.

Council members are entrusted to make decisions that directly affect the daily lives of residents, families, local business owners and many others in the community.

Levels of Government

MUNICIPAL

- Water and Sewer
- Garbage Collection
- Land Use Planning and Development
- Cemeteries
- Animal Control
- Local Roads and Streets
- Emergency Services
- Property Tax
- Parks and Recreation

PROVINCIAL

- Labour Laws
- Education
- Provincial Courts
- Health Care
- Environment
- Social Services
- Highways
- Natural Resources
- Provincial Sales Tax
- Provincial Parks

FEDERAL

- Immigration and Citizenship
- Correctional Facilities and Supreme Court
- RCMP and Military
- Banking, Trade and Commerce
- Foreign Affairs
- Income Tax
- National Parks

The Purpose of a Municipality and the Role of Council

The Purpose of a Municipality

The province creates municipalities and provides the legislative framework for municipalities to govern local affairs and make decisions on local matters. The legislative framework is provided through *The Municipalities Act* (villages, resort villages, towns and rural municipalities); *The Cities Act* (cities); and *The Northern Municipalities Act, 2010* (northern municipalities). A municipality's purpose is to:

- Provide good governance;
- Provide services and facilities that council feels are necessary and desirable for all or part of the municipality;
- Develop and maintain a safe and viable community;
- Foster economic, social and environmental well-being; and
- Provide wise stewardship of public assets.

The Role of Council

A municipality is governed by, and acts through, the elected council. Council members must:

- Fulfil the purpose of the municipality;
- Make decisions for the municipality about services, policies and programs;
- Make decisions through passing of resolutions and bylaws at properly conducted meetings that are open to the public;
- Be accountable to the public for the decisions made;
- Ensure administrative practices and procedures are in place that enable municipal employees to carry out their duties; and
- Ensure the municipality acts within the law.

Council members are elected to serve and act on behalf of all citizens in the community.

Council Support from Administration

Council is supported in carrying out their roles and duties by the administration of the municipality, particularly the municipal administrator/city manager/city clerk (administration). This support includes:

- Providing professional advice for council's consideration and decision-making;
- Advising council of their legislative responsibilities;
- Carrying out the direction set by council;
- Recording the decisions of council in the meeting minutes;

- Managing financial matters;
- The safekeeping of documents; and
- Meeting legal obligations of the municipality.

Council provides direction on the provision of services and programs and establishes policies through resolutions and bylaws. Administration ensures the decisions and directions of council are implemented.

Elected Council Provides:

Direction

Council provides direction on services and programs and establishes policies through resolutions and bylaws.

Administration Provides:

Advice and Execution

Administration provides advice and ensures the decisions and directions of council are implemented.

Learn More About Your Municipality and Council

To learn more about your municipality, its priorities and the duties and functions of council, you can:

- Attend council and council committee meetings to observe the process and proceedings – all meetings are open to the public unless council closes all, or a portion of, the meeting for specific purposes allowed by legislation;
- Review meeting minutes – all meeting minutes are open for public inspection during office hours once they are approved by council; many municipalities have the meeting minutes on their website;
- Review the municipality's Council Procedures bylaw;
- Review the municipality's Code of Ethics bylaw;
- Ask questions – talk to current or past council members and/or the municipality's administration; and
- If your municipality has a website, review the website to understand its key priorities and initiatives.

Considerations Before Running for Council

It is important to think about how you can best serve your community if you are elected and the expectations of being a council member.

Reasons why you might consider running for council:

- To be actively involved in the local democratic process;
- To contribute your experience and knowledge to your municipality;
- To participate in making bylaws and setting policy direction in your municipality; and
- To lead change and address various issues in your municipality.

Is council the right fit for me?

Reflection Questions

1. Why do I want to be on council?
2. How will I contribute to my municipality?
3. What are my objectives and do they reflect the needs of my municipality?
4. How will I work with my colleagues even if we have different points of view?
5. Do I have the time to dedicate to being a member of council?

Time Commitment

Being a council member requires a time commitment. The term of office for council members is four years. During that time, council members are expected to:

- Learn their roles and responsibilities as a member of council and understand the role of the municipality's administration;
- Prepare for and attend meetings;
- Learn the municipality's policies, procedures, and bylaws;
- With the support of administration, be familiar with applicable legislation;
- Attend educational opportunities (conferences, seminars, workshops and conventions);
- Attend events that promote the municipality, as required; and
- Receive feedback from and communicate to the public.

Responsibilities of a Council Member

Mayors, reeves and councillors are expected to contribute to the betterment of their community; to provide leadership; and to serve and act on behalf of all citizens in the community. All council members must:

- Represent their citizens and consider the well-being and interest of the municipality as a whole;
- Contribute to the development and evaluation of policies and programs of the municipality;
- Participate in meetings and contribute to decision-making;
- Follow the rules set out by municipal legislation, bylaws and policies that govern how council members exercise their authority;
- Ensure administrative practices and procedures are in place to implement the decisions of council – council is the policy maker and not to be involved in operational matters;
- Keep certain matters confidential until discussed at a meeting open to the public; and

- Maintain the financial integrity of the municipality.

The mayor/reeve has a few additional responsibilities including:

- Chairing the council meetings and maintaining the order and conducting of debate, ensures meeting procedures are followed and encourages the expression of differing viewpoints;
- Has the ability to call a special meeting; and
- Is the 'head' of the municipality as defined under *The Local Authority Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act.* Often the reeve/mayor will delegate this responsibility to administration.

Key Standards and Values of Council Members

Legislation requires a municipality to have a Code of Ethics bylaw for members of council that includes the following standards and values expected of them during their term of office:

- **HONESTY** – be truthful in their roles as council members and as members of the communities they serve.
- **OBJECTIVITY** – make decisions carefully, fairly and impartially.
- **RESPECT** – treat every person with dignity, understanding and respect; not engage in discrimination, bullying or harassment; do not use derogatory language towards others; respect the rights of other people and groups; treat people with courtesy and recognize the importance of different roles others play in decision-making.
- **TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY** – councils are required to conduct their business and their duties in an open and transparent manner, except those discussions that are authorized to be confidential in a closed session; their obligation and willingness to accept responsibility for decisions made and to account for their own actions.
- **CONFIDENTIALITY** – refrain from disclosing or releasing confidential information except when required by law or authorized by council to do so; do not take advantage of or obtain private benefit from information obtained in the course of their duties or position.

Code of Ethics bylaws define the standards and values expected of council members.

- **LEADERSHIP AND THE PUBLIC INTEREST** – an ability to lead, listen to and positively influence others; act in the best interests of the municipality; focus on issues important to the community; and strive to build and inspire the public's trust and confidence in local government.
- **RESPONSIBILITY** – understand the role and legislative requirements that apply to a council member, the municipal council, and the local government system as a whole; follow policies and procedures of the municipality; and duty to disclose actual or potential conflicts of interest and be responsible for related actions.

Additional characteristics key to the role of a council member include:

- **COLLABORATIVE** – coming together to pursue a common goal through collective efforts; working with other municipalities in areas of common interest for the betterment of the region.
- **INTEGRITY** – being honest and demonstrating strong ethical principles.

- **INFLUENTIAL** – build relationships; provide facts; explain points of view; listen to concerns; and provide real examples of the impact of taking or not taking action.
- **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 and administrative processes and procedures; listen to others when they are expressing their views.
- **EMPATHETIC** – be understanding and sensitive to the feelings and experiences of others.

Reflection Questions

1. How do I demonstrate these characteristics?
2. Are they traits that come naturally to me or will I need to work to build and maintain them?
3. What are my strengths and how will they help shape the way my municipality moves forward if I am elected?

Responsible Conduct of Council Members

Responsible conduct is how council members conduct themselves in their relationships with fellow council members, municipal staff and the public. It is directly connected to how a municipality is governed. A council members' relationships with their colleagues, staff and the public play a significant role in carrying out their responsibilities.

The following legislative requirements support responsible conduct of council members:

- Oath or Affirmation of Office
    - Once elected, all council members must complete an oath or affirmation of office, declaring that they:
        - Will act truthfully, faithfully and impartially;
        - Will not receive any payment or reward for any corrupt practices while in office;
        - Abide by and comply with the code of ethics, rules of conduct and procedures required by legislation;
        - Perform the duties of a council member; and
        - Disclose any conflict of interest.
- Public Disclosure Statements (PDS)
    - Once elected, all council members must complete and annually update a PDS. *A PDS is also required to be submitted with the nomination form prior to being elected.*
    - The PDS help assure the public that when a council member is elected to office, council's decisions are made in the best interest of the municipality. They also: have a direct impact when dealing with a conflict of interest; assist with transparency and accountability; and assist the public in understanding dealings that may compromise a council member's ability to make decisions.
    - Required information relates to the council member and the council member's family (spouse and dependent children) and includes the disclosure of: an employer; corporate interests; partnerships; property holdings; and contracts and agreements.

- Conflict of Interest Rules
    - Conflict of interest rules are found in municipal legislation. Identifying, addressing and managing conflicts of interest are key to good governance and maintaining the public's trust and confidence in their local government.
    - A conflict of interest occurs when a council member's private interests, or a family member's interests may, or may appear to be, affected by a council decision.
    - A council member having a conflict of interest is not unusual. When that happens, the conflict of interest rules must be followed. It is the responsibility of each council member to determine if they have a conflict of interest, either real or perceived, in a matter brought before council and take the appropriate action.

Responsible conduct is not optional – it is essential to good governance.

- Code of Ethics Bylaw
    - As mentioned previously, municipalities must have a Code of Ethics bylaw that defines the standards and values expected of each member of council in dealing with each other, employees of the municipality and the public.
- Council Procedures Bylaw
    - Municipalities must have a Council Procedures bylaw which establishes general procedures to be followed in conducting business at council and council committee meetings, such as:
        - Rules for the conduct of members of council;
        - Rules regarding confidentiality, transparency, openness and accessibility of documents and other matters to be discussed;
        - Establishment of dates for council meetings; and
        - Rules and procedures to close a part or all of the meeting to the public to discuss confidential information allowed by legislation.

Am I willing to do what it takes to be an effective council member?

Reflection Questions

1. What does responsible conduct mean to me?
2. How do I express my disagreement with others?
3. How do I work through disagreements with others?
4. Am I able to disagree while still maintaining a professional attitude and an open mind?
5. How will I demonstrate the personal characteristics necessary to be effective, even in challenging situations?

How To Run for Council

Candidate Eligibility

There are some requirements that all municipalities have in common with respect to a candidate's eligibility in running for council. Individual requirements are broken down further depending on the type of municipality. The table below shows candidate eligibility requirements based on the type of municipality the candidate is running for.

<table>
<tr><th colspan="3">Candidate Eligibility</th></tr>
<tr><td colspan="3">Candidate eligibility requirements in all municipalities:
• At least 18 years old on the day of the election;
• Canadian citizen at the time of submitting the nomination paper;
• Is not disqualified pursuant to the LGEA or any other Act; AND</td></tr>
<tr><th>Cities, towns, villages and northern municipalities</th><th>Resort villages</th><th>Rural municipalities</th></tr>
<tr><td>• Has resided in Saskatchewan for at least six consecutive months immediately preceding the date the nomination paper is submitted; AND
• Has resided in the municipality, or on land now in the municipality, for at least three consecutive months immediately preceding the date the nomination paper is submitted.</td><td>• Has resided in Saskatchewan for at least six consecutive months immediately preceding the date the nomination paper is submitted; AND
• Has resided in the resort village, or on land now in the resort village, for at least three consecutive months immediately preceding the date the nomination paper is submitted; OR
• Is the assessed person with respect to property in the resort village for at least three consecutive months immediately preceding the date the nomination paper is submitted; OR
• Is the spouse of a person mentioned in the above bullets.</td><td>• Resides in Saskatchewan; AND
• Is eligible to vote in the rural municipality (voter information can be found on saskatchewan.ca).</td></tr>
</table>

Filing the nomination paper

To run in a municipal election, you must file a nomination paper with the returning officer or nomination officer by the deadline specified in the 'Notice of Call for Nominations' posted by your municipality.

Obtain the form	• Contact your municipality for the nomination paper. • The form will include a public disclosure statement that must be completed and attached.
Deposit required?	• Applies to municipalities with a population of 20,000 or more. • Deposits range from $100-$500, check with your municipality. • Must be cash, certified cheque or money order payable to the municipality.
Criminal Record Check Required?	• Applies if your municipality has a criminal record check bylaw. • Check with your municipality.
Obtain required signatures	• Signature requirements will be specified on the nomination paper. • For more information, contact your municipality or visit www.saskatchewan.ca
Complete acceptance form	• Complete candidates acceptance form, which will be part of the nomination paper.
Review nomination paper	• Review the nomination paper and any required attachments for accuracy and completeness.
Submit the form	• Once the Notice of Call for Nominations is published, the nomination form can be submitted, as directed on the notice. • Only completed forms will be accepted.

You must file a completed nomination paper by the nomination deadline to be an election candidate.

Contact your municipality for more information or if you have questions about your eligibility, the nomination period and requirements for filing a nomination paper.

Campaigning for an Election

The purpose of campaigning for an election is to convince electors that you are the best candidate for the job. It involves talking to people, distributing brochures and posters and perhaps paid media advertising.

Every printed advertisement referencing an election must contain the name of the person who has authorized its printing, display and distribution.

When the polls are open, no candidate, agent or other person shall influence or attempt to influence voters in any way at any polling place or within 100 metres of the building where the poll is held. Check with your municipality to see if they have passed a bylaw to establish:

- Disclosure requirements regarding election campaign contributions and expenses; and/or
- Election campaign spending limits.

Rules regarding proper campaign procedures, such as advertising, canvassing in or near the polling place, bribery and threats can be found in the LGEA. Election candidates that intend on campaigning should review the rules thoroughly and ensure they are followed.

Key Documents After Being Elected

If you are elected, there are two documents you are legislatively required to complete right after the election:

1. Oath or Affirmation of Office – Must be completed prior to carrying out any power, duty or function as a member of council.
2. PDS – Must be completed and submitted to the administrator/city clerk, within 30 days of being elected. Failure to do so results in a disqualification from council. *Note: the PDS submitted with the nomination paper will not meet this requirement*

For more information contact your municipality or a municipal advisor at:
Ministry of Government Relations
Advisory Services and Municipal Relations
Phone: 306-787-2680
Email: muninfo@gov.sk.ca

Resources

The following resources can be found by using the key words in the search bar on saskatchewan.ca.

- Municipal Election Information
- Conflict of Interest
- Public Disclosure Guide and templates
- *The Local Government Election Act, 2015*
- *The Local Government Election Regulations, 2015*
- Council Member's Handbook for Municipalities