

The Role of Council in Municipal Governance



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Municipal Governance

Key Shift:

From prescriptive rules → to empowered local governance.

New Towns and Local Service Districts Act

- Modernizes municipal governance
- Gives towns more flexibility to respond to local needs
- Provides broader local decision-making authority
- Strengthens tools for economic development and financial management
- Reduces unnecessary provincial oversight

Source of Council Authority

Under the Towns and Local Service Districts Act, councils are granted authority to:

- Govern local affairs
- Provide services
- Pass bylaws
- Manage municipal finances
- Represent residents

Municipal councils exist because of provincial legislation.

Council powers are legislated and collective.

Core Role of Councils

Council's primary responsibility remains:

- Setting direction
- Making policy decisions
- Approving bylaws
- Financial oversight
- Accountability to residents

Council governs — administration operates.

Role of Council Members

Councillors collectively:

- Establish municipal priorities
- Debate and vote on decisions
- Represent the interests of the whole community
- Provide oversight of municipal performance
- Act in the public interest

Authority exists **only when council acts as a body.**

Core Role of Mayors

The Mayor:

- Leads council governance
- Chairs meetings
- Acts as official spokesperson
- Represents council externally
- Ensures decisions reflect council direction

Governance and Operations

Council

- Sets policy
- Approves budget
- Sets service levels
- Oversees CAO

Administration

- Implements policy
- Manages spending
- Delivers services
- Supervises staff

Bylaws

The Towns and Local Service District Act introduces:

- **Mandatory bylaws (required areas)**
- **Discretionary bylaws (local flexibility)**

Councils now have broader authority to create bylaws addressing local priorities.

Financial Stewardship

Council responsibilities include:

- Approving budgets
- Setting taxation and fees
- Ensuring affordability tools are considered
- Long-term financial sustainability

The new Act increases flexibility in municipal revenue tools.

Council as an Employer

- Establishes staff positions
- Sets expectations for senior administration
- Oversees organizational performance

Council does **not** manage individual employees.

Meeting and Decision-Making

Council must:

- Conduct formal meetings
- Follow rules of procedure regulations
- Make decisions by resolution
- Maintain public transparency

Effective meetings = effective governance.

Accountability and Conduct

Council members must:

- Follow ethical standards
- Avoid conflicts of interest
- Act collectively
- Maintain confidentiality where required

Supported by the Municipal Conduct Act framework governing behaviour and training requirements.

Advocacy and Community Leadership

Council's leadership role includes:

- Advocating to other levels of government
- Regional collaboration
- Supporting community growth
- Responding to emerging issues

The new Act encourages locally driven solutions.

Accountability and Conduct

Common Governance Challenges

- Micromanagement
- Operational interference
- Individual decision-making outside meetings
- Role confusion between council and staff

The new legislation increases authority — but also responsibility.

What High-Performing Councils Do

Strong councils:

- Focus on strategy, not operations
- Respect administrative expertise
- Make decisions collectively
- Communicate clearly with residents
- Use bylaws proactively

Questions?



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Understanding the Roles of Administrators

Municipal Roles & Responsibilities Guide

Myrna Goosney, Vice-President
Professional Municipal Administrators



- Support for municipal administrators across the province
- Professional Development/Training
- Advocacy

Provide an overview of:

- The function of a Municipal Administrator
- Statutory responsibilities
- Important governing legislation and regulations
- Meeting management
- Financial management
- Council/staff relationships



Council decides policy - Municipal Administrators (CAO, manager, town clerk, etc.) implement council's policies.

An understanding of the roles and responsibilities of both councillors and administrators is essential for an effective and efficient municipality.



- Providing administrative leadership
- Managing organizational resources
- Carrying out directions, policies, and regulations provided and approved by Council
- Providing services approved by Council in the most effective and efficient manner possible
- Following Council's direction and ensuring it is carried out in the manner Council intended
- Administering policies and enforcing regulations and bylaws in an objective manner and without discrimination to any individual or group(s) within the community
- Providing administrative leadership
- Managing organizational resources
- Carrying out directions, policies, and regulations provided and approved by Council
- Being open and receptive to residents' concerns



Town/City Clerk

- Mandatory appointment by Council
- May be appointed Town Manager or Acting Manager
- Reports directly to council
- Required to attend council meetings and at the discretion of council may attend committee meetings; can speak at council and committee meetings but has no vote
- Responsible for recording proceedings and decisions of Council and responsible for safe keeping all documents.
- Acts as returning officer during municipal elections or by-elections



Town/City Manager

- Discretionary position
- Head of councils admin. Branch
- Responsible for proper planning, execution, conduct and administration of Municipality
- Advises and make recommendations to Council
- Attends council meetings and may, at Council's discretion, attend committee meetings; has no vote at any meetings.



- Towns and Local Service District Act
- Public Procurement Act
- Labour Standards Act
- Municipal Conduct Act
- Urban and Rural Planning Act
- Elections Act

Rules of procedure

- In Newfoundland and Labrador, municipal councils must adopt formal Rules of Procedure for meetings, governed by the TLSDA
- Councils must adopt procedures for preparing agendas and keeping minutes
- Open to the public, unless it is held as a privileged meeting

Financial Management is a key function of Administrators. A good understanding of revenue sources and collection methods available to Core Financial Responsibilities.

Council is essential.

- Budgeting/Reporting
- Accounting
- Compliance (financial activities align with provincial legislation)
 - Tax recovery plan/audit deadlines
- Asset Management
- Assessment Role
- General Tax, Property Tax, Business Tax, Tourist Accommodation Tax, Direct Sellers Tax, Water & Sewer Tax
- Municipal Operating Grants (MOG)



Keys to Success:

- Provide clear, consistent sense of direction;
- Build a foundation that involves teamwork;
- Recognize **distinctly difference of roles** of Council and Administrator;
- Follow accepted chain of command;
- Recognize role(s) of key agencies (NL and Lab Housing Corp, {NLHC}, Public Procurement Agency {PPA}, Multi-Materials Stewardship Board {MMSB}, etc.);
- Maintain confidentiality and personal integrity; and
- Maintain a balance in life



Teamwork

- The ability to work together toward a common goal
- The ability to direct individual accomplishments toward organizational objectives;
- The fuel that allows common people to attain uncommon results

Harassment & Incivility

- ~75% of municipal administrators report experiencing harassment, incivility or abuse in their roles
(based on recent incivility training surveys)
- ~33% of those cases are from members of council, ~61% from members of the public and ~6% from other staff
- How can you facilitate a respectful workplace environment and keep staff safe?



Thank you for joining us!

Get in touch!

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