



Thinking of Running for Council.....Now What?

Helping You Decide if Municipal Office is Right for You

Introductions

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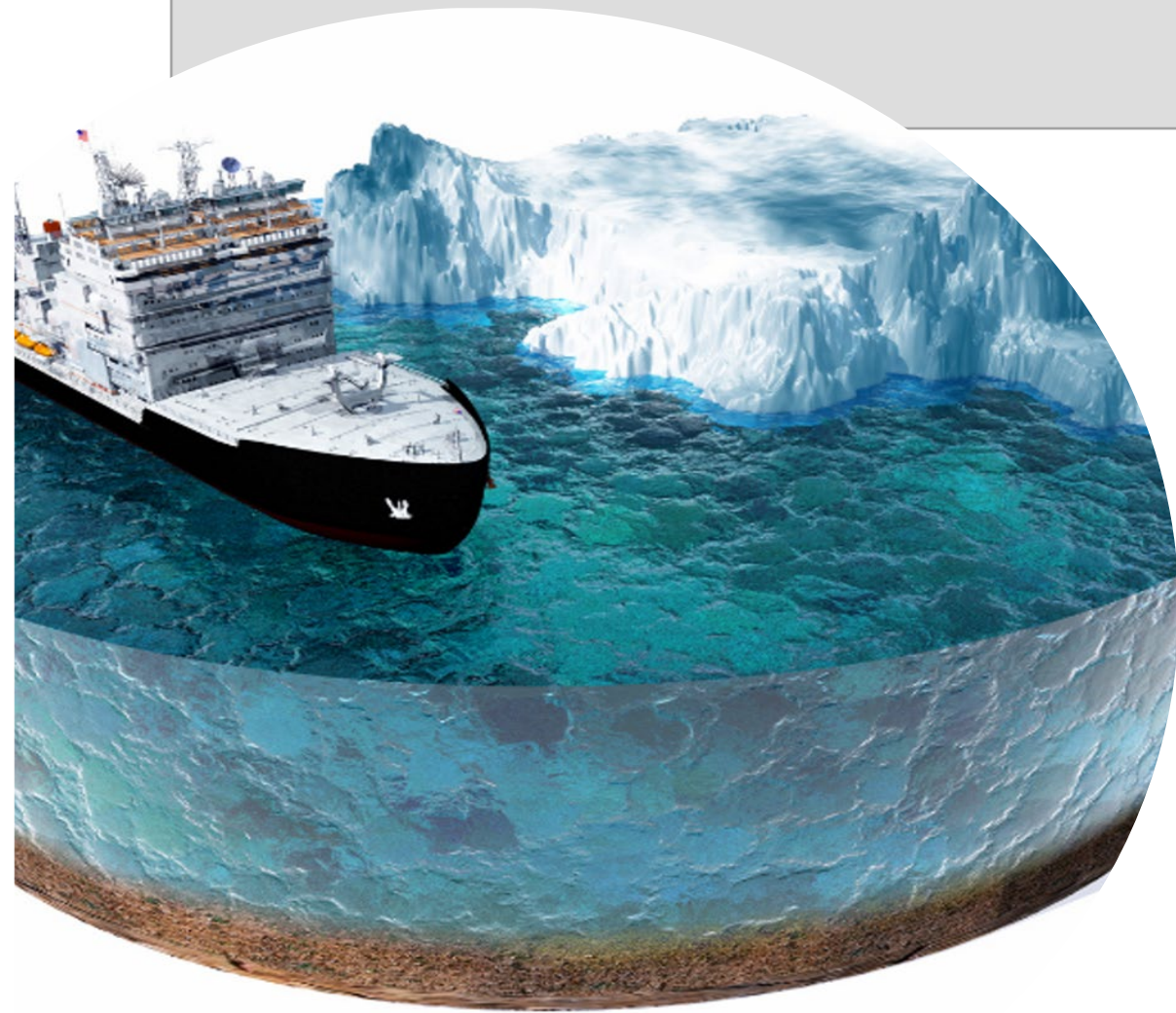
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- 30+ years of municipal experience – CAO & Municipal Clerk
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ICEBREAKER



Are you ready to run
for Council?

Let's start with a quick
readiness check.

Readiness Questions

Put your hand up if you have
attended a Council Meeting?

Readiness Questions

Put your hand up if you are currently participating on a committee in your community?

Readiness Questions

Put your hand up if you are currently on Council?

Readiness Questions

Put your hand up if you are currently involved on a Board of Directors?

Workshop Purpose

1. Provide clear information and context about Municipal Government
2. Provide reflection tools
3. Help you make an informed decision about running for Council

What we will cover

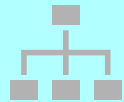
- How municipal government works
- Roles and responsibilities of council members and staff
- Reasons to run for council
- Key considerations before entering the race
- Importance of ethics, accountability, and transparency
- Campaign realities
- Dealing with the media and the public

Municipal Government 101

Overview of the Province's Municipal Government System



Municipal Governance Framework



Structure and Roles



Importance of Municipal Elections

Structure of Municipal Governments

- Most local governments are part of a 2 Tier System
 - lower tier – town or township
 - upper tier - county or region
- Although some are a Single Tier

Councillor Responsibilities with 2-Tier System

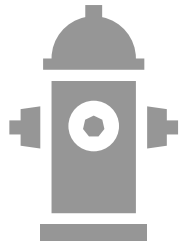
As a Municipal Councillor....

- Responsible to make decisions based on what is good for the local municipality
- Those decisions directly benefit your local municipality

As a County Councillor....

- Responsible to make decisions based on what is good for the whole County/Region
- Those decisions **may not** always benefit your local municipality the most

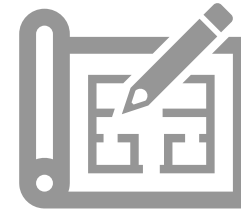
Role of Municipal Government



Manage critical
local service



Accountable to
their
constituents



Responsible for
Community
Planning

Key Legislation Affecting Municipal Councils

Municipal Act

- Sets legal framework for how local government operates
- Grants broad authority to pass by-laws
- Outlines requirements for accountability and transparency
- Municipal by-laws can not conflict with Federal or Provincial laws

Types of Meetings & Meeting Procedures



Procedure By-law



Open meetings



Closed meetings



Statutory Public Meetings

Ethics & Accountability

- Code of Conduct
- Municipal Conflict of Interest Act
- Integrity Commissioner
- Transparency and accountability expectations
- Confidentiality

Code of Conduct

Deals with:

- Integrity
- Respectful interactions
- Use of Council property and information
- Confidentiality
- Conflict of Interest

Integrity Commissioner

- Every Municipality is required to appoint an Integrity Commissioner
- Investigates alleged contraventions of the Code of Conduct
- Makes recommendations to Council on any penalties
- Council ultimately makes the decision on sanctions

Case Study – Code of Conduct

- City of Sarnia – Mayor Mike Bradley
- Complaints by Municipal Staff of disrespectful behaviour and harassment
- Integrity Commissioner determined there were repeated Code of Conduct contraventions
- Sanctions put in place on how and when he could interact with staff

Municipal Conflict of Interest

- Conflict occurs when a Council member has a financial interest in a matter before the Council that could prejudice their decision making
- Legislation requires disclosure of interest
- Breaches can lead to court proceedings, suspension, removal from office, or disqualification from running in the next election.

Case Study – Conflict of Interest

- Councillor Jones was a shareholder in a development company
- That company was the applicant of a development application, and he didn't disclose that conflict
- Contravention of Municipal Conflict of Interest Act.

Transparency & Accountability



Fosters public trust



Proactive disclosure



Open meetings



Access to information

Confidentiality

- Legal duty to maintain confidentiality
- Municipal Act requirements
- Closed Meetings - personal matters, labour negotiations, litigation, land negotiations
- If confidential information is disclosed, results in investigation and potential legal implications to Council member and/or municipality

Closed Meetings: What You Can (and Can't) Say

- As a Council member, you must not disclose what happens in closed session
- You may be asked: *“What happened in closed session?”*
- The correct response is most often: *“I can’t discuss that.”*
- Closed session rules protect people’s privacy, the municipality from legal risk, and you as a Councillor
- Use approved ‘rise and report’ language — avoid improvising

Let's Check Your Understanding



Councillors can remove a colleague from office for a Code of Conduct breach.



A conflict of interest only exists if a Councillor directly benefits financially.



Transparency and accountability are legal and ethical expectations in municipal government.

Role and Responsibilities

Roles in Ontario Local Government



Council



Head of
Council

as CEO not CAO
(as per Municipal Act)



Councillor



Staff

Council (*collective role*)

- Sets the municipality's vision, strategic priorities, and service levels
- Adopts bylaws, budgets, and policies
- Evaluates and revises municipal programs and policies
- Ensures accountability and transparency frameworks are in place
- Makes decisions by majority vote

Council's Collective Responsibilities

- Council has authority only as a 'collective body'
- Individual Councillors do *not* have independent decision-making power outside the Council table
- Residents often want you to 'fix' something directly, but you can't act unilaterally
- What you can do: bring issues forward, ask questions, debate policy, and vote as a member of Council

Decision-Making Authority

- Decisions are made by majority vote at Council meetings
- That means compromise is part of the job
- Once Council has made a decision, you are expected to respect and support it publicly, even if you voted against it
- This shows respect for the democratic process and the collective authority of Council

Head of Council

- Presides over Council meetings and ensures meeting rules are followed.
- Provides leadership to Council: helps establish priorities, fosters consensus, and upholds respectful conduct.
- Represents the municipality at ceremonial and intergovernmental functions
- Primary political spokesperson for Council

Head of Council (cont'd)

- Works with the CAO to ensure policies and programs adopted by Council are implemented.
- Does not independently direct staff (except where authority is delegated by Council or statute).
- Head of Council has one vote, the same as every other Council member

Municipal Councillor's Role

- Core governance responsibilities:
 - Represent the public
 - Help develop policy
 - Help determine services/levels
 - Maintain financial integrity and accountability
- Does not direct day-to-day operations or individual staff

Other Roles and Committees

- Committees and Advisory or Sub-Committees
- Boards
- County/Regional Council
- Local Board of Health
- Budget Meetings
- Attendance at Open Houses or Town Halls
- Meetings during the day, in the evenings

Role of Staff – CAO



Head of administration; provides impartial, professional advice to Council.



Leads implementation of Council decisions; coordinates interdepartmental work to deliver Council's strategic plan.



Oversees senior leadership, performance management, organizational design, and continuous improvement.

Role of Staff - CAO



Ensures administrative practices support accountability, financial sustainability, health and safety, and legal compliance.



Connect with Head of Council on priorities and with the Clerk and Treasurer on governance and finance.

Role of Staff - General

- Staff are the subject-matter experts
- Implement Council decisions
- Manage the operational aspects of the municipality
- Staff supports members of Council

Council and Staff Relationship

Positive

Trust

Respect

Collaboration

Teamwork

One Team
Approach

Strong Mayor Powers

What Are “Strong Mayor Powers”?

- Province has introduced Strong Mayor Powers in some municipalities
- These powers give the Mayor additional authority beyond a traditional “head of council” role
- The goal: support provincial priorities (e.g., housing, transit, infrastructure)
- Not all municipalities have these powers - it depends on provincial designation

What Powers Does a Strong Mayor Have?

- Ability to advance actions aligned with provincial priorities
- Authority to appoint or dismiss the CAO
- Authority to appoint certain department heads
- Greater control over committee structures and memberships
- Special powers related to budget preparation
- Ability to propose and veto certain by-laws that interfere with a provincial priority

Strong Mayor Powers - Delegation

- Many Mayors choose to delegate authority back to staff or to Council collectively
- Maintains collaboration; helps keep everyone working together and builds trust
- Delegation is a way to make sure decisions benefit from multiple perspectives

The Decision to Run

The Decision to Run

A personal and
professional
choice

Impacts on:
self, family,
community,
career

What You Need to Know Before You Enter the Race

Time Commitment

Financial Considerations

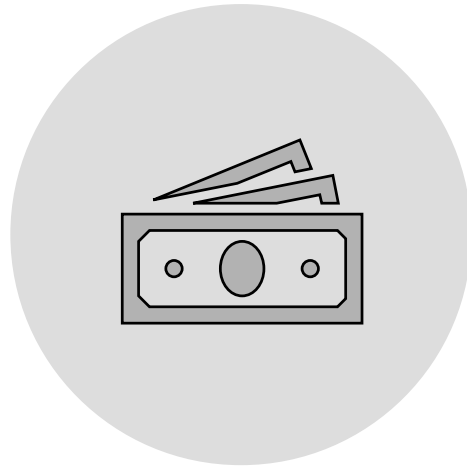
Media Exposure

Public Incivility

Time Commitment

- Regular and special meetings
- Committee participation
- Represent Council at meetings of local boards and agencies
- Community events
- Preparation and reading

Financial Considerations



COUNCIL
REMUNERATION
VARIES



EXPENSE CLAIMS
AND LIMITATIONS

Media/Social Media

- Nothing is truly 'Off the Record'
- Social media posts – negative and misinformation
- Council has a collective voice
- You can't be both a member of Council and a private citizen

Interactions with the Public

- Different channels (ie. emails, phone calls, community)
- Handling service requests
- Managing expectations
- Ethics, confidentiality and records
- Accessibility and Inclusion

The political climate can be harsh

- Councils across Ontario are increasingly facing hostility
- Poses emotional and safety challenges for those running or serving
- Particularly challenging for women and those from marginalized backgrounds.

Incivility

Disrespectful
tone

Personal attacks

Shouting/
Interrupting

Refusal to
follow meeting
rules

Disruptions at
meetings or
events

Before You Run: Key Things to Consider



Personal fit and lifestyle



Governance and Role Realities



Legal and Ethical Obligations



Work and financial considerations



Community and reputational risk

What Can You Expect?

- Real life Scenarios -

The Service Request that Wasn't Ours

Issue: Resident demands the municipality fix potholes “on my road—now.”

Action: You check and discover it's a County road; ask staff to forward the request to County.

Result: Resident learns the right channel for complaints and gets a timeline.

Lesson: Jurisdiction matters; a quick, accurate referral beats an instant but wrong promise.

The Planning File that Filled the Council Chamber

Issue: A subdivision application draws a packed public meeting.

Action: You explain the decision path (notice → report → public meeting → Council vote → appeal rights) and focus your comments on planning grounds.

Result: Not everyone agrees, but the record shows a fair process and clear reasons tied to the Official Plan.

Lesson: Stick to policy and evidence for decision-making. A fair and transparent process is everything.

The Facebook Pile On

Issue: A photo of a snowplow at a coffee shop goes viral: “our taxes at work!”

Action: You move the conversation offline, share the service standard (break times and route rotation), and log the concern with Public Works.

Result: The thread cools; a neutral facts-based post from the municipality closes the loop.

Lesson: Don’t litigate service files on social media; de-escalate and document.

The Delegation that Crossed the Line

Issue: An angry speaker attacks staff personally.

Action: The Chair cites the Procedure By-law, rules the comment out of order, and re-focuses the discussion on policy, not people.

Result: Meeting decorum restored; clear precedent set.

Lesson: Civility isn't optional—use your procedural rules.

Election Eligibility, Requirements and Campaigns

Campaign Realities

- Campaign planning and timelines
- Canvassing and voter outreach
- Dealing with the media
- Compliance with the Municipal Elections Act, 1996

Eligibility and Requirements

To be eligible to hold office for a position as councillor or mayor, on the day that you file your nomination, you must be:

A Canadian citizen

Age 18 or older

Qualify as a resident or non-resident elector

Eligibility and Requirements

The following people are disqualified from being elected to municipal office:

- any person who is not eligible to vote in the municipality
- an employee of a municipality who has not taken an unpaid leave of absence (must resign after being elected)
- a judge of any court
- an MP, an MPP, or a senator
- an inmate serving a sentence in a penal or correctional institution

Research and Community Involvement



UNDERSTAND
YOUR
COMMUNITY



DEVELOP YOUR
CAMPAIGN
MESSAGE



CHALLENGES AND
CONSIDERATIONS

Financial Considerations (Campaign)

- Campaign costs (signs, advertising, etc.)
- Fundraising requirements
- Spending limits
- Record keeping

Nomination & Acclamation

Filing Your Nomination

- Start date for filing nominations is Friday, May 1st
- Nomination Day is Friday, August 21st
- There are prescribed forms which require endorsements
- Nomination Fee

Nomination Form

- Form is prescribed under the Municipal Elections Act
- Nomination form to be filed in person or through an agent
- Write down your name as you want it to appear on the ballot
- Be prepared to show identification
- It is suggested you make an appointment with the Clerks Office to submit your nomination.

Nomination Fee

\$200 for Head
of Council

\$100 for all
other positions

Endorsement Signatures

- Must submit 25 original signatures endorsing your nomination (if more than 4,000 electors in municipality)
- Use prescribed form to collect signatures
- Any person providing an endorsement signature must be eligible to vote in the municipality

Acclamations

- If only 1 certified candidate running for an office at the close of nominations, then they will be declared elected by acclamation.
- Where candidates are elected at large, acclamation occurs if the number of certified candidates is the same as or less than the number of offices.

Campaign Management

Setting Up Your Election Campaign

- Understand the Municipal Election Timeline
- Financial Management
- Campaign Advertising
- Campaign Outreach
- Dealing with the Media

Municipal Election Timeline

- The election timeline set out in legislation
- Key milestones — nomination period, campaign period, voting day, and post-election financial reporting
- The Clerk's office will provide key dates and reminders, but ultimately, compliance is the candidate's responsibility

Opening a Bank Account

- Once nominated, you must open a separate bank account that will be used exclusively for your campaign.
- Clerk will provide information that you can provide to the bank
- You cannot use your personal bank account

Fundraising and Campaign Financing

- Municipal Elections Act sets out raising funds and how you can spend those funds
- Campaign Period begins on the day that the Clerk receives your nomination
- Keep good records
- Maximum finances is determined by the Clerk
- Requirement for Financial Audit

Campaign Advertising

Signs:

- Lawn and billboard signs

Website:

- Bio, platform, priorities, contact information

Advertisements:

- Newspapers, radio, robo-calls

Social Media:

- Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn

Campaign Literature:

- Brochures, flyers

Election Sign By-law

- Most municipalities have a by-law that outlines where election signs can be posted
- It's important to follow the by-law requirements to avoid any contraventions
- Keep an inventory of where you have installed signs – makes for easy removal later

Door to Door Canvassing

- Some households are not receptive to “mail” or to “soliciting”
- Many households use video doorbells to monitor visitors
- Not everyone may speak the same language you do
- Effective but can be time consuming

Engaging with Media

- Opportunity to share your platform with the voters
- Make sure to focus on your core messages
- Audience is the voter, not the reporter
- Be respectful, factual, concise
- Every interaction is 'on the record'

Campaign Compliance – T or F



Your campaign officially begins on Nomination Day.



You need a separate campaign bank account.



The Clerk will tell you your spending limit, but it's up to you to stay within it.



You can place election signs wherever you think they will get the most visibility.



The Clerk will make sure that you are compliant with legal requirements.

Voting & Election Day

**Voting Day is
Monday, October 26th**

Voting Method and Procedures



INTERNET



TELEPHONE



VOTE BY MAIL



PAPER BALLOT

****Procedures are developed by the Municipal Clerk on the Voting Method to be used.**

Understanding Voter Behaviour and Voter Turnout

- Many residents are not aware of the importance of municipal government
- Low engagement level at the local government level depending on the races for the available positions
- Voter turnout varies – the higher the turnout, the more representative the Council will be

Reasons to Run for Council

Why Run for Council?

Influence local decisions and services

Preserve democratic engagement

Bring diverse representation to council

Opportunity for true civic leadership

Things to Consider Before Running

Requires strong understanding of municipal issues

Must accept council authority, not managerial authority

Time-consuming role, potential personal strain

Political environment may be emotionally taxing

Direct Impact on Your Community

- Municipal governments handle essentials—roads, water, recreation, emergency services—that deeply affect daily life.
- Serving on Council gives you a voice in decisions that shape how those services are delivered.

Strengthening Local Democracy

- Many Ontario Council positions were uncontested in recent elections
- Almost a third of local elections faced acclamations and low voter turnout
- Taking on the role helps preserve democracy and ensures representation for your community

Bring New Voices & Perspectives

- Despite Ontario's cultural diversity, municipal representation remains skewed.
- Running for Council is a way to bring voices to the table that may not otherwise be there.
- Recent research from AMO emphasizes the urgency of increasing diverse representation.

Opportunity for Meaningful Leadership

Councillors have the opportunity to:

- steer community priorities
- advocate for local groups
- lead change using your life experiences and commitment to local betterment

Things to Consider Before Running



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Skills and Rewards

Skills & Attributes for Success

- Listening and collaboration
- Decision-making and critical thinking
- Ability to balance multiple roles/priorities
- Resilience under pressure
- Political acuity

You Don't Need to Know Everything

- You are not expected to know everything
- Municipal staff are subject-matter experts.
- Your role is to ask thoughtful questions, understand implications, and make informed decisions.

Rewards of Public Service



Contributing to community growth



Making a difference in people's lives



Shaping local policy and future direction

Personal Growth and Learning

- Serving on Council is also a learning experience.
- You gain exposure to complex issues, budgeting, policy development, and governance.
- Many Councillors talk about how much they grow personally — developing resilience, communication skills, and a deeper understanding of how the community functions.
- It's challenging work — but it's also rewarding.

Reflection Questions

Key Questions to Ask Yourself

- Why do you want to run for Council – a single issue, public service, or career development?
- What do you hope to achieve?
- Do you have support from your family/employer?
- Can you commit 15-20 hours per week?
- Are you comfortable setting policy and letting staff handle operations?

Key Questions to Ask Yourself

- Are you comfortable making unpopular decisions in the broader public interest?
- Can you step back from a vote if a family or friend's interest is affected?
- Can you manage public criticism?
- Can you keep closed session information confidential?
- Will you avoid promises on outcomes?

Additional Resources

- Municipal Clerk's Office
- Municipal website
- Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) publications and website
- Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing publications and website

Closing Message

- Serving on Council is both a privilege and a responsibility
- The decision to run must be informed and intentional



Disclaimer

This workshop is provided for general educational purposes.
It does not constitute legal or business advice.



QUESTIONS



Clerks *on Call*