

Mayor Role Statement



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According to the Municipal Act (2001), the Mayor has the same responsibilities of all members of Council as well as performing the leadership roles of the Council. As a result, the Mayor is required to meet the responsibilities as outlined both within the Role Statement for the Mayor, as well as that for Council.

Role of head of council

225. It is the role of the head of council,

- (a) to act as chief executive officer of the municipality;
- (b) to preside over council meetings so that its business can be carried out efficiently and effectively;
- (c) to provide leadership to the council;
- (c.1) without limiting clause (c), to provide information and recommendations to the council with respect to the role of council described in clauses 224 (d) and (d.1);
- (d) to represent the municipality at official functions; and
- (e) to carry out the duties of the head of council under this or any other Act."

Head of council as chief executive officer

226.1 As chief executive officer of a municipality, the head of council shall,

- (a) uphold and promote the purposes of the municipality;
- (b) promote public involvement in the municipality's activities;
- (c) act as the representative of the municipality both within and outside the municipality, and promote the municipality locally, nationally and internationally; and
- (d) participate in and foster activities that enhance the economic, social and environmental well-being of the municipality and its residents."

It is important that these roles be clearly understood. The legislation does not encourage or allow the Mayor to act independently. The Mayor is expected to be a leader and yet function as "one of" not "apart from". The Mayor will always be viewed by the public as the face and voice of Council but must never allow that public personae to be used in an imperial or directive fashion.

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Importance of the Mayor's Position

The foregoing commentary does not mean that the Mayor does not have a very important role to play. The Mayor is central to what is commonly referred to as "tone at the top". Much of how the community views its Council is a reflection of how it sees its Mayor. Is the Mayor on top of things or seemingly disinterested? Is the Mayor decisive or does he seem to waffle? Is the Mayor respectful of other Council members and trying to build a team or does the Mayor operate in a high-handed manner seemingly without caring about the need to lead a team? Is the Mayor a person of high integrity or someone that believes that the rules and legislation were meant for everyone else?

The Mayor's style should be one which enables each member of Council to see their own worth to the collective whole.

The Mayor is the leader of the Council team despite the fact that his team may not see things as one but rather whose members speak out separately on the key issues. Where Council members disagree on key issues, the challenge of the Mayor is to listen carefully to what each is saying and try to identify common ground in their arguments. The Mayor seeks consensus while understanding that in its absence democracy rules. That is, regardless of the Mayor's efforts the Council might be split on this or that issue. That is how it may remain and thus the Mayor has to lead from whatever decision of Council has been approved by resolution. Such consensus building is not simple nor is it not without considerable time and effort. And, ironically, it might be without positive result.

A healthy Council has everyone at the table, informed and involved. That is, there is no effort to exclude those who might disagree; such disagreement should be accepted with grace and as a normal part of any healthy council.

Leader of All

The duty of the Mayor in such circumstances is to work with all members and not single out some as being on his "side" and the others as relegated to the sidelines because they do not support the Mayor. Such a style of leadership is divisive to the core and results in enmity not collegiality. The Mayor must recognize that on any given topic, some of his colleagues may choose to have a different opinion. That being so does not inhibit a mature and thoughtful Mayor from ensuring that all members are equally and concurrently informed and all given the opportunity to express their differences to the views of the Mayor. When that is so it eliminates any possibility of the Mayor acting in a deliberate fashion to shut out the voices of those he would expect to be opposed.

Concurrently Informed

The Mayor ought to be focusing on how to ensure that all of Council is concurrently informed. That would be the respectful thing to do and would reflect the fact that the Mayor sees all of Council as his colleagues and as equals. One way in which this process can be manipulated in the Mayor's favour is by the Mayor holding onto valuable information and not sharing the same with his Council colleagues. This is generally done knowingly and with the purpose of making the rest of Council dependent on the Mayor for his judgment as to what

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course of action to follow. A mature Mayor seeks to ensure that all members of Council are treated equally and fairly.

Community Conscience

We generally expect the Mayor to be the conscience of the community: to act in such a way as to place the interests of others before any evidence of self-interest. The Mayor needs to conscientiously set aside any professional or personal obligations or commitments that are not in the best interests of the community and act as one of rather than the only one. The Mayor's business interests should be made known to the CAO and Clerk and any issue that subsequently arises in Chambers which impacts on those interests should be quickly identified so that the Mayor can be excused from any discussion on or voting on these issues.

If acting as expected and anticipated by legislation, the Mayor respects the fact that he is but one voice representing Council's "face" to the public. The Mayor has one vote, not a majority. The Mayor can encourage a Council to act in a certain way but cannot coerce it to do so nor can the Mayor act unilaterally. The Mayor can say what he thinks Council's views on a matter will be, but a Mayor cannot categorically state what it will be; nor can a Mayor make any commitment to an action before the Council as a whole has made a decision.

The Mayor's voice has much more volume than that held by his colleagues. That is, when the Mayor speaks his voice carries weight beyond that of any other member of Council. The Mayor has the vote of the citizenry behind him/her and they see him as "their" leader and spokesperson. That is a role and perspective which ought not to be treated lightly.

Informal Power

The Mayor's power is informal but it can still be very persuasive. The Mayor may only have one vote on each matter but the office carries with it more prestige and "power" than the vote would signify. Whenever the Mayor speaks, the community presumes that he is uttering the will of the Council. This is both a power and an obligation: a power in that his voice carries more influence than the individual voices of his colleagues; an obligation in that the Mayor must be very careful not to go beyond the parameters of his office and presume that because he speaks, others must fall in line. The Mayor, regardless of how committed to a particular course of action, needs to ensure that all members of Council understand the implications of that course and are willing to endorse the leadership being offered by the Mayor.

It needs to be understood that the ability of the Mayor to be influential on Council is highly dependent on the willingness of the rest of Council to follow the lead of the Mayor. While each Mayor is entitled and indeed expected to hold his own views on most issues, the challenge for a Mayor is to be able to rightfully claim that he reflects the will of the majority of Council. The most logical way to ensure that this is the case is to develop a policy framework on the key issues such that each member knows where the Council stands on that topic with sufficient confidence so as to express those views publicly without fear of contradiction.