



Thinking of Running for Council...Now What?

A Reflection Guide for Prospective Municipal Candidates

Serving on municipal Council is a meaningful way to contribute to your community — but it is also a serious commitment. Before deciding whether to run, take time to reflect on the realities of the role and how they align with your life, values, and capacity.

This handout is designed to help you think critically and intentionally about that decision.

Why Do You Want to Run?

Ask yourself:

- What motivates me to consider public office?
- Is there a specific issue, experience, or value driving this decision?
- Am I seeking change, influence, service, or representation — and why?
- How will I feel if progress is slow or decisions don't go my way?

▶ ***Strong Councillors are guided by purpose, not impulse.***

Understanding the Role

Consider whether you are comfortable with:

- Making decisions collectively, even when you personally disagree
- Governing at a policy and strategic level (not managing day-to-day operations)
- Working respectfully with staff, other Council members, and the public
- Following legislation, procedure, and Codes of Conduct at all times

▶ ***Council is about governance, accountability, and collaboration.***

Time & Energy Commitment

Reflect honestly:

- Can I realistically attend meetings, prepare in advance, and participate fully?
- Am I available for committee work, community events, and constituent concerns?
- How will this role affect my work, family, and personal time?
- Do I have the energy to stay engaged for the full term?

▶ ***Council service often takes more time than people expect.***

Personal & Family Impact

Ask yourself:

- Do my family and close supports understand what this role involves?
- Am I prepared for public scrutiny and criticism?
- How will I handle stress, conflict, and pressure in a public setting?
- Am I comfortable having my decisions and actions examined publicly?

▶ ***Running for Council affects more than just the candidate.***

Campaign & Financial Considerations

Think about:

- Am I prepared for the time and cost of running a campaign?
- Do I understand fundraising, spending limits, and financial reporting requirements?
- Can I comply with election rules and deadlines?
- Do I have the organizational skills to run a compliant campaign?

▶ ***Campaigns require planning, discipline, and transparency.***

Skills & Readiness

Be honest with yourself:

- Am I a good listener?
- Can I work respectfully with people who hold different views?
- Am I comfortable making difficult decisions with incomplete information?
- Am I willing to learn, ask questions, and accept guidance?

▶ ***There is no single “type” of Councillor — but readiness matters.***

Final Reflection

Before deciding to run, ask:

- If elected, am I prepared to serve the entire term responsibly?
 - Does this role align with my values, capacity, and goals at this stage of my life?
 - Am I entering this decision informed, intentional, and realistic?
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A Thought to Leave With

Serving on Council is both a privilege and a responsibility. Taking time to reflect before running helps ensure strong leadership, healthy governance, and better outcomes for the community — whether you decide to run or not.



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Prospective Municipal Candidate Workbook

This workbook summarizes the key information from the candidate information presentation. It is designed to support thoughtful reflection and help you decide whether running for Municipal Council is the right choice for you. There are no right or wrong answers. The goal is honesty, clarity, and alignment with your values, capacity, and expectations.

You may wish to complete this workbook privately, revisit it over time, or discuss it with trusted family members, colleagues, or mentors.

1. Purpose of This Workbook

This workbook is educational in nature. It is not intended to encourage or discourage anyone from running for Council. Its purpose is to provide clear information and reflection questions so that you can make an informed and intentional decision.

2. How Municipal Government Works

Municipal governments operate within a legislative framework set by the Province to deliver essential local services. Council governs by setting policy, approving budgets, and passing by-laws, while staff manage day-to-day operations. Municipalities are either single-tier or a part of a two-tier system ie. lower tier (town/township) and upper tier (county/region).

Are you comfortable with the idea that change in municipal government is often incremental rather than immediate? Yes No Not Sure

What part of how municipal government works would you want to learn more about?

3. Understanding the Role

Role of Council (Collective Responsibility)

Council has authority only when acting collectively. Individual Councillors cannot direct staff or make decisions outside the Council table. Decisions are made together as a group.

Role of Head of Council

The Mayor or Head of Council presides over meetings, provides leadership, represents the municipality, and works with the CAO to ensure Council decisions are implemented. The Head of Council has one vote, the same as other Council members. No additional powers to act unless delegated *Strong Mayor Powers* by the Province.

Role of Councillors

Councillors represent the public - not just those who voted for you, but the entire community. They help develop policy by debating and voting on by-laws and motions; determine service levels and priorities through the budget process; serve on committees, boards and external agencies; and maintain financial integrity and accountability by making decisions that balance community needs with affordability.

Role of Municipal Staff

Municipal staff, led by the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO), are the subject-matter experts. They provide advice, implement Council decisions, and manage operations. Respecting the Council–staff relationship is essential to good governance.

Are you comfortable with the governance role of Council?

(Council sets policy and direction; staff manage day-to-day operations.)

- Yes
- I understand it but may find it challenging
- This may not align with my preferred way of working

How do you feel about making decisions collectively, even when you disagree with the outcome?

What part of the role do you want to learn more about?

4. Decision-Making and Integrity

Decisions of Council are made by majority vote at properly convened meetings. Once Council makes a decision, each member is expected to respect and support it publicly, even if they voted against it. It's all about working together and making decisions that benefit the whole community.

Are you prepared to make decisions in the broader public interest, even when they are unpopular?

5. Strong Mayor Powers

Strong Mayor Powers give Mayors (in some municipalities) additional authority beyond a traditional "head of council" role. This includes: appointing the CAO, hiring department heads, creating committees, and drafting the budget. Many Mayors delegate these back to staff or Council as a whole.

If you become Mayor, are you prepared to assume this additional authority or would you delegate it back to either Council or staff?

6. Confidentiality and Ethics

Council members must not disclose what occurs in closed session. Confidentiality protects individuals, the municipality, and Council members themselves. Always use approved 'rise and report' language. This is the safe, public explanation of what occurred in closed session without disclosing confidential details.

Council members are held to high ethical standards. This includes compliance with Codes of Conduct, the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act, confidentiality rules, and decisions of the Integrity Commissioner.

Are you prepared to maintain confidentiality regarding closed-session matters and sensitive information?

How would you handle pressure from residents, media, or friends and family to share information you cannot disclose?

What ethical or accountability challenges concern you most?

7. Time Commitment

Serving on Council requires regular attendance at meetings, committee participation, preparation time, community events, and responding to residents. The role often requires more time than anticipated. Many Councillors spend more than 15–20 hours per week on Council work.

Estimate your weekly availability:

- Less than 10 hours per week
- 10–15 hours per week
- 15–20 hours per week
- 20+ hours per week
- I have flexibility for meetings, preparation, and events

How will Council responsibilities affect your work, family, or personal time?

Do I have support from my family and employer?

Do I have the time and energy to commit for a full term (4 years)?

8. Financial Considerations

Candidates must plan for campaign costs, fundraising, spending limits, and financial reporting, and strict compliance with election finance rules.

Once elected, Council remuneration varies by municipality and is not intended to replace full-time income.

What financial impacts do you need to plan for?

9. Dealing with the Media and Public

Council members and candidates operate in a public environment. Social media, public meetings, and media interactions require professionalism, accuracy, and respect. Nothing is truly 'off the record'.

Council service increasingly involves exposure to incivility and criticism. Candidates should consider their readiness to handle public pressure and maintain personal well-being.

Are you prepared for public scrutiny and accountability?

Yes No Not Sure

How will you manage public criticism or online commentary?

What strategies or supports would help you manage stress, criticism, or conflict?

10. Campaign Realities

Campaigning requires planning, canvassing, outreach, and strict compliance with the Municipal Elections Act, including timelines and reporting obligations.

Candidates must meet eligibility requirements and are subject to disqualification rules. Nominations must be filed using prescribed forms, with applicable fees and endorsement signatures.

Voting methods and procedures vary between municipalities. Candidates should understand how voting will work in their municipality, so that they can answer questions and direct residents.

During campaigning, how will you approach listening to perspectives that differ from your own?

What campaign or voting questions do you still have?

11. Skills and Attributes for Success

Effective Councillors demonstrate listening skills, collaboration, critical thinking, resilience, respect for diverse viewpoints, and a willingness to learn. You are not expected to know everything—asking good questions is part of the role.

Are you ready to represent the *entire* community — including people who did not vote for you or who strongly disagree with you? Yes No Not Sure

What skills do you bring to Council? What skills do you want to develop?

12. Rewards of Public Service

Serving on Council allows individuals to directly impact their community, strengthen local democracy, and bring diverse voices and perspectives to the decision-making table.

What do you think you will find rewarding about public service?

13. Your Motivation for Running

Why are you considering running for Council? (check all that apply)

- Public service / giving back to the community
- Specific issue or concern
- Leadership development opportunity
- Representation / diversity
- Other: _____

In your own words, why do you want to run?

What do you realistically hope to achieve as a Councillor?

(Think in terms of contribution, learning, and leadership rather than guaranteed outcomes.)

14. Final Reflection

At this moment in your life, does running for Council feel like the right step?

- Yes No Not Sure

What additional information do you need before deciding?

15. Closing Thought

Serving on Council is both a privilege and a responsibility. Taking time to understand the role and reflect honestly before running supports strong leadership and healthy local democracy.

If you decide to explore candidacy further, contact your Municipal Clerk's Office, review municipal election resources, and consider speaking with current or former Councillors to gather insights.

