

Enhancing public accountability in your municipality

Submitted by: Municipal Finance and Advisory Services Manitoba Intergovernmental Affairs

Serving on municipal council is a challenging, but rewarding experience. It takes dedication and commitment, and usually involves long hours. For some, this is your first experience as a municipal councillor. If you are new to council, you probably realize that you have much to learn about your new role and new responsibilities. If you are a returning council member, you probably know there is always more to learn.

As an elected member of council, you have a responsibility to make decisions and act in the best interest of your municipality and its citizens. In return, citizens expect their council to be accountable for their decisions and their actions.

Everyday, you will be called on to make decisions on behalf of your municipality – for example, about the services (and level of service) your municipality provides, expenditures your municipality makes and the taxes your municipality raises. Council must make these decisions bearing in mind that increased expectations of the public regarding the quality of public services and the need for greater political accountability on the effectiveness and efficiency of public spending requires improved performance, transparency and reporting.

Accountable decision-making in your municipality will be enhanced by:

Ensuring your municipality has a relevant and up-to-date procedures by-law – the procedures by-law is a requirement under *The Municipal Act* and sets out how your municipality will operate. The procedures by-law establishes:

- the rules of procedure for council's activities, enabling council and the public alike to understand how business will be conducted;
- procedures for council meetings, so business is conducted in an orderly manner;
- rules to ensure that the public (for example, citizens, stakeholder groups, and the media) can participate effectively at meetings;
- rules respecting conduct; and
- meeting notice requirements.

Involving your citizens – *The Municipal Act* provides minimum requirements for public participation in the decision-making process, for example, at the public hearing on the financial plan. Municipalities should take steps to ensure that public meetings and hearings are scheduled and advertised so they encourage the public to participate.

Councils should also explore other ways to involve citizens, and view these as opportunities to share information with and get feedback from the public. Some examples of how some municipalities share information include water bill and / or tax inserts, open houses, municipal newsletters, and media reports.

Making decisions in an open and transparent manner – Council and committee meetings are, as a rule, open to the public. Only in very specific circumstances may a meeting be closed to the public. All decisions of council and committees must be made in a meeting open to the public.

Making financial information understandable and readily available – Citizens want to be sure that spending by their municipality is both efficient and effective, and that the municipality continues to be financially sound. The financial plan (budget) process provides the opportunity for councils to share financial information with citizens and involve them in the decision-making process. Because the financial information is complex and may be difficult to understand, it is critical for councils to ensure that they develop public information packages and encourage citizens to attend the annual public hearing on the financial plan.

Enabling citizens to access information – Citizens want to know what is going on and what council is doing. Municipalities should take steps and work with citizens to ensure that information is accessible. While in specific instances municipal documents cannot be shared (for example, when they contain information of a personal nature), citizens' requests for information can usually be satisfied if the municipality is viewed as cooperative and understanding.

In this era of accountability, successful municipalities work with their citizens, make decisions in an open and transparent manner, and ensure citizens have a meaningful role in the decision making process. It is important, therefore, for councils to take steps to encourage and foster public participation whenever possible. ♻️



Miller Environmental Corporation

Contact Miller Environmental Corporation to help organize your community's household hazardous waste event. With over 10 years experience in the development and management of household hazardous waste programs, Miller Environmental Corporation can help create and plan events that will provide an ongoing waste management system to serve your community's waste collection needs.

HOUSEHOLD HAZARDOUS WASTE PROGRAM



Household Hazardous Wastes (HHWs) are materials commonly used in and around residential households that contain toxic substances. These include household cleaning products (drain cleaners, oven cleaners, floor and furniture polish); painting products (paints, stains, finishing products and thinners); automotive products (motor oil, old gasoline, anti-freeze, car batteries, transmission, brake and steering fluids, solvents); garden products (fertilizers, pesticides, herbicides); hobby supplies (solvents, photo chemicals); and pool supplies (chlorine).

Tel: 204-925-9600

