

What's YOUR role?

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It is extremely important for the head of council, the members of council and the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to have a good understanding of the role they have in a municipal environment.

With an upcoming general municipal election this fall, it will be important for all parties to be very clear on their respective role. If there is a major change of members following the election, the responsibility may fall on the CAO to provide guidance and training to the newly elected members.

Council's role is outlined in *The Municipal Act*. Section 82 provides as follows: "A council is responsible (a) for developing and evaluating the policies and programs of the municipality; (b) for ensuring that the powers, duties and functions of the municipalities are appropriately carried out; and (c) for carrying out the powers, duties and functions expressly given to council under this or any other Act."

Role of the head of council

The role of the head of council is not provided but *The Municipal Act* does provide the duties of the head of council. Sub-section 83(2) provides that "In addition to performing the duties of a member of council, the head of council has a duty (a) to preside when in attendance at a council meeting, except where the procedures by-law or other Provincial legislation provides otherwise; (b) to provide leadership and direction to the council; and (c) to perform any other duty or function assigned to a head of council by the council or by other legislation."

It is generally understood that the head of council will preside at all meetings of council when in attendance and ensure that the procedures of the meetings as directed by the municipal procedures by-law are adhered to.

I believe that the most important role of the head of council is to provide leadership and direction to council. At times, this can be a difficult role. Leadership and direction may be provided in many ways and a head of council may have a different approach to being a leader. Some will lead by example, while others will rule by consensus, while still others may attempt the 'conquer and divide' approach. Part of the role of the head of council should include being a good listener, a mediator and an ambassador of the municipality.

In the past, the head of council acted as chair to the meeting and only voted during a tie vote, while today *The Municipal Act* provides the head of council with full council status including voting and introducing motions for debate. I believe that the head of council should leave some of these matters to the other members of council. The main role of the head of council during the meeting should be to provide leadership and direction by allowing all members to participate in debates as provided in the procedures by-law, summarizing the discussion and allowing all members to vote freely on the issue. If a tie vote results, without the participation of the head of council, maybe the matter needs more information or additional debate. It may be best to reconsider the vote at a later date.

Role of council

As previously mentioned, the role of council is clearly outlined in *The Municipal Act*. Members should clearly understand that their role is to develop and evaluate policies and programs which they or previous councils have implemented. If a member of council is not satisfied with certain activity in the municipality, the matter should be brought to council where the matter is reviewed. A new policy may be established by a simple resolution of council. It is not the role of council to actively participate in the day to day operation of the corporation. In fact *The Municipal Act* does not provide authority for council to delegate any of its powers, duties or functions to a member of council. It does provide for the delegation of powers and duties to the head of council or a council committee.

Members of council are the eyes and ears of the municipality. They should bring forward concerns of the ratepayers to council for their consideration and action. Once a decision is made, members should be supportive of the decision no matter what the outcome. In a municipality with wards, the members must remember that he or she represents the whole of the municipality and not just the ward in which they were elected. Work as a team not as individuals!

Role of the Chief Administrative Officer

The CAO's title has changed over the years from Secretary-Treasurer, Municipal Clerk, and Municipal Administrator to reflect today's role of the CAO.

The Municipal Act does not provide a specific role for the CAO, but does outline the CAO's responsibilities and administrative duties. The CAO is the administrative head of the municipality and therefore responsible for ensuring that all policies and programs are implemented; the CAO is also responsible for management and supervision of the employees of the municipality. I believe that the most important role of the CAO is as an advisor to council, keeping members informed on the operation and affairs of the municipality.

Council should be provided with the best available advice in order to make good and sound decision. Once the CAO has provided advice to council and a decision has been made on the matter, then council should expect full support from the CAO and staff to implement and enforce the policy and program. The CAO must understand that council is accountable to the ratepayers and that they are accountable to council. The CAO must be seen to be fair, open and approachable when it comes to the business of the municipality.

There should be a strong bond and trust between the CAO and council, especially the head of council. Council needs to understand the role of the CAO as an advisor and be able to differentiate between a suggestion to do something vs. a requirement to adhere to legislation. If the advice is not clear, it is suggested that additional advice be researched prior to making a decision.

To a new member of council, the CAO's role may also include that of a mentor, providing advice, training and guidance on the procedures of meetings and their role and duties expected under the various legislations. The CAO should view himself/herself as a professional, respected for his/her role as the administrative head of the municipality.

The CAO and council should work as a team feeding off each other's authority, knowledge and strength. •



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