

Q & A with the CAO

So, You Want to Run for Council...

The Municipal Election will be held on October 18, 2021, and Councillor nominations are currently being accepted for all seven divisions in Lethbridge County. Chief Administrative Officer Ann Mitchell has put together a Q&A for those interested in running for Council.

Q: What are your motivations for running for local government?

A: Some run on for a one item agenda. Perhaps you are disgruntled with a decision that the local Council has made and that you disagreed with.

Ideally, running for Council should be a decision that is not taken lightly. No matter what division you are elected from, as a member of Council your job is to make decision for the whole of the municipality. This is not easy, and all information about the subject matter needs to be taken into consideration and weighed carefully.

Q: What is the time commitment?

A: While there are two regularly scheduled Council meetings per month this is only the tip of the iceberg.

There is a need for Council members to come prepared to meetings well informed, having read agenda reports and any additional background materials. Making informed and balanced decisions is the backbone of being a good Councillor and an effective leader. Also, members of Council will sit on various committees, attend conferences, lobby other levels of government, and interact with various stakeholder groups.

Many candidates run without a full understanding of how much time is required. It is indeed a very serious commitment. There is a very stiff learning curve and complex issues to tackle as a Councillor. Municipalities provide municipal services that they deem necessary with a minimal amount of revenue.

Q: What is my role with operations?

A: None. Council's role is that of an oversight body rather than an operational entity.

Council is responsible for governance- that is setting the strategic vision and direction for the municipality. The operations are managed by the CAO, who is the only employee of Council. Through setting policies and procedures at the Council table direction is given to the CAO who implements them as they see fit.

Q: What is the greatest misunderstanding of candidates running for Council?

A: Candidates run and think they will change the world. Local government, while the most transparent level of government and the one closest to the people, does run by policies and bylaws. These are in place for a reason: to ensure equality to all citizens. Additionally, municipalities are a creation of the province and often the agendas or strategic plans that we are trying to move forward are stymied in bureaucracy.

Q: What is meant by role clarity?

A: There are very defined roles under the Municipal Government Act (MGA) for politicians and CAOs:

- **General duties of councillors 153**
Councillors have the following duties:
 - (a) to consider the welfare and interests of the municipality as a whole and to bring to council's attention anything that would promote the welfare or interests of the municipality;*
 - (a.1) to promote an integrated and strategic approach to intermunicipal land use planning and service delivery with neighbouring municipalities;*
 - (b) to participate generally in developing and evaluating the policies and programs of the municipality;*

(c) to participate in council meetings and council committee meetings and meetings of other bodies to which they are appointed by the council;

(d) to obtain information about the operation or administration of the municipality from the chief administrative officer or a person designated by the chief administrative officer;

(e) to keep in confidence matters discussed in private at a council or council committee meeting until discussed at a meeting held in public;

(e.1) to adhere to the code of conduct established by the council under section 146.1(1);

(f) to perform any other duty or function imposed on councillors by this or any other enactment or by the council.

- ***Establishment of chief administrative officer***

205(1) Every council must establish by bylaw a position of chief administrative officer.

(2) Every council must appoint one or more persons to carry out the powers, duties and functions of the position of chief administrative officer.

(3) If more than one person is appointed, the council must by bylaw determine how the powers, duties and functions of the position of chief administrative officer are to be carried out.

(4) Council may give the position of chief administrative officer any title the council considers appropriate.

(5) Council must ensure that the chief administrative officer appropriately performs the duties and functions and exercises the powers assigned to the chief

administrative officer by this or any other enactment or by council.

The relationship between Council and their one employee (the CAO) is critical to the success of the organization. Role clarity is a key piece of this success. Working collaboratively the CAO and Council can effectively move forward the corporation.

Q: How can I prepare myself to run for Council?

A: All Council meetings are live-streamed and past meetings can be viewed online at www.lethcounty.ca. This will give you the opportunity to see what items and issues are presented to Council. It will also give you a greater understanding of the process.

Speak to current members of Council or the CAO at the municipality you wish to run in. Do your homework! Four years is a large commitment of time, make sure this is something you want to be invested in.