

# Section 3

## Roles and Responsibilities

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# Roles and Responsibilities

Municipal government is based on the principle of ensuring that residents have a voice in the affairs of their municipality. This requires the election of people who are prepared to serve in leadership positions, and who are willing to exercise their best judgment on issues impacting the lives of others.

One of the more important issues facing elected municipal leaders, and often a source of confusion and frustration, is the nature of their role as an elected official and the role of the people with whom they must work.

While roles invariably evolve over times and are often based upon tradition, personal expectations, and what seems to work in a given situation, it is nevertheless useful to have some knowledge of, and regard for, what many consider to be the ideal model. This is particularly true since regular occupations do not normally prepare councillors for their role as elected officials responsible for making policy.

## The Role of the Mayor or Chairperson 3.1

In PEI, municipal legislation states that every municipality shall have a council consisting of the following:

- in the City of Charlottetown: a mayor and ten councillors;
- in the City of Summerside: a mayor and eight councillors;
- within the towns: a mayor and six councillors;
- in the case of communities: a chairperson and not fewer than three or more than six councillors; and
- in a resort municipality, at least two of the councillors shall be persons who are not temporary residents.

Councils that had greater or fewer than seven councillors prior to this Act are, according to legislation, are permitted to maintain that number.

The mayor or chairperson is elected at large by the voting population of their respective municipal units. Once sworn into office, the mayor or chairperson becomes the chief executive officer of the municipality and is expected to provide leadership in the affairs of the municipality.

One of the first tasks facing a mayor or chairperson after election is the establishment of standing committees of council. Legislation indicates that the mayor or chairperson may appoint standing committees from among member of the council for such purposes as may be determined and for the better transaction of the business before council.

Council may also use this authority with respect to the creation of special committees to ensure that the priorities and concerns of the community are properly reflected in the municipal policy and decision-making processes.

Often, the mayor or chairperson is perceived as the embodiment of municipal authority, and the administration is identified with the office. The mayor or chairperson, by virtue of that office, is an ex-officio member of all committees of council. This will allow the individual who holds the office to be knowledgeable of all committee decisions and recommendations before they proceed to council for ratification. Thus, the mayor or chairperson is provided with an overview of all municipal problems and is in an informed position to put before council sound policy decisions and bylaws for the betterment of the community.

The second role of the mayor or chairperson is to be the “figure head” or symbol of municipal government. The office holder represents the municipality at important functions, speaks for the community as a whole, often handles relations with the media, and is generally expected to be able to respond to all issues and problems as they arise. In light of this, it is important that the mayor or chairperson do nothing to diminish the status of the office during the term of office.

As chief executive officer of the council, the mayor or chairperson is required to preside at all meetings of council (except during absence or illness, when the deputy mayor or vice-chairperson presides). In this capacity, the mayor or chairperson’s main function is to ensure that the business of the meeting proceeds in an orderly and proper manner and that all councillors are provided with the appropriate background documentation for each of the agenda items.

Finally, the mayor or chairperson must fill the position of chief executive officer, which is the depository for all issues and problems that do not reside with any of the municipal committees but may be equally important as those that do. The mayor or chairperson must advance, whenever possible, the general interests of the municipality, including its business development, its cultural enrichment, its social progress, and its physical environment.

While the position of mayor or chairperson itself quickly trains the new incumbent, each newly elected mayor or chairperson would do well to review the office with his or her predecessor and with senior municipal staff. The mayor or chairperson should not hesitate to admit the need to learn the full and true dimensions of the job. A municipality’s interests are served by ensuring that the mayor or chairperson is fully informed as to municipal roles and responsibilities.

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## The Role of Councillors 3.2

Elected councillors, along with the mayor or chairperson, determine the policies of the municipality by working together as a council to decide upon the overall direction for the municipality. Setting the tax rate and approving the operating expenditures are two ways in which the policies of the council are put into action.

All elected municipal officials share one desire; to continue to hold the confidence, trust and respect of those who elected them. It is possible to do that without tarnishing the confidence, trust and respect of others who were also elected. To that end, it is important that councillors perceive their role to be that of contributing to an effective municipal team under the leadership of the mayor or chairperson during their full term in office. Reputations are built on performance and not on the ruins of the reputation of colleagues; hence, each councillor can best secure his or her own elective future by contributing in a positive manner to an effective municipal team.

Municipalities function through an endless series of alliances and relationships which are constantly forming and reforming as issues and problems develop, intensify, and insert themselves, sometimes permanently, into community relationships. Inevitably, some issues arouse conflicts and animosities that sometimes fall to council to resolve, and it is the duty of council to do so, using its best collective judgment, even if its exercise of judgment may not always be flawless.

Skill in dealing with confrontation in council is an important attribute for councillors to develop. Councillors should constantly strive to:

- a) identify the issues
- b) gain as much information as possible on the issues
- c) isolate the main issues and prioritize them
- d) remove personal feelings and biases as much as possible
- e) keep discussion focused on the issues and not on personalities
- f) express views which are consistent with their emerging opinion on the issues
- g) exercise judgment consistent with their information and findings
- h) be prepared to modify their judgment as significant new information is made available

## Council-Administration Relationship 3.3

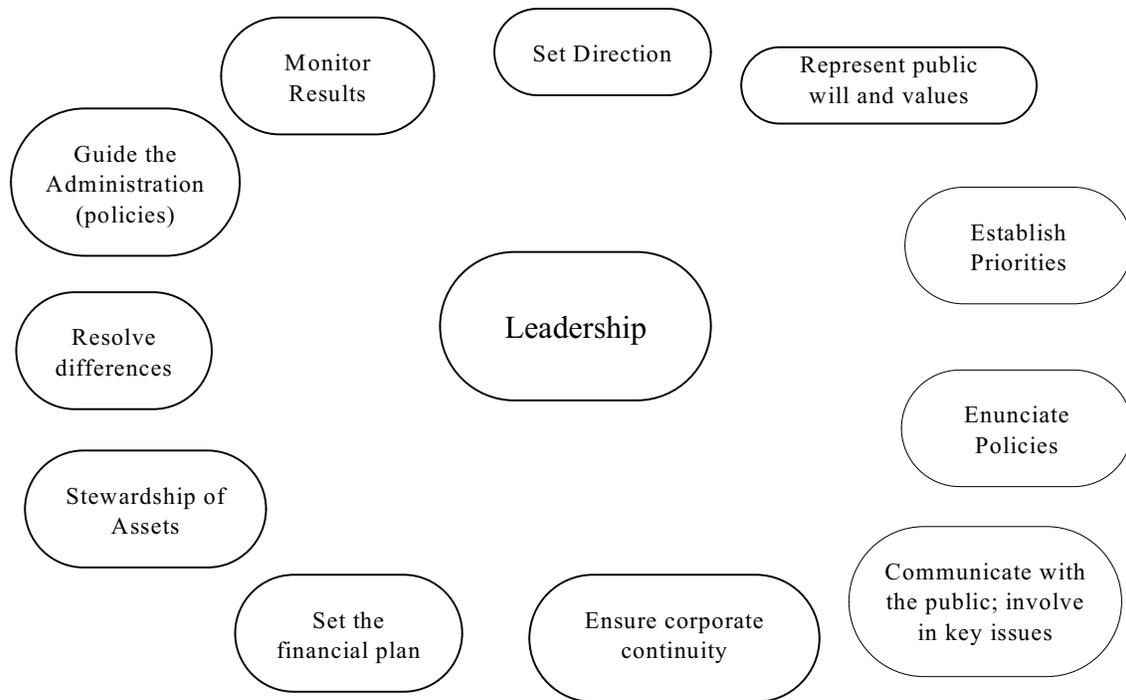
The view that council makes decisions and staff carries out those decisions is based on the premise that a clear division can be made between policy and administration. Such is not always the case. In reality, there is considerable overlap between those who make decisions and those who carry them out.

The elected body must understand how the administrative system operates in order to know what can be expected from it. The ideal relationship resembles one of a partnership in which the administration recognizes that council makes, and is held accountable for, its decisions, and council recognizes the duty of the administration to provide expert advice and carry out council decisions in an effective manner. The administration must make recommendations that take into account the real world of the elected councillors. The administration must also understand the political process and be committed to working openly and honestly with the elected officials in an attempt to provide the council with the best information available, alternatives where possible, and public input when necessary and obtainable.

Council and the administration need to work together in a spirit of trust and commitment. If this understanding and attitude does not exist between the council and administration, the system will break down, to the detriment of the entire municipality. The system of policy making and administration at the local level should never be one of “we” and “they”; it should be one of “team” working together to achieve the municipality’s goals.

## Roles and Responsibilities of Council 34

It is absolutely imperative that both council and the administration are aware of the roles that each is expected to play. Without such clarity, the roles are easily blurred and serious problems result. As shown in the following diagram, the role of the elected official is complex and multifaceted.



Roles and responsibilities of council include:

- establishing the direction of the municipality
- identifying and /or approving budgeted allocations
- providing leadership
- setting tax rates
- establishing priorities
- ensuring that all residents of the municipality are provided with an appropriate mix of services
- approving policies
- ensuring the organization has appropriate staff resources
- adopting bylaws, resolutions and policies
- maintaining good public relations
- evaluating senior management where applicable
- ensuring that municipal employees are provided with competitive salaries and benefits
- correcting organizational deficiencies

## **Roles and Responsibilities of Senior Staff 3.5**

Roles and responsibilities of senior staff include:

- understanding and appreciating the democratic system
- understanding and appreciating the management function
- acting as a resource to council and providing advice
- implementing and administering approved policies of council
- informing council and its committees of possible options, alternatives and implications
- managing the organization; undertaking day-to-day tasks
- providing leadership in short- and long-range planning
- managing personnel
- providing appropriate leadership to staff; praising, correcting and rewarding
- ensuring staff development
- managing fiscal resources
- communicating effectively
- preparing draft policies, programs and budgets
- responding to public enquiries; advising on policies
- maintaining up-to-date knowledge of new developments
- evaluating policies, programs and staff

It is important that formal job descriptions be developed for all municipal government staff positions. Particular care should be taken in the development of the CAO's or administrator's job description to provide a full outline of the scope, responsibilities and expectations which apply to this position and to include any statutory duties which are set out in legislation.