

REFRESHER ON  
COUNCIL-STAFF  
RELATIONS

TO: WEST ELGIN COUNCIL

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Mark G. McDonald  
IC, CMI, Municipal Ombudsman

# Council-Staff Relations

You're in this together!

# Image and Trust

- ◆ Brand may be defined as “what people say about you when you aren’t in the room.”
- ◆ What people think and say about your municipality is important.
- ◆ What is your brand?

- ◆ How you behave, how you interact and how you conduct Council business paints a picture of your community.
- ◆ Image is important.
- ◆ A positive brand instils confidence, makes citizens proud, engages the community and can stimulate investment and prosperity.

- ◆ You cannot build trust and confidence on your own.
- ◆ Use the expertise of the administrative staff and work cooperatively with them.
- ◆ Think of staff as an important resource to enable you to build the community that you envision.
- ◆ It is not “Us vs Them”!

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# Understand the Relationship

- ◆ Elected Members are not expected to be managers or technical experts in municipal administration.
- ◆ Likewise, staff do not play a political role.

- ◆ As a Councillor you are responsible for one staff employee - your C.A.O.
- ◆ The C.A.O. is responsible for all other staff.
- ◆ If you have an issue with the administration, then refer it to the C.A.O.

- ◆ Do not direct the staff - allow the C.A.O. to do that.
- ◆ There is an onus on staff to respect the democratic process and to implement Council's decisions, even if that policy is contrary to staffs' advice.

- ◆ You have the pulse of your community and staff know it.
- ◆ Recognize that staff advice may not always support your initiative - they are compelled as professionals to provide both the pros and the cons.
- ◆ This helps you to make informed decisions.

- ◆ Once you have been provided with this “informed knowledge” then you can determine how to proceed.
- ◆ A good example of this is the construction of the pier in Port Stanley.
- ◆ Staff outlined a number of risks to developing this asset (liability).

- ◆ The risks were/are real and Council was informed.
- ◆ However, options to mitigate the risks were also presented and Council decided that the benefit to the community outweighed the risks.
- ◆ It is a wonderful asset.

- ◆ This is an example of working together, using the expertise of staff and melding that with the political will to improve the community.
- ◆ When making decisions, Council owes itself and its citizens a duty to consider all sides of an issue - due diligence.
- ◆ It's staff's job to provide the research in an unfiltered manner.

- ◆ Lets be clear, as an elected representative you have the right to question staff reports, to ask for more information, to disagree with assumptions and to present a different point of view.
- ◆ Just do so in a professional manner without getting “personal.”

- ◆ You're the policy boss.....Staff know you're the boss.....

and

- ◆ You know that staff know that you're the boss (i.e. policy makers)

# Understanding Process

- ◆ Recognizing that working together produces the best results, here are some process suggestions:
- ◆ Run your idea by the C.A.O. first. Test it before you introduce it. Often the C.A.O. can help refine your idea and help you make it work.

- ◆ Get help when drafting resolutions or recommendations before you introduce them. There is a format and rhythm to them. This will avoid potential embarrassment at the Council table, avoid delays and make for a more fulsome proposition.
- ◆ Use your staff as a resource.

- ◆ There is a symbiotic relationship between staff and Council. You are in this together.
- ◆ Avoid last minute surprises at the Council table and resist the temptation to embarrass someone.
- ◆ Follow the chain of command.

- ◆ If you have issues with a staff person, then allow the C.A.O. to deal with the staff member in a professional and dignified manner.
- ◆ We are living in an age of heightened sensitivity (human rights guarantees, anti-bullying policies, workplace harassment laws, etc.).

# Your Role as a Councillor

- ◆ It is important to recognize that you were elected for the betterment of the entire community (even if you represent a Ward).
- ◆ You are a decision-maker in a democratic process. Majority rules.

- ◆ Staff must treat all Members of Council as equals. There is no favouritism.
- ◆ The “will” of Council supersedes what an individual may desire, no matter how well intentioned.
- ◆ It is alright to argue the position of your constituents but you must accept Council’s final decision.

- Give direction to staff only as a Council and through the CAO - do not become involved in the management of staff.
- Councillors must use staff time effectively - only refer essential matters to staff for reports.
- Understand that staff will undertake significant projects only if they have been directed to do so by Council and through the CAO.

- ◆ Members have no greater access to records or information held by the Municipality than any member of the public - records are often protected by privacy legislation.
- ◆ All Members must comply with established policies (Code of Conduct, Human Rights Legislation, Procedural By-law, etc.)

# Role of Staff

- ◆ To treat all Members of Council as equals.
- ◆ To recognize Council as a whole is the decision-making body, ultimately responsible to the electorate.
- ◆ To implement Council's decisions.

- ◆ To assist Council by providing professional advice, research and good judgement.
- ◆ To serve Council as a whole and not as individual Members.
- ◆ To be responsive and timely.

- ◆ To be diligent and impartial (do not take sides).
- ◆ To not publicly criticize decisions of Council.
- ◆ To follow and comply with all relevant policies.

# Key Messages

- ◆ Council and staff have the same goal(s): advancing the interests of the Municipality.
- ◆ Staff is a resource to be utilized. Take advantage of their expertise.
- ◆ Informed decisions are the best decisions.

- ◆ A solid Council-staff relationship is a reflection of your community. Reputation is important and people are watching.
- ◆ Understand your role and that of the administration.

YOURS IS POLITICAL - THEIRS IS NOT.

- ◆ You are but one vote in a Council of decision-makers. Majority rules.
- ◆ Conduct yourself with decorum, professionalism and civility.....

**\*\*Your community expects it.\*\***

# Questions?

- ◆ 519-670-4517
- ◆ [independentresolutions@gmail.com](mailto:independentresolutions@gmail.com)