

LOCAL GOVERNMENT ELECTIONS IN BRITISH COLUMBIA 2026:



Thinking About Running for Local Office?





This brochure is to help prospective candidates answer questions they may have before deciding to run for local government office (municipality or regional district).

This brochure provides information about:

- eligibility for local office;
- what local governments do;
- how local governments are governed;
- roles and responsibilities of locally elected officials; and,
- preparing to be a candidate.

WHAT ARE THE ELIGIBILITY REQUIREMENTS FOR LOCAL OFFICE?

To run for local office, a prospective candidate must be:

- at least 18 years of age or older on general voting day;
- a Canadian citizen;
- have been a resident of British Columbia for at least six months immediately before filing nomination documents; and,

- not be disqualified under the *Local Government Act*, or any other enactment from voting in an election in B.C. or from being nominated for, being elected to, or holding the office or be otherwise disqualified by law.

EMPLOYEES AND VOLUNTEERS

There are additional requirements and eligibility considerations that people who work or volunteer for a local government must also follow.

For more information, please visit the B.C. government webpage about [Employees and Volunteers](#).

WHAT DO LOCAL GOVERNMENTS DO?

Decision-making

Local government is where community decisions happen – and affects the lives of British Columbians, every day.

As collective decision-making bodies, municipal councils and regional district boards influence jobs, foster healthy, safe and sustainable communities, and have the ability to plan and shape the long-term vision for their communities. Councils and boards make decisions through the adoption of bylaws, policies, and resolutions.

Relationship-building

Municipal councils and regional district boards govern effectively and create benefits for their communities by working together and building relationships with other local governments, the provincial government, First Nations and the federal government.

Engagement by local governments, at both the local and regional levels, with neighbouring First Nation governments is common and can help

achieve matters of mutual interest. Engagement can happen on a broad range of mutual interests including land use, economic development, services and infrastructure, or to simply bring community leaders together for the first time or to renew an existing relationship.

FIRST NATIONS ENGAGEMENT

Engagement is a method of exploring opportunities for cooperation and collaboration between local governments and First Nations – building positive relationships and furthering the goal of reconciliation.

For examples of Local Government-First Nation Governments working together, visit:

[CivicInfo BC | First Nations Relationships & Protocol Agreements](#)

This engagement can also help councils and boards to better understand and serve the members in the community that also identify as Indigenous. Many local governments and First Nations have developed service agreements, protocol agreements and memorandums of understanding to identify opportunities to build relationships, collaborate, and further reconciliation.

Service Provision

Local governments provide a wide range of services to their communities. Locally elected officials may find that much of their time at the council/board table is spent on setting strategic direction and making decisions related to service provision, land use planning, and development for the community. There are a wide range of services that are within local government's scope of responsibility, and these services are different from the services provided by other levels of government:

WHO DOES WHAT?

A Services Snapshot for Candidates

ORDER OF GOVERNMENT – Municipalities (Cities, Towns, Districts, Villages)

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES	WHY IT MATTERS FOR CANDIDATES
• Water quality and supply • Liquid waste (local) • Solid waste (local) • Fire protection • Road maintenance and transit • Zoning and permits • Parks and recreation • Local laws (e.g., bylaws) • Policing/community safety	• Directly shapes neighborhoods, local services, and daily quality of life.

ORDER OF GOVERNMENT – Regional Districts (Made up of Electoral areas, member municipalities and Treaty First Nations (if applicable))

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES	WHY IT MATTERS FOR CANDIDATES
• Solid waste (regional) • Regional water and liquid waste services • Regional parks • Emergency management • Rural land use and planning • Local laws (e.g., bylaws) • Policing/community safety	• Provides local governance to the rural areas of the province. • Balances local priorities with region-wide collaboration.

WHO DOES WHAT?

A Services Snapshot for Candidates

ORDER OF GOVERNMENT – First Nations

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES	WHY IT MATTERS FOR CANDIDATES
• First Nation governments may have a treaty, self-government agreement, or operate under federal legislation. As such the authorities and responsibilities of First Nation government can vary. • Some examples of key responsibilities can include: - Community services (e.g., education, health, childcare) - Land management - Cultural preservation - Service provision (direct or by agreement)	• Many local governments and First Nations are geographic neighbours and as such are increasingly discussing common interests, challenges and identifying mutual opportunities for their respective communities. • Local governments and First Nations build and enhance relations by developing partnerships through protocols, service agreements and memorandums of understanding.



WHO DOES WHAT?

A Services Snapshot for Candidates

PROVINCIAL GOVERNMENT – (British Columbia)

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES	WHY IT MATTERS FOR CANDIDATES
• Health care • Education • Highways • Justice • Provincial laws, including legislation that establishes the local government framework in B.C.	• Provincial laws, grants, and approval processes can influence the scope and process of local decision-making.

FEDERAL GOVERNMENT – (Canada)

KEY RESPONSIBILITIES	WHY IT MATTERS FOR CANDIDATES
• Income tax • Banking • Immigration • Military • Federal laws (e.g., <i>Species at Risk Act</i>; <i>Criminal Code</i>; <i>Constitution Act</i>)	• Federal laws and programs can apply to local governments. • Grant contribution programs support local governments to meet their objectives, such as infrastructure and climate change adaptation.

HOW ARE LOCAL GOVERNMENTS GOVERNED?

Municipal councils and regional district boards set the direction for their respective local governments.

The role of a council board is to:

- consider the well-being and interests of the entire community;
- set strategic direction, including the development and evaluation of policies and programs of the local government;
- adopt the local government's financial plan;
- broadly allocate resources to services, capital projects, programs and other priorities;
- engage with the community; and,
- make policies and adopt bylaws.

Collective Decision-making

Council and board powers are collective, not individual, with each member entitled to one vote on matters (unless otherwise set out in legislation) that come before them for decision.

While council and boards may sometimes reach unanimous agreement on a matter, at other times members may disagree with the majority decision of a council or board. Candidates need to be prepared for situations where they may not be aligned with the collective will of the council or board.

Elected officials ability to work together and resolve conflict respectfully are keys to council and board effectiveness and good governance for the community.

Role of Staff

The roles and responsibilities of elected officials and local government staff are interdependent, but distinct. Local government staff provide the council board with information and professional advice to support informed decision-making, implement the collective decisions, policies, and direction of the council board, and communicate those decisions to the public and other orders of government.

All local governments in British Columbia are required to have a corporate officer and financial officer. Local governments also often establish a Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) position – although this position is not required by legislation. In many local governments the CAO is the only member of staff directly hired by the council or board. This structure separates political policymaking from administrative implementation, with the CAO responsible for hiring and supervising all other staff.

WHAT ARE THE ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES OF LOCALLY ELECTED OFFICIALS?

Legislative Requirements

Locally elected officials are required to comply with the *Community Charter* and *Local Government Act* as well as other provincial legislation, including conduct rules, privacy and employment laws and policies, and local government procedures.

The *Community Charter* and *Local Government Act* set out the roles and responsibilities for municipal councillors and regional district board members. An elected official's responsibilities include:

- considering the well-being and interests of the entire community;
- contributing to the development and evaluation of the policies and programs with respect to local government services;
- participating in council/regional district board and committee meetings; and,
- carrying out other duties assigned (such as chairing committees).

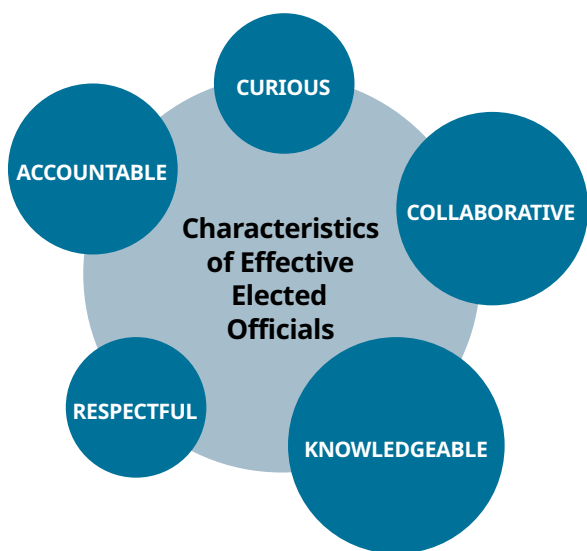
The mayor and regional district board chair have all the same responsibilities as a municipal councillor or regional district board member plus a few additional responsibilities, these include:

- chairing meetings, maintaining the order and conduct of debate, ensuring meeting rules are followed, and encouraging the expression of differing viewpoints;
- creating standing committees, appointing people to these committees, and deciding the committees' mandates;
- communicating council or board decisions to the CAO so staff may implement policies, programs and other decisions; and,
- acting as the spokesperson and communicating the collective decisions of the council or regional district board.

Characteristics of Effective Elected Officials

Effective elected officials are dedicated, ethical, and informed. In practice, this means an effective elected official that is:

- **accountable** in their decisions and conduct;
- **respectful** of others (even when they don't agree) and understands the responsibilities that come with holding local office;
- **knowledgeable** about local government roles and legislative requirements;
- **curious** about the perspectives and experiences of others in order to find solutions and inform decision-making; and,
- **collaborative** with their colleagues, who share the responsibility of representing the interests of their community.



Mayors, councillors and board members work alongside each other to meet the needs of communities across B.C. and uphold local democracy, the law, and the principles of good officials.

Watch the video series "[Being an Effective Elected Official](#)" for direct insights into the role of a locally elected official.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST

Locally elected officials are subject to conflict-of-interest rules under the *Community Charter* and common law.

As a locally elected official, there may be times where you must not participate or vote on a particular matter due to your personal circumstances. It is your responsibility to determine when you may be in a conflict of interest and recuse yourself from discussing or voting on a matter.

You may be liable to penalties and/or disqualification from holding office until the next general local election if you do not adhere to the conflict-of-interest rules.

Demands of the Job

Being in elected office can be a very rewarding experience. It can also be quite demanding.

Potential candidates do not need to be an expert in governance or finance to run for local office, however, they need to be open minded and willing to learn.

Elected officials can expect a high volume of reading and learning across a variety of topics during their term in office. They will also need to become familiar with the local government's policies and procedures, as well as the legislation that applies to local governments.

Local government orientation sessions, educational resources and opportunities through local government associations or other relevant organizations, and the expertise of staff can support elected officials in fulfilling their duties.

Potential candidates must be prepared for the realities of local office and how their day-to-day life may change if elected to office – whether that is managing time commitments or adjusting to increased public and media scrutiny. Many local governments have policies (such as internal information-sharing protocols and social media policies) in place to support elected officials with this aspect of their role.

The **Local Government Leadership Academy**

(LGLA) serves locally elected officials throughout British Columbia by offering training, resources, and a Certificate program. The LGLA aims to improve the competencies needed to effectively manage and lead B.C.'s communities. Visit: <https://lgla.ca/> for more information.

HOW TO PREPARE FOR ELECTED OFFICE?

Contributing as an elected official to the long-term success of the community begins the moment an elected official takes office. Some ways to prepare include:

- reading the local government's key planning documents (e.g., strategic and financial plan), policies (e.g., social media), and the code of conduct (if any) and the procedure bylaws;
- attending council or board meetings to observe meeting procedures and learn about priority issues and projects in your community;
- reviewing the local government's website, meeting agendas, and minutes to understand its key priorities and initiatives;
- attending neighbourhood association meetings or getting to know key groups in the community, such as the Chamber of Commerce, service groups, social agencies or environmental stewardship groups, to better understand the diversity of interests;
- becoming familiar with neighbouring First Nation governments and reviewing any local government policies and agreements that support collaboration and partnerships;
- reading the *Local Government Act* and *Community Charter* to gain an understanding of the legislative requirements that local governments must follow; and,
- researching provincial government webpages to learn more about the local government system generally.

Refer to the **What Every Candidate Needs to Know** brochure for more information about running as a candidate in general local elections.

FURTHER INFORMATION

Local government mailing addresses, telephone numbers, email addresses and websites are available online from CivicInfo BC at:

www.civicinfo.bc.ca/directories

For answers to legislative **questions about municipal and regional district elections** please contact:

Ministry of Housing and Municipal Affairs

Governance and Structure Branch

Phone: 250 387-4020

Email: LGgovernance@gov.bc.ca

Website: www.gov.bc.ca/localelections

For answers to **questions about elector organization registration, election advertising, third party sponsors or campaign financing disclosure** please contact:

Elections BC

Phone: 250 387-5305

Toll-free: 1 800 661-8683

TTY 1 888 456-5448

Email: electoral.finance@elections.bc.ca

Website: <https://elections.bc.ca/local-elections/2026-general-local-elections/>

Full text of the *Local Government Act*, *Local Election Campaign Financing Act*, *Community Charter*, *Vancouver Charter*, *School Act*, and *Offence Act* can be found online at: www.bclaws.ca

DISCLAIMER

In the event that there is inconsistency between this brochure and *the Local Government Act*, the *Local Elections Campaign Financing Act*, or any other Act, the legislation shall prevail.



**Scan the QR code to find
information and guidance
materials about the upcoming
general local elections**



www.gov.bc.ca/localelections

Land Acknowledgment

The BC Public Service acknowledges the territories of First Nations around B.C. and is grateful to carry out its work on these lands – it acknowledges the rights, interests, priorities, and concerns of all Indigenous Peoples – First Nations, Métis, and Inuit – respecting and acknowledging their distinct cultures, histories, rights, laws, and governments.