

Why do Municipal Governments Exist?

At a special meeting held by the Municipal Council on Friday April 29th, 2016, members of the public who were present observed a sense of frustration and at times even a degree of acrimony. The issue centered on the removal and the subsequent re-installation of the waste bins at the Wolseley Bay Road bin site. Upon reflection of this event, the French River Citizens' Association/Association des citoyens de la Rivière des Français felt that it was important to highlight why municipal governments exist and to reflect on how municipal governments should proceed in order to perform their duties. We write this article to remind all of us, residents, staff and especially council members to make every effort to try and incorporate the pillars of good decision making listed below.

Municipal governments exist to provide for the needs and priorities of individuals within their community; to represent the interests of the whole municipality and those of their constituents. Decisions made affect the lives of its citizens, and equal access to services need to be provided to the people. In order to serve the community, democratic principle requires municipal officials and employees to conduct ethically; thus the duty of due diligence, the fiduciary duty, and the duty to act fairly.

Due Diligence: the duty of due diligence; council and staff must take all reasonable steps to perform their duties, make sure all decisions are informed decisions, study legislation and municipal policies, seek reliable professional advice when appropriate, review all materials before hand, consult with staff and council, ask questions and take notes during meetings. A trustworthy and accountable relationship with the public must exist.

Fiduciary Duties: as public trustees, duties of good faith and trust are paramount in responding to the concerns of the people. Being fiduciary means to put the interests of the municipality ahead of their personal interests. Fiduciary duties are necessary to maintain public trust in the integrity of local government.

Ethical Codes of Conduct: duties and functions need to be carried out with impartiality, dignity and respect, recognizing that the functions of council members and staff are, at all times service to their community and the public. The need to preserve the integrity and impartiality of council is necessary. It is imperative that council and staff conform themselves to the highest ethical standards at all times.

In conclusion, effective municipal governance requires that the public have confidence in the integrity and trustworthiness of its elected officials. The fiduciary duty of good faith, the duty of due diligence and duty to act fairly, free from any conflicts of interest provide a structure to which councillors should conduct themselves to ensure values of transparency, honesty and accountability inform how they perform their public duties.

French River Citizens' Association
Association des citoyens de la Rivière des Français