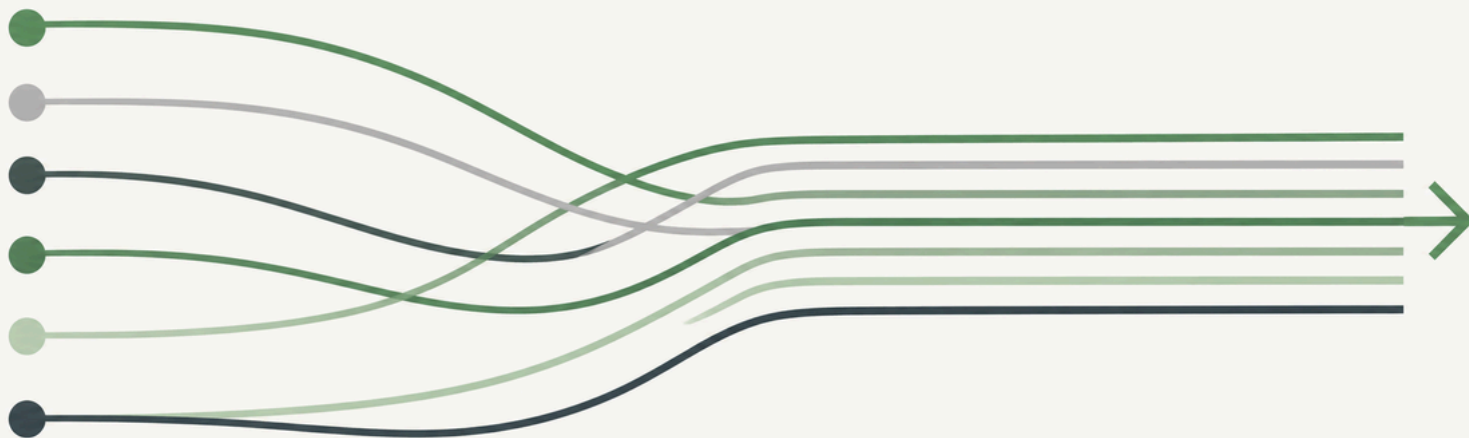




BY DESIGN OR BY DEFAULT

How new councils find their direction and build a roadmap for four years of progress.



Different mandates.
Shared direction.
Stronger communities.

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VOTERS ELECT INDIVIDUALS. COMMUNITIES ARE LED BY COUNCILS.

A municipal election is a conversation about the future of a community.

Candidates put their names forward, share their vision and make the case for how they believe their community can be better. Each brings different experiences, perspectives and priorities. Some campaign on growth and economic opportunity. Others focus on roads, financial stewardship, transparency, or protecting the character of their community.

They don't all see the future in exactly the same way—and they shouldn't. That diversity is one of the great strengths of local democracy.

Then voters decide.

They choose the individuals they trust to lead their community, and each person elected arrives at the council table with a legitimate democratic mandate from the people who put them there.

The election is over. Now the work of leadership begins.

Campaigning is about presenting individual visions. Governing is about creating a collective one.

Unlike most corporate leadership teams, a municipal council is not assembled around a shared organizational purpose. It is created through a democratic process that intentionally brings together independently elected leaders, each carrying a legitimate mandate from the community.

The election determines who sits around the table. It does not determine how that table will work together and what you will accomplish.

From the very first meeting, every significant decision will be made collectively. The objective of governing is not to diminish individual mandates or ask people to think alike. Different perspectives are essential to good local government.

Individual mandates are not the obstacle. They are the foundation.

The work of governing begins by bringing individual mandates together to establish a shared direction for the community.

As councils look toward the next four years, attention naturally turns to strategic priorities, major projects, budgets and the outcomes they hope to achieve. Those conversations are essential. Every new council has an opportunity to define what success will look like for its community and build a practical roadmap to get there.

Council does not begin with a blank slate. Each elected member brings priorities, commitments and perspectives. Some align; others compete for attention, resources and time. The opportunity is to discover where individual mandates connect and establish what council collectively wants to accomplish. This requires more than a list of priorities. It requires a shared direction.

Three questions guide this work:

1. What do we want to accomplish?

The priorities, outcomes and commitments that will define success over the next four years.

2. Where do our individual mandates connect?

The common interests and ambitions that form council's shared direction.

3. How will we work together to deliver?

The relationships, expectations and ways of working that turn priorities into progress.

Together, these questions establish the foundation for a four-year mandate.

The objective is not to set aside individual priorities or eliminate disagreement. It is to connect different perspectives, establish a shared direction and build a practical plan reflecting council's collective ambitions.

Through this process, council also establishes how it will work together, make decisions and engage administration throughout its mandate.

The result is more than a strategic plan. It is a shared understanding of where council wants to go, how it will get there and how it will work together along the way.

THE MUNICIPAL REALITY

The law creates a council. It doesn't create a team.

Manitoba's Municipal Act establishes the authority, responsibilities and rules for municipal councils. This is essential information to know.

But the Act cannot legislate success. Trust, shared purpose and an effective way of working together must be built by the people around the table.

The Act provides the structure for governing. Council determines what it builds within it.

EVERY COUNCIL FINDS ITS WAY. EITHER BY DESIGN OR BY DEFAULT.

Every council develops a direction for its mandate and a way of working together.

Both take shape through the priorities council pursues, the decisions it makes, the budgets it establishes and the relationships it builds around the table.

The question is not whether council will find its way. The question is whether it will do so deliberately—or allow its direction and ways of working to emerge over time.

A new mandate offers an opportunity to be intentional about both.

Council can take the time to understand the priorities brought to the table, discover where individual mandates connect and establish what it collectively wants to accomplish over the next four years.

Through that same process, council can establish how it will work together to deliver on those ambitions.

Every election produces a different council. Different people, experiences, priorities and communities mean there is no single model of effective governance.

Some councils debate issues vigorously, knowing that respectful disagreement can lead to stronger decisions.

Others intentionally build a more collaborative approach, seeking consensus before issues reach the council table.

Some councils work in close partnership with administration. Others establish clearer governance boundaries while maintaining strong, respectful relationships.

None of these approaches is inherently right or wrong.

What matters is that they are intentional and support the direction council has established.

Without deliberate conversation, patterns still emerge.

Priorities become established through individual decisions rather than a shared understanding of what council wants to accomplish. Trust develops—or it doesn't. Decision-making becomes collaborative—or fragmented. Roles become clear—or remain uncertain.

Over time, those patterns become the way council governs.

The opportunity at the beginning of a new mandate is to deliberately establish both a shared direction and a way of working that will help council turn its priorities into progress.

RESEARCH INSIGHT: Patterns Become Norms.

Research shows that every team develops norms—the shared expectations that shape how people communicate, make decisions and resolve disagreement. Those norms can be built deliberately or emerge unintentionally through repeated experience.

Left unattended, today's behaviours become tomorrow's culture.

If a council doesn't deliberately shape how it works, experience will shape it instead

A SHARED MANDATE MUST BE DISCOVERED.

Every person elected to council arrives with a legitimate democratic mandate. Those mandates often overlap—but they are rarely identical.

Two elected officials may both champion recreation, but for different reasons. One sees it as an investment in quality of life. Another sees it as a way to attract families, strengthen the local economy and support long-term growth.

A third may prioritize financial sustainability, wanting to ensure existing facilities are maintained before committing to new investments.

Their priorities are different, but they may share a common ambition: building a community where families want to live, businesses can thrive and municipal resources are used responsibly.

That common ground is where a shared mandate begins.

The instinct in strategic planning is often to begin by identifying individual priorities and deciding which should come first. But this can become a zero-sum exercise, where advancing one priority appears to come at the expense of another.

A different approach begins by understanding what motivates those priorities and discovering where individual mandates intersect.

Where do different perspectives reinforce one another? What outcomes are council members collectively trying to achieve? Where does common purpose already exist?

Those points of intersection provide the foundation for council's shared direction.

From there, council can establish its strategic priorities, identify desired outcomes and build a practical roadmap that connects its collective ambitions to the decisions, resources and actions required to deliver them.

A shared mandate does not diminish the legitimacy of an individual's mandate. It gives those individual mandates a common direction while respecting the perspectives each elected official was chosen to represent.

A shared mandate is not declared. It is discovered.

THE SHARED MANDATE MODEL

Connecting individual mandates through shared community outcomes.



The Shared Mandate Model demonstrates how individual priorities and perspectives can connect around common outcomes for the community. By understanding what motivates each elected member and discovering where their mandates intersect, council can establish a shared direction that reflects its collective ambitions.

That shared direction becomes the foundation for identifying strategic priorities, defining what success looks like and building a practical roadmap for the four years ahead.

The objective is not to eliminate differences. It is to connect them around a shared direction—and turn that direction into progress.

THE FOUNDATION FOR EVERYTHING THAT FOLLOWS.

A shared mandate does more than establish direction. It creates a common understanding that council can return to as it works to deliver on its priorities.

And that work will not always be straightforward.

Over four years, council will face difficult budgets, competing priorities, unexpected challenges and decisions that divide opinion around the table. New opportunities will emerge, community expectations will evolve and circumstances will change.

A clear roadmap provides a common reference point for navigating those decisions.

It helps council connect annual budgets to longer-term priorities, evaluate new opportunities against its shared objectives and maintain focus on what it collectively wants to accomplish.

But a roadmap alone cannot determine how council will respond when difficult decisions arise.

That is where the shared understanding developed through the planning process becomes equally important. Council has not only established what it wants to accomplish. It has also developed a clearer understanding of the people around the table, the perspectives they bring and how they will work together to make progress. Disagreement will still occur. Votes will still be split. Different perspectives will remain an essential part of representative democracy.

But those disagreements can take place within a broader understanding of what council is collectively trying to achieve.

A single difficult meeting does not have to define the term. Council can disagree on the best path forward while remaining committed to the same destination.

The disagreement is about the path. Not the destination.

Every council will eventually face what appears to be a defining moment—a divisive issue, a public controversy, an unexpected crisis or a difficult budget.

These are often remembered as the moments that defined a council.

In reality, they reveal it.

How council responds is shaped by the shared direction, relationships and ways of working established long before the challenge arrived.

The beginning of a new mandate is an opportunity to build that foundation deliberately.

The result is more than a strategic plan. It is a shared direction, a practical roadmap and a way of working together that supports council throughout its mandate.

RESEARCH INSIGHT - Not all disagreement is dysfunction.

Research distinguishes between task conflict—disagreement about ideas, priorities and decisions—and relationship conflict, where disagreement becomes personal.

Strong teams can debate the work without damaging their ability to work together.

The goal isn't to eliminate disagreement. It's to build a council that can withstand it.

THE CHOICE IS YOURS.

Every new council has four years to make a difference in its community.

Each elected member arrives with priorities, commitments and a vision for what that difference might look like. The opportunity is to bring those individual mandates together, establish what council collectively wants to accomplish and build a practical roadmap for the years ahead.

That work will happen in some form.

Priorities will emerge. Budgets will be established. Decisions will be made. Relationships and ways of working will develop.

The question is whether council will shape its direction deliberately—or allow it to emerge through the demands and decisions of the mandate.

Taking the time to establish a shared direction does more than produce a plan. It creates an opportunity to understand the people around the table, discover where their priorities connect and establish how council will work together to deliver on its ambitions.

That does not mean eliminating disagreement or asking elected officials to surrender their individual mandates. It means using those different perspectives to build a shared direction, establish strategic priorities and create a roadmap for progress.

And through that same process, council builds the shared understanding and ways of working that will support it throughout its mandate.

Because the challenges will come.

There will be difficult budgets, contentious issues, competing priorities and decisions that test relationships around the table.

Those moments are often described as defining a council.

In reality, they reveal what has already been built.

The beginning of a new mandate is an opportunity to deliberately establish what council wants to accomplish, how it will get there and how it will work together along the way.

Every council will find its way. The choice is whether it does so by design—or by default.

BY DESIGN OR BY DEFAULT.

Every council will establish a way of working together.

By design, council deliberately determines what it wants to accomplish, builds a roadmap and establishes how it will work together to deliver. By default, priorities, decisions and experiences shape its direction and ways of working over time.

How will your council find its way forward?