



ELECTION 2026: ASK BETTER QUESTIONS

The 2026 local government elections are coming quickly. Strategic Leadership Solutions Inc. is travelling across BC to deliver an Election Readiness Program designed to educate and engage potential candidates, residents, and community members. This interactive workshop explores the responsibilities of local government, the role of elected officials versus staff, and the real infrastructure and service-delivery challenges facing communities. Local government decisions shape the daily lives of residents. Good questions help move election conversations beyond slogans and into substance.

Use the questions below to support meaningful dialogue with candidates.

Questions to Ask Candidates

1. Have you been attending Council or Board meetings? What have you learned from observing how decisions are made?
2. Have you read the Official Community Plan, strategic plan, financial plan, annual report, asset management plan, or other key planning documents?
3. What do you understand to be the most important services our local government provides?
4. Local governments are facing rising costs to maintain infrastructure and deliver services. How should Councils and Boards approach this challenge?
5. If our community cannot afford everything, how would you help decide what gets funded, what gets delayed, and what risks we are willing to carry?
6. If you are proposing to cut taxes or reduce spending, what services, service levels, projects, or infrastructure investments would you reduce, delay, or eliminate?
7. What governance, leadership, board, committee, or community experience would you bring to the role?
8. If you do not yet have governance experience, how will you seek training and support to understand your role as an elected official?
9. Elected officials must work with colleagues who may hold very different views. How will you contribute to respectful, productive debate around the Council or Board table?
10. What kind of behaviour do you believe the public should expect from elected officials when issues are difficult and divisive?
11. How do you understand the difference between the role of elected officials and the role of staff?

What Is the Job of an Elected Official?

The job of an elected official is governance.

Elected officials do not “run the town,” manage staff, or oversee day-to-day operations. Their role is to provide strategic direction, make policy decisions, adopt bylaws, approve budgets, set priorities, and ensure the organization has the resources needed to deliver services. They understand that local government decisions involve trade-offs, competing interests, limited resources, legal constraints, and real consequences. Governance is about thinking, deciding, and acting in service of the whole community.



Attributes of an Effective Local Leader

Works Well With Others

An effective elected official:

- Works constructively with others without dominating the flow of information or ideas.
- Considers different points of view without being dismissive.
- Focuses on issues, not personalities, and avoids personal attacks, blame, and public shaming.
- Respects that every elected official around the table was chosen by the public.
- Demonstrates respect for staff, residents, businesses, property owners, and due process.
- Understands the relationship between elected officials and staff and uses appropriate communication channels.
- Can set aside personal interests and influences in service of the common good.
- Contributes to a table where people can disagree without becoming destructive.

Is Approachable and Connected

An effective elected official:

- Is accessible to the community through meetings, events, phone, email, and informal conversations.
- Listens carefully to understand concerns, ideas, and perspectives.
- Explains decisions honestly, including the trade-offs involved.
- Understands that listening to the public does not always mean promising what people want to hear.
- Has the courage to explain difficult decisions clearly, even when they are unpopular.

Thinks Critically

An effective elected official:

- Does their homework and comes prepared for meetings.
- Reads reports, plans, budgets, and background materials before making decisions.
- Maintains a long-term perspective.
- Considers the potential impacts, risks, and unintended consequences of decisions.
- Understands the limitations of local government and the legislative environment it operates within.
- Seeks additional input or expertise when needed.
- Asks better questions before jumping to conclusions.

Understands Financial Responsibility

An effective elected official:

- Understands basic financial information, including budgets, financial plans, and financial statements.
- Considers the long-term taxation and budget impacts of decisions.
- Understands that underfunding infrastructure can increase risk and cost over time.
- Balances community desires with financial reality and distinguishes between affordability today and sustainability over time.
- Is willing to have honest conversations about service levels, taxation, infrastructure, and trade-offs.

LEADERSHIP MINDSET

VS

POLITICAL MINDSET

Focused on serving both current AND future generations, and communicating that your job IS to design a sustainable future - EVERY decision you make is a decision toward sustainability or away from.

Speaks truth no matter how uncomfortable it is.

Willing and able to change what they think based on new information or new perspective.

Does the right thing rather than the popular thing.

Willing to be vulnerable, and to seek feedback with emotional intelligence and self regulation.

Engages in productive conflict & courageous conversations to find the best solution, allowing uncomfortable emotions and tension without personalizing it.

Willing to make difficult or unpopular decisions and to course correct when necessary.

Protect the future even when it means short term discomfort.

Values soul to soul relational currency, caring for the people that are doing the work - The system is ONLY as good as the people in it.

Strategic Thinker: Asks WHY are we doing this, WHY do we provide this service, and WHAT are we trying to achieve? Takes intelligent risks with full awareness of the consequences.

Willing to wrestle with complex ideas

Listens to understand what is being said, and more importantly WHY.

Challenges assumptions, particularly the way that meetings are run. Incorporates thinking tools into meeting structures and wrestles with complex challenges, asking strategic questions to uncover bias.

Uses failure as a learning opportunity

Grounded and non-anxious - guided by intellectual curiosity, contextual intelligence, collective wisdom, and mental flexibility.

Cultivates an environment where optimism, hope, creativity, fearlessness, candor, growth & learning happen.



Focused on pleasing voters and always looking for the quick wins - Employing short term thinking to appease the masses.

Says what people want to hear.

Willing to change what they say to win approval.

Overly responsive to the critical minority.

Takes things personally & is self-protective, defensive, & emotionally reactive when they don't get their own way.

Conflict avoidant

Decision avoidant

Borrows from the future for popularity today.

Seeks transactional relationships.

Problem solver: Focused on specific projects and instructs staff on how to solve this or that problem to circumvent process.

Stays on script - does not deviate from the message.

Listens to speak, to fix, to react, or to dismiss.

Makes assumptions and speculates that staff are wasting tax payers money - tells them to sharpen their pencils.

Fear of failure and fear of being wrong.

Confidence is invested in certainty and rigidity and sometimes even policy.

Cultivates a staff vs EO's mentality, storytelling that the staff are trying to pull one over on you.

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WELCOME

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Let's Talk Local Government



WHAT'S UP:

1. Responsibilities of local government
2. Role of elected official vs role of staff
3. Truth serum about our infrastructure challenges
4. What to consider as a candidate or a voter
5. Roundtable discussions

INVITATION:

Be Curious

MY INTENTION

Educational
Conversational
Reflective

WHAT
THIS ISN'T





MY WHY LESS:

- Kicking of the Can

MORE:

- Positive Change Agents
- Informed Participation
- Healthier Narrative

YOUR 'WHY'

What brought you here today?

What are you hoping to take away?

Elected Officials are...

Local government is...

What do you think are some of the common
misperceptions about being elected to
local government?

Back to Basics



"I'm a doctor from the future, with revolutionary health advice. Exercise, drink plenty of water and eat your veggies."

LOCAL GOVERNMENT

MISSION

Why does it exist?



To provide
safe,
sustainable,
secure
services in a
predictable,
cost-effective
manner.



WHO DOES WHAT?

Municipal Government



CITY OF PRINCE GEORGE

- Road maintenance
- Snow removal
- Water supply
- Sewer/storm water management
- Solid waste collection
- Parks, trails and playgrounds
- Cemetery
- Recreation facilities (e.g., CN Centre)
- Bylaws
- Municipal RCMP
- PG Fire Rescue
- Business licenses
- Community planning and development
- City Hall
- Municipal property tax

Regional District



REGIONAL DISTRICT
of Fraser-Fort George

- Solid waste management (landfill, recycling depot and transfer stations)
- Residential services outside City boundaries
- Regional parks and recreation
- Rural area planning and development
- 911 operation
- Fire dispatch
- Heritage conservation

Provincial Government



BRITISH
COLUMBIA

- Schools
- Provincial parks
- Crown land resource extraction
- Health care
- Social services
- WorkSafe
- ICBC
- Justice
- Post-secondary education
- All highway maintenance (including highways within City boundaries)
- Provincial income tax
- Provincial property tax
- Sales tax

Federal Government

Canada 

- Income tax
- Employment insurance
- Child tax benefits
- Student loans
- Military
- National parks
- International travel
- Banking
- Criminal law
- Foreign affairs

WELLBEING SERVICES 24 - 7 - 365

Shelter: *land use planning*

Hydration: *drinking water*

Sanitation: *flushing, garbage, recycling,*

Movement: *sidewalks, roads. bike lanes, transit*

Wellbeing: *recreation centers, trails, parks, public spaces*

Safety: *emergency planning, fire protection*

**I paid my taxes
and all I got was...**



Transportation networks including roads,
sidewalks, bike lanes, trails,
Snow clearing, street sweeping, pothole filling
Storm drain management
Clean, clear, safe drinking water
Waste water systems
Community and cultural events
Garbage and recycling services
Land use planning and zoning for the future
Parks and sports fields
Sports facilities
Play places & recreation programs for ALL ages
Bylaw enforcement
Enforcement of building codes

Flood protection

Fire protection

Emergency management

Public inquiries

FOI requests

Grant writing

Animal services – licensing/dog park/shelter

Signage

Attractive public spaces – flowers/lawn care

Communication and engagement

AND MORE.....



PRIMARY ROLE

Why do we
need
elected
officials?



WHAT THE PUBLIC THINKS YOU ARE
ELECTED TO DO

- Hold the line on taxes
- Keep the staff from wasting time and spending frivolously
- Act as the complaint department
- Do more with less
- Stop making decisions behind closed doors



A person is holding a large black sign with a white border. The sign has white text that reads:

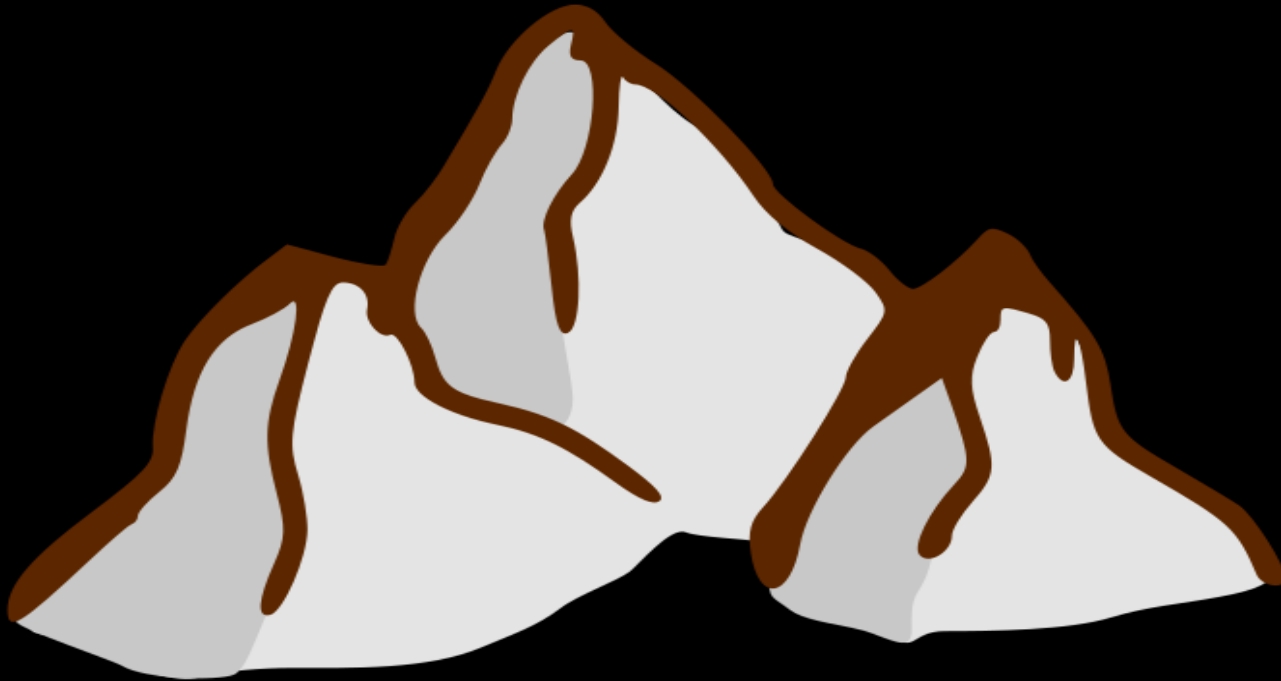
DO SOMETHING
TODAY THAT
YOUR FUTURE
SELF WILL
THANK YOU
FOR

The person is wearing a blue shirt and jeans. The background shows a blurred outdoor setting with greenery and a building.

WHAT YOU ARE REALLY ELECTED TO DO

To think strategically and
plan wisely for the future
prosperity of the
community

When there are more wishes and complaints than resources, you need leaders.



Wishes and Complaints



Resources

1

What services
does your
community need
and want now and
into the future?

(and at what level)

2

What are the
services your
community is
willing and able to
pay for now and
into the future?

What do we need elected officials to DO?



TO THINK

To have an overarching understanding of the system (R/A/R)

To think strategically about where the community is going

To provide direction through policy-bylaw-resolutions

To attend meetings, participate in discussions and vote

To act as a collective decision-making body

To ensure accountability, transparency and long-term financial sustainability

To respect and follow the law

To educate and engage with the community (shareholders)

PARTNERSHIP WITH COMMUNITY – STAFF - TEAM

What is staff hired to do?

TO ACT

- To protect the corporation by managing risk
- To meet legislative requirements
- To provide FEARLESS and expert advice to EOs
- To identify policy gaps
- To operationalize Council/Board direction
- To deliver services with the resources provided



The governing body elected by residents

Sets overall policy, strategic direction, and budget

Does not direct individual employees or departments

Works through the Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) as the single employee of Council/Board





CHIEF ADMINISTRATIVE OFFICER (CAO)

The only direct report to the Board or Council

Responsible for:

- Implementing the Board or Council's decisions and policies.
- Overseeing all operations.
- Supervising department heads and staff.
- Advising Council or Board on administration, finance, and policy implications.

ADMINISTRATIVE DEPARTMENTS (sample)

Report to the CAO – not to Elected Officials or committees
Carry out day-to-day local government services, including:

- **Administration**
- **Public Works**
- **Finance**
- **Planning & Development**
- **Recreation & Community Services**
- **Communications**
- **Protective Services**



THE ROLE OF THE MAYOR

Leadership – Governance - Representation

1. Council Lead

- Team leadership

- Preside over meetings

- Establishing committee appointments

- Have equal voting power

2. Conduit to CAO

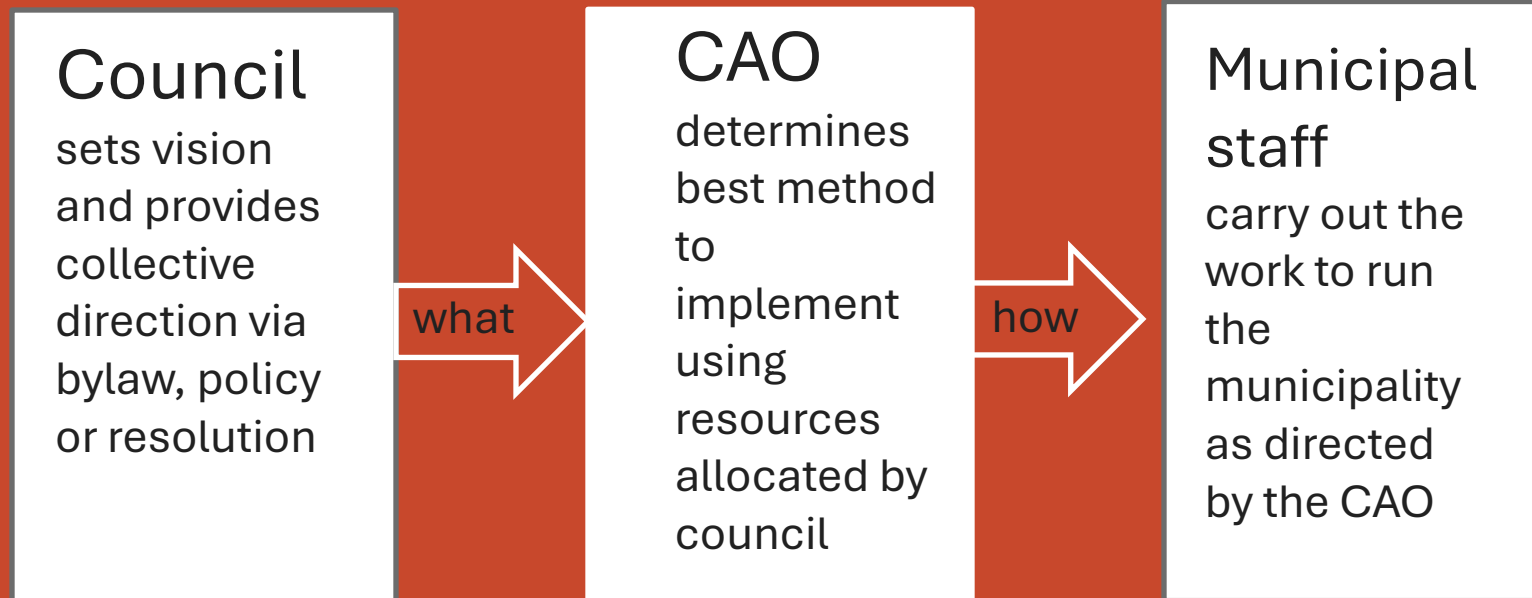
3. Corporate/Community Representative

- Council spokesperson

- Ceremonial duties



Council-CAO-Staff Relationship



GOVERNANCE vs. OPERATIONS

Two Different Roles. Working Together for a Strong Community.



GOVERNANCE

The role of Council / Board



FOCUS

Sets direction and vision for the community.



ROLE

Makes decisions and sets policy.
Represents the interests of residents.



RESPONSIBILITIES

Approves plans and budgets.
Sets priorities and service levels.
Adopts bylaws and policies.
Monitors performance.



APPROACH

Strategic thinking, listening, and decision-making
in the best interests of the community.



ACCOUNTABLE TO:

The community through elections.



OPERATIONS

The role of Staff / Administration



FOCUS

Implements the direction set by Council / Board.



ROLE

Manages day-to-day services and programs.
Provides expert advice and information.



RESPONSIBILITIES

Delivers services efficiently and effectively.
Manages staff and resources.
Implements policies and bylaws.
Reports to Council / Board.



APPROACH

Operational expertise, problem-solving,
and managing resources.



ACCOUNTABLE TO:

Council / Board through the Chief Administrative Officer.



SHARED GOAL:

Quality services, responsible stewardship, and a better future for our community.

GOOD GOVERNANCE IS.....

ONE TEAM

ONE MISSION

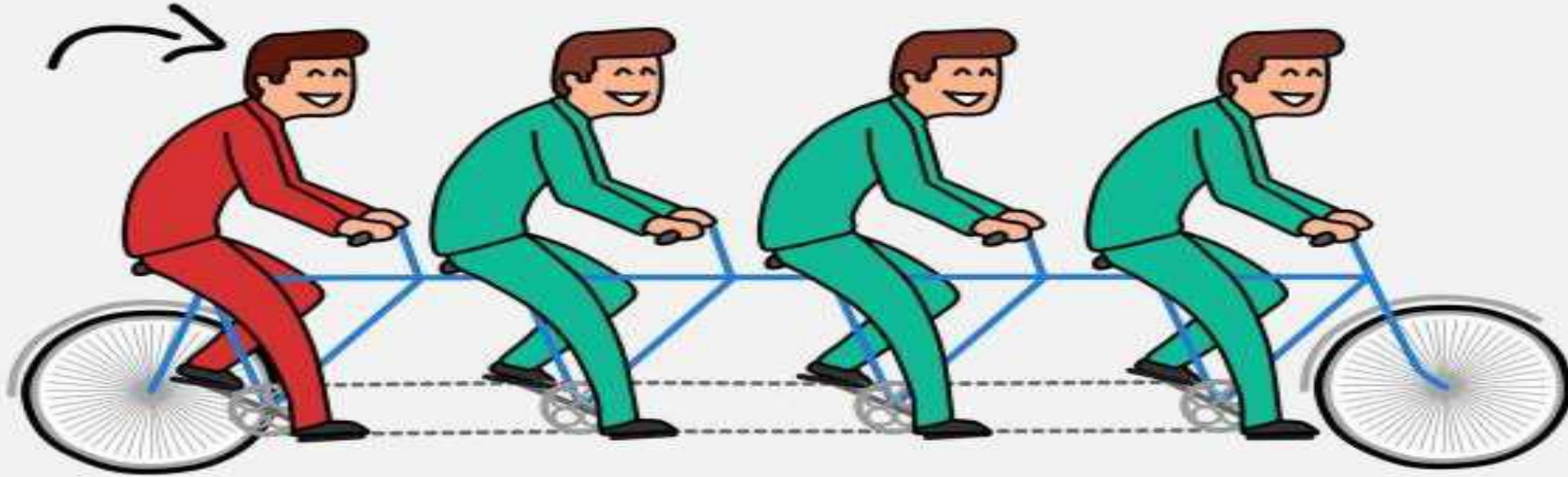
YOU ARE IN A PARTNERSHIP

(not a battle)

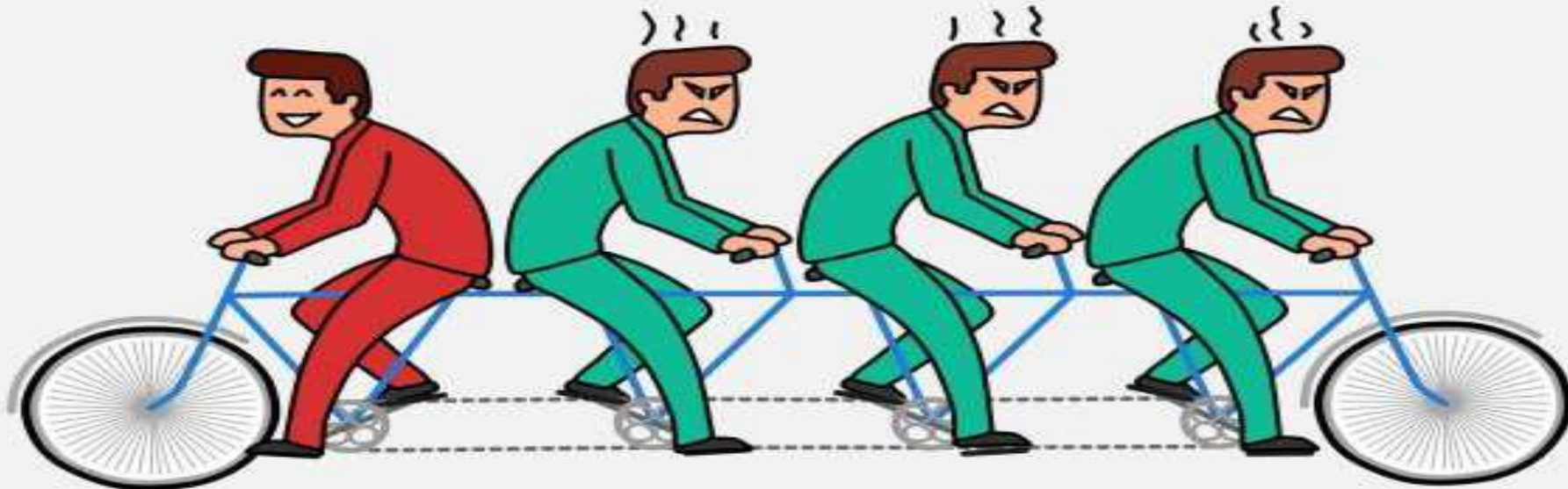
**With community – staff –
Council/Board**



What a contrarian thinks they do?



WHAT THEY REALLY DO



GOOD GOVERNANCE IS.....

RELATIONAL
VISIONARY
STRATEGIC
CURIOUS
OPEN-MINDED
DECISIVE
COURAGEOUS
SELF AWARE



GOOD GOVERNANCE IS.....

**DESIGNING
the future we
want!**

A person is holding a black sign with white text. The sign is held up by two hands, one on the left and one on the right. The background shows a blurred outdoor setting with green foliage and a building.

**DO SOMETHING
TODAY THAT
YOUR FUTURE
SELF WILL
THANK YOU
FOR**

WE NEED LEADERSHIP

What leadership qualities are important to you?



"Thinking about Thinking"

Higher Reasoning

Executive Function

Prefrontal Cortex

9 Functions of the Prefrontal Cortex

1. Empathy
2. Insight
3. Response Flexibility
4. Emotion Regulation
5. Body Regulation
6. Morality
7. Intuition
8. Attuned Communication
9. Fear Modulation



Limbic Brain

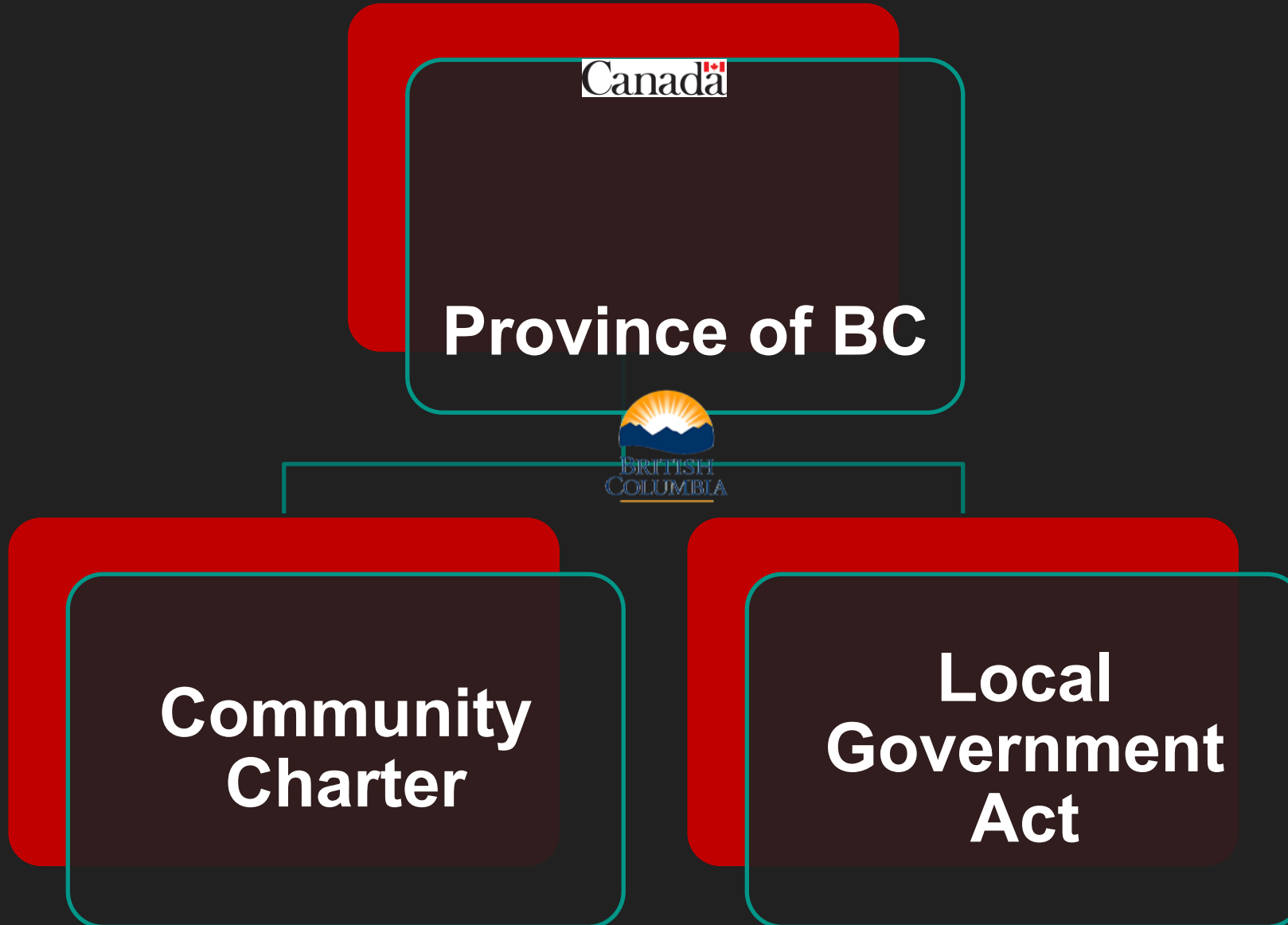
1. Fight, flight, freeze stress response
2. Thinks, "Am I safe? Do people want me?"
3. Emotions live here

QUESTIONS???

THE SYSTEM



Legislative Authority



Stewardship and Oversight

British Columbia has **27 regional districts and 161 municipalities**. Regional districts were established in 1965.



Regional Districts

Regional districts provide local governance for rural, unincorporated areas, create a structure for neighbouring communities to work together on shared services, and carry out certain responsibilities assigned by the Province.



Regional Districts

Region wide - (911, solid waste management)

Electoral Area specific- (land use planning tools, parks)

Neighbourhood specific – (fire protection, water, wastewater)

Interjurisdictional services - (recreational facilities, economic development)



Stewardship and Oversight

For **BC regional districts**, the **Local Government Act**, section 185 says the purposes of a regional district include:

- (a) providing good government for its community,
- (b) providing the services and other things that the board considers are necessary or desirable for all or part of its community,
- (c) providing for stewardship of the public assets of its community, and
- (d) fostering the current and future economic, social and environmental well-being of its community.

Stewardship and Oversight

For **BC municipalities**, the **Community Charter** Section 7 says the purposes of a municipality include:

- (a) providing for good government of its community,
- (b) providing for services, laws and other matters for community benefit,
- (c) providing for stewardship of the public assets of its community, and
- (d) fostering the economic, social and environmental well-being of its community.

QUESTIONS???

QUESTIONS

- **How much time should I realistically expect this role to take?**
 - **Do I get paid?**
- **What authority does an individual EO have on their own?**
 - **How can I prepare for the campaign?**
 - **How do I become a candidate and who do I talk to?**
 - **Who is eligible to run for local office in BC?**
 - **Do I have to live in the community to run?**
- **Will newly elected officials receive orientation and training?**

INNER REFLECTIONS

- **Am I prepared for public criticism?**
- **Can I work with people I strongly disagree with?**
- **Can I respect a decision I did not support?**
- **Am I willing to read long reports and ask thoughtful questions?**
- **Am I willing to make decisions that are unpopular but necessary?**

CONDUCT BECOMING

- **What kind of conduct do I expect from others?**
- **Am I prepared to model it myself?**
- **How do I stay present in disagreements without escalating or shutting down?**
- **How willing am I to rigorously distinguish facts from opinions & stories?**

INNER REFLECTIONS

Am I prepared not just to win an election,
but to govern with discipline, humility, curiosity,
and respect once the campaign is over?

THE COST OF LEADERSHIP



Anyone can tell you the benefits of great leaders

Back in Time

**What would you
thank the
elected officials
from 20 years
ago?**

**What would you
beg them to pay
attention to?**

GOVERNANCE STARTS WITH:

What services do we provide and WHY?

What services will be needed in the future?

What does it cost to provide this level of service?

Is this service level:

Sustainable?

Fully funded?

Needed, desired, valued by the community?

Think about the services you used:

- today
- this week
- this month

**How important
is it that these
services are in
decent working
order with
minimal
disruptions?**



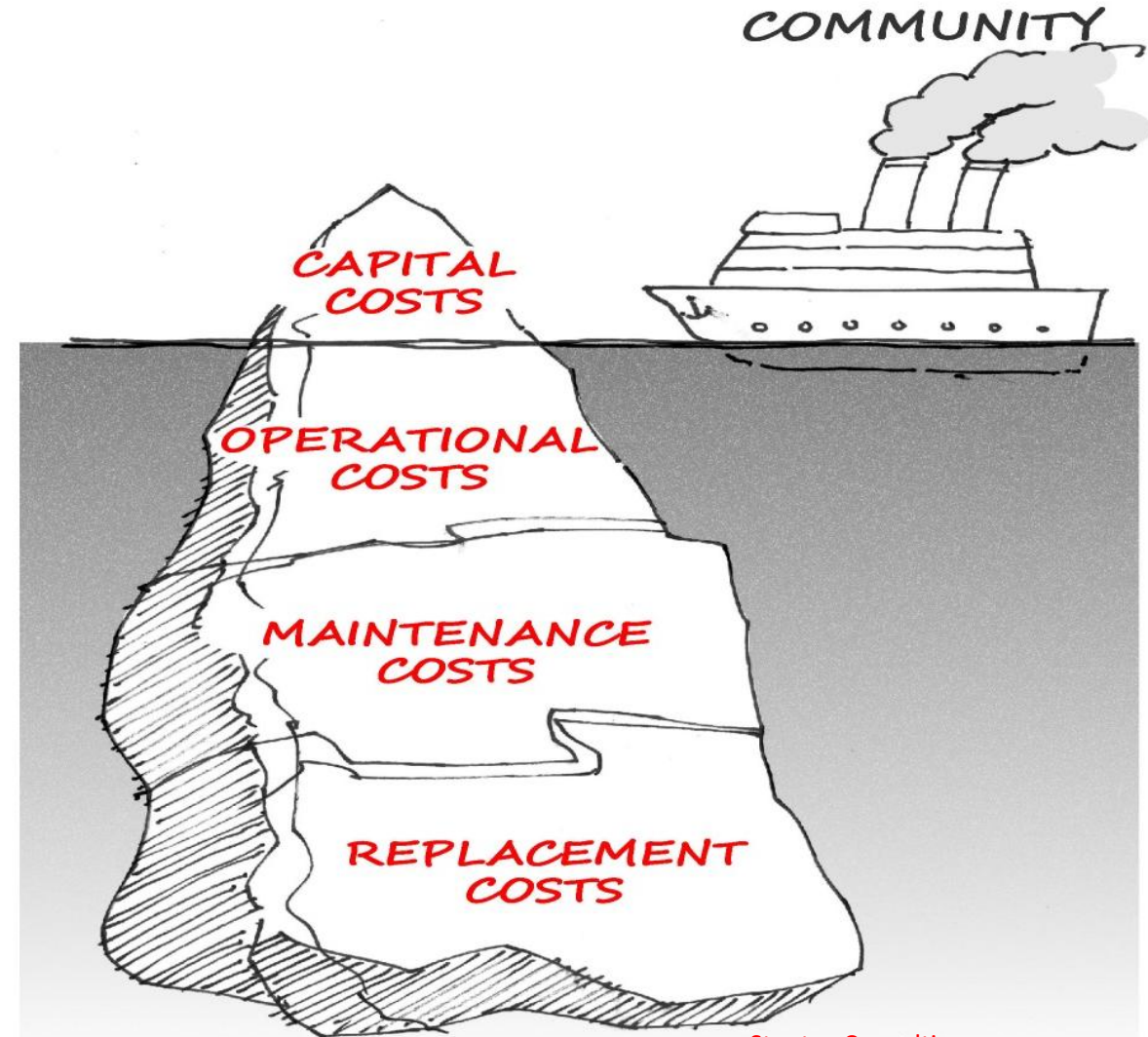
BACK TO THE FUTURE

If we like what we have now,
how do we keep it this way?
(OR MAKE IT BETTER?)



What's at risk?

- Making decisions that don't consider lifecycle costs (lust to dust)
- Failing to fully acknowledge and recover costs and fees



You can't cut taxes without cutting services.

I don't want
to pay more
taxes



The level of service we want



The level of service we can afford



Discussion Question

- What LG assets/services do you use?
- What LG assets/services might other user groups care about?
- How does local government address the difference?

What is the role of the elected official?

What are we spending to maintain our services and what should we be spending?

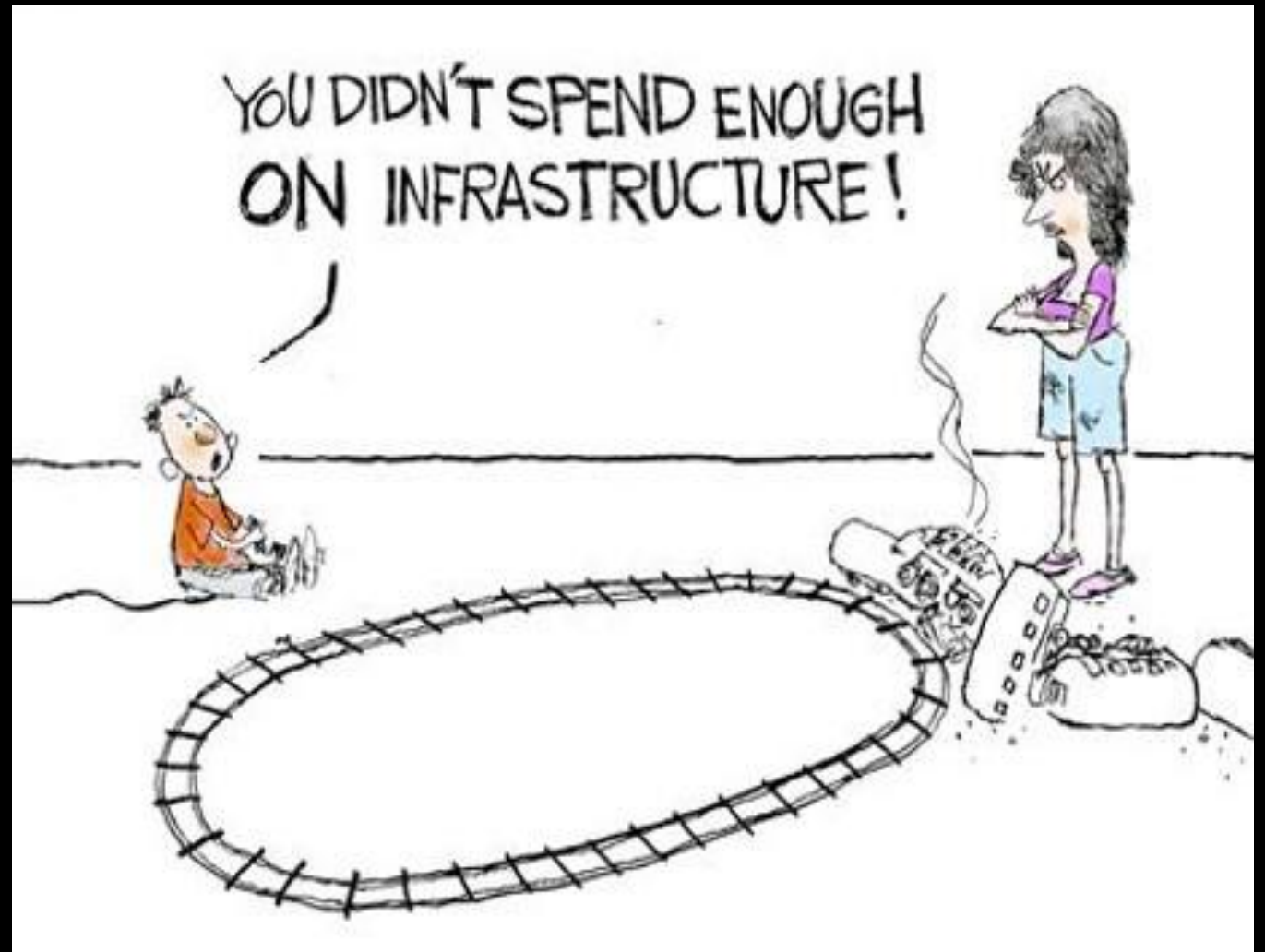
Where are we vulnerable?

If we can't afford everything, how will we prioritize our investments and minimize our risk?



Be the leader NOW

Don't let this be
said of you in ten
years time ...



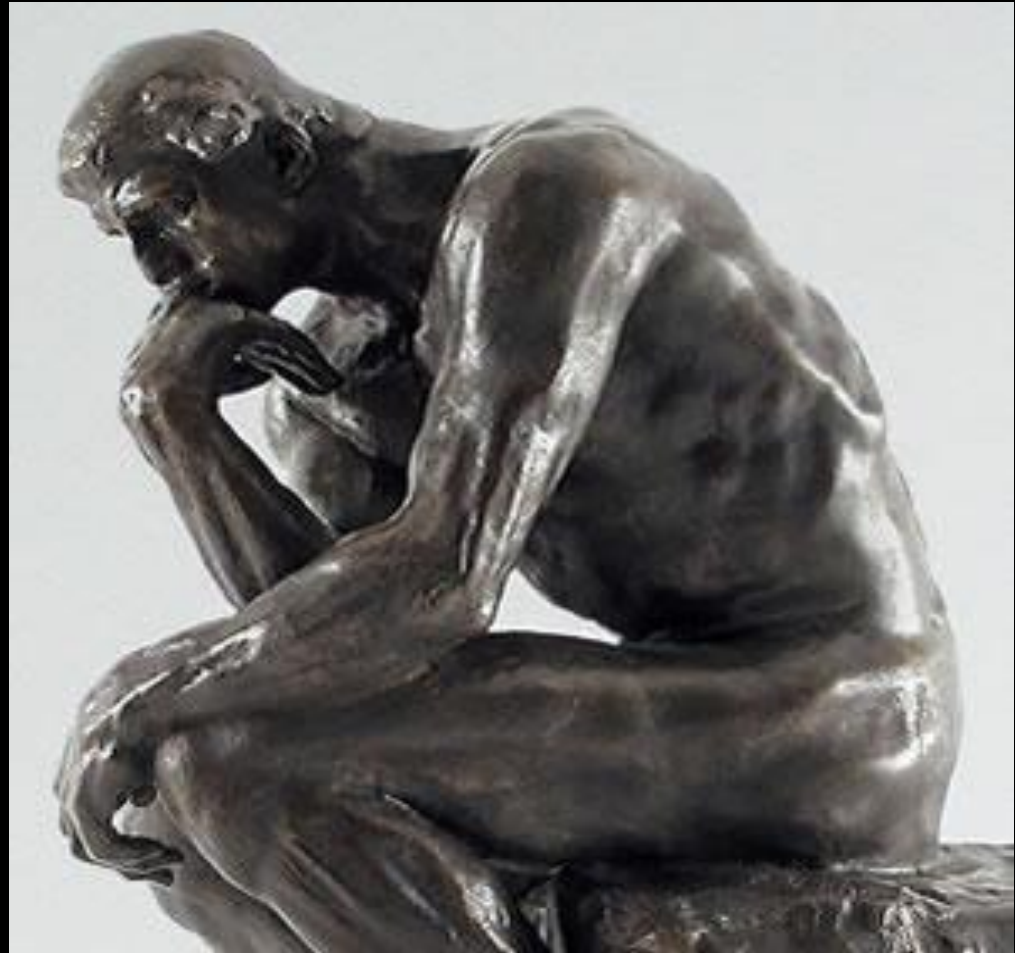
SEVEN DEADLY SINS

for candidates and citizens
(AND HOW TO AVOID THEM)



ONE

**UNPREPARED
TO LEARN**



TWO

**MAKE
PROMISES
AND SPEW
CATCH
PHRASES**



**You can't cut taxes
without cutting services.**



THREE

IMPATIENT



FOUR

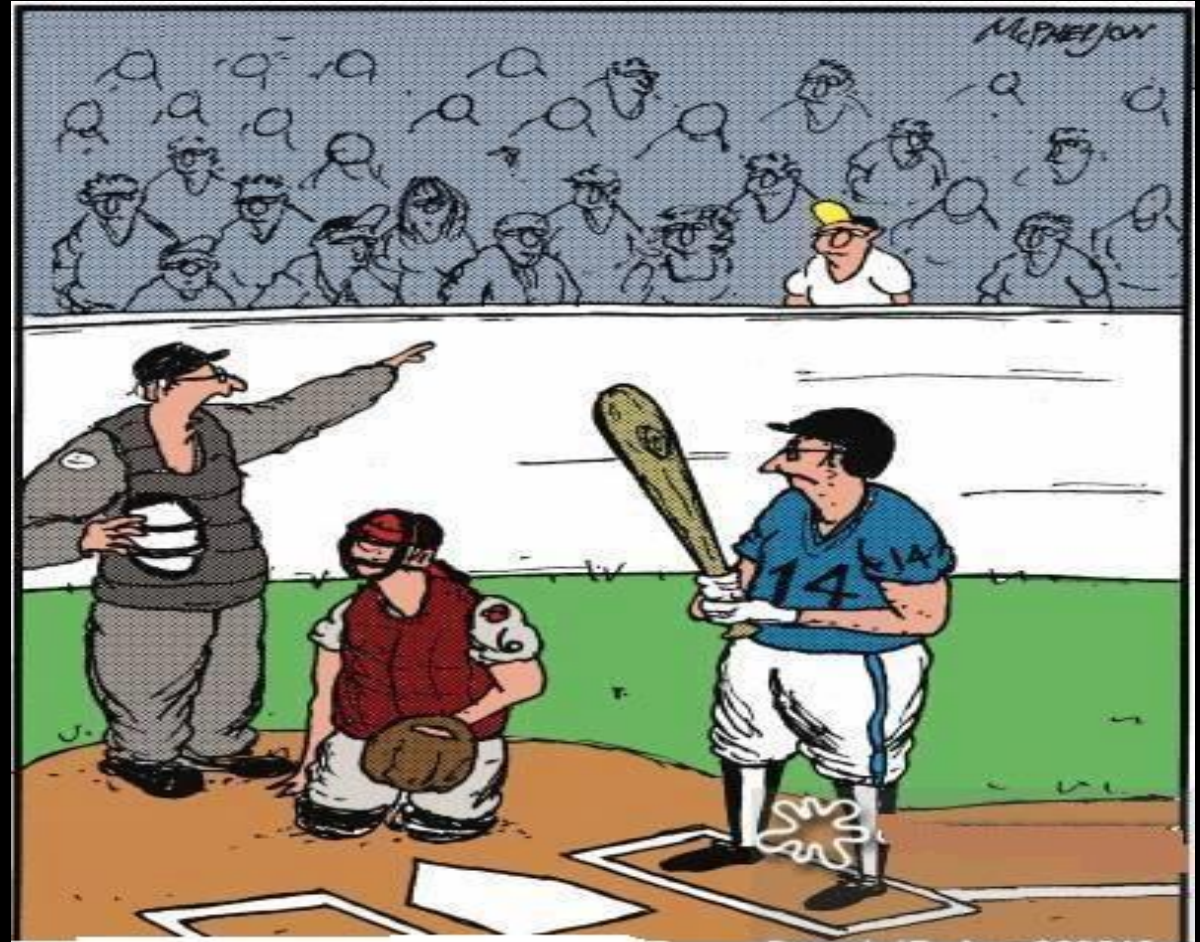
FIXED MINDSET

I'M NOT SAYING
YOU'RE STUPID
I'M JUST SAYING
YOU'VE GOT BAD
LUCK WHEN IT
COMES TO THINKING

BIF

FIVE

**MAKE
EVERYONE
HAPPY**



"Whoa! Time out. The loud guy in the white shirt is right — that was a ball. My mistake. Sorry everyone. Thank you, sir."

SIX

**COMPLAIN
CRITICIZE
BLAME**





Conflict is Information

- Expect tension
- Explore polarized perspectives
- Wrestle with ideas not personalities
- Communication, conflict-navigation and facilitation skills matter

Conflict doesn't break organizations.

Our inability to hold complexity and uncertainty does.

Common Polarities in Local Government

- *Core Services vs. Community Aspirations
- *Engagement vs. Efficiency
- *User-Pay Model vs. Public Good Model
- *Risk Management vs. Innovation
- *Active Social Media vs Deliberate Avoidance



SEVEN

**ONLY TALK TO
PEOPLE WHO
AGREE WITH
YOU**



OPTIMAL CANDIDATE AND CITIZEN

VISIONARY

LEARNER

PATIENT

OPEN-MINDED

DECISIVE

RELATIONAL

CURIOUS



**WE NEED TO STOP YELLING AT EACH OTHER,
AND START TALKING TO ONE ANOTHER.**



Turning to One Another

There is no power greater than a community discovering what it cares about.

Ask 'What's possible?' not 'What's wrong?' Keep asking.

Notice what you care about. Assume that many others share your dreams.

Be brave enough to start a conversation that matters.

Talk to people you know. Talk to people you don't know. Talk to people you never talk to.

Be intrigued by the differences you hear. Expect to be surprised.

Treasure curiosity more than certainty.

Invite in everybody who cares to work on what's possible.

Acknowledge that everyone is an expert about something.

Know that creative solutions come from new connections.

Remember, you don't fear people whose story you know.

Real listening always brings people closer together.

Trust that meaningful conversations can change your world.

Rely on human goodness. Stay together.

(Wheatley, 2002, p. 166)

WE NEED LEADERSHIP

**Strategic
questions to ask
of your
candidates**



INTENTION

What else are you curious about?

**Be a Good
Ancestor**

A person is holding a large, black-framed sign with a white border. The sign contains the text:

DO SOMETHING
TODAY THAT
YOUR FUTURE
SELF WILL
THANK YOU
FOR

The person holding the sign is wearing a blue shirt and jeans. The background shows a black metal railing, green trees, and a brick building.

How brave are you?

I know ya think its boring
But the numbers are soaring
The deficit ain't going away

You think your getting hosed
'cause you still drive on the roads
You're gonna have to fix 'em
someday

Can't just defer
And only do what you prefer
The sewer needs to handle the flush

Your kids will be annoyed
If the water's null and void
They'll wonder why you didn't rush

Take'n care of business Everyday

Take'n care of business Everyway

Take'n care of business

It's alright

Take'n care of business

It won't happen overnight

COME ON

Keyboard warriors are busy
Putting people in a tizzy
They like to work at nothing all day

The front-line folks are begging
'cause the assets are a fraying
And nobody is willing to pay

Better start behaving
'cause the climate is changing
Don't bury your head in the sand

If the arena roof is breaking
If ya think the staff is faking
Better listen up again and again...

Take'n care of business Everyday

Take'n care of business Everyway

Take'n care of business

It's alright

Take'n care of business

It won't happen overnight

COME ON

Early in the season
Just about budget time
No one wants a tax increase
Staff starting to lose their
mind
Infrastructure gap is growing
Forgot our policy
We deferred our maintenance
Be reactive is our strategy

Down on the Corner
Under the street
Water main's about to blow
Bring a nickel, tap your feet

Buried under piles of data
None of it makes sense
Where are all the experts
To help clean up the mess
Crumbling roads - leaky pipes
What's their life expectancy
We need more information
To know what the cost will be

Down on the Corner
Under the street
Sewer main's about to blow
Bring a nickel, tap your feet

How do we tell the public
That things are really bad
It's gonna cost some money
And you know they will be
mad
We have to tell the truth
Communication is the key
For future generations
What is our destiny
Is it gonna be.....

Down on the Corner
Under the street
Water main's about to blow
Bring a nickel, tap your feet