

## Rapporteur's Report

### 2016 Local Government Leadership Forum

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I have to begin by lowering expectations a bit. During one of the sessions, I was identified as the Forum's raconteur and it was quickly pointed out that I am a rapporteur rather than a raconteur. Isn't it weird how we default to Canada's other official language when we don't quite know what we are talking about? In any case, while I have a few anecdotes to share, most of my report deals with what I took out of two intensive days of learning and discussion. You'll have to look elsewhere if you want a raconteur.

My report is in three sections:

- Overall themes;
- Roles of locally elected representatives; and
- Attributes or skills needed by elected representatives in today's world.

First, the themes.

1. The first theme is *time*, which is ultimately the most precious resource of all. Each of us has only so much time on this planet, and each of you as elected people is aware of the four years of time the people have given you to allow you to show how you can make your community better. One of the main objectives of the techniques to which you have been exposed in the past few days was to avoid wasting time – through poor relationships between council or board members, or with staff or with the public, or through lack of information or trust. On the other hand, those of us with an impatient streak have been advised to “take the time” to get to know our colleagues, to listen to the public, to cultivate the media or to understand the knowledge and perspectives that First Nations communities have to offer. So time can be wasted as much by our failure to spend it wisely by not developing an understanding of perspectives as much as by poorly executed and hasty decision-making processes.
2. The second theme is *timeliness*, by which I mean having an understanding of the unique opportunities that exist in a given time and place. Here I think we heard clearly from Chief Dr. Robert Joseph that we have an opportunity right now to make our societies better by answering, through reconciliation, questions such as Who are we? What are our core values? and How can we do less harm to each other? Timeliness is on the side of local government in other ways as a result of the new national consensus on climate

change and the recognition of the economic and community benefits of early investment in infrastructure. At the provincial level, we have just heard from the minister now responsible for local government who, as Minister of Education, did what many thought was impossible by forging a long-term collective agreement with the most militant union in the province through respectful leadership. Those of you who know me will confirm that I am pretty focused on results and have limited time for this “respectful leadership” “stuff.” When Mr. Fassbender and I were involved in local government, I used to wonder whether there would be any time to get anything done after the amount of time he needed to get everyone “to the table.” It is no exaggeration to say that his entire career has been built on communication, dialogue and respect, and I must admit he has the results to show for it. One does not have to look too far back in our history when local government would have given a lot for a minister with those qualities. Yesterday a mayor commented to me that this minister comes “to the table” knowing more about his portfolio than his deputy minister and assistant deputy minister combined, which you can interpret any way you want. So we in local government have a timely opportunity to pursue common goals with the province, the federal government and first nations through respectful leadership.

3. The third and final theme is *public expectations*. It was Gordon McIntosh who pointed out that, while local government has always prided itself on being the closest to the people, the public are now expecting a degree of civility, inclusiveness and functionality from their governments as a whole, including local government. This theme goes to the very heart of concerns about our democracy, including low voter turnout, cynicism about government responsiveness and strains on the discourse between citizens and their government. (Just as an aside about citizens and their communication with government, I must observe that only in British Columbia would a mayor have to make a rule about not talking to citizens while on a ski hill.) Increasingly citizens are looking for reassurance about the three questions posed by Commander Beverly Busson: Am I safe? Do you know what you are doing? and Can I trust you?

### Roles of locally elected leaders

We learned a lot about the roles of locally elected leaders that may come as a surprise to some of you who are relatively new to the game and thought you were put here to make rapid progress for your community and give the people what they want, as laudable as those motivations are. In reality, we have learned in the past few days that there are at least three roles that locally elected leaders must play.

1. The first is *guardianship*. You are there to serve all the people and their best interests as you understand them. Guardianship means not only being guardians of the community's

assets, both tangible and intangible, but also being guardians of fair processes and the interests of people who cannot speak for themselves because they are socially or economically disadvantaged or not even here yet.

2. The second role is *enabling and empowering*, which means helping people to help themselves to solve problems rather than buying everybody's problems and trying to solve them. One participant described those in a certain sector of the population as "psychic vampires" who don't really want their problem solved but want to suck all the positive energy out of their elected representatives. You must learn to deal with this; you are their assistant and facilitator, not their servant.
3. The third role is *arbitrating*. One of the presenters at the session two years ago jolted the participants by saying "You were elected to say 'no.'" This came as a shock to a group of newly elected people who considered themselves to be positive people – and they were – but the reality is that governing is making choices and someone is bound to be disappointed when choices are made.

#### Attributes and skills needed by locally elected people

If the organizers had contented themselves with telling us what challenging times we live in and the hard truths about the roles of elected representatives, we might have been able to go home early but we would have been pretty depressed. Instead, they provided us with an amazing array of attributes and skills that can help you rise to these challenges. My observation is that most if not all successful elected people have many of these skills to a greater or lesser degree, but the sessions provided opportunities for even the most seasoned practitioners to develop further strengths.

To me, these skill requirements fell into four main categories:

1. *Personal balance and effectiveness*. I was tempted to list this factor last, as a kind of catch-all category, but it belongs at the top of the list. You can only be effective if you are healthy, have balance in your life and continue to pursue opportunities for learning and growth. The sessions on the balancing act, self-leadership and self-assessment of the impact of your personality on others all provided very helpful guidance on how we can increase our personal effectiveness and readiness for leadership. Personal balance also means not allowing tools of communication (i.e. social media) to get in the way of real communication with the live human beings with whom we must work if we are to have respectful leadership.
2. *Knowing the territory*, which involves knowledge of, and respect for, various actors in the process. In addition to providing us with new insights into the challenges of reconciliation as a general and empowering theme of our times, this involves an

understanding of the role of council, the role of staff and the place of the public in decision-making.

3. *Constructive, effective engagement*, which includes effective meetings with the public and conflict engagement and communications. We had very useful sessions on community engagement and on how, through role-playing, we can be more effective in managing conflict and reframing it towards solutions.
4. *Ensuring fairness*, so that all people can be involved in a respected way. We had very effective sessions on open meetings, integrity and harassment and freedom of information and protection of privacy that equipped us better to ensure that, not only are we staying on the right side of ever-changing legislation but we are also providing governance that is open to the interplay of diverse interests.

### Conclusion

Looking back on the past few days, I find myself better educated and equipped to function in the fascinating and complex society that we are building in British Columbia. I hope that your experience has been similarly invigorating and that my summary has helped you to put your time here in a constructive, action-oriented perspective.