



## 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.