



Leading Effective Council Meetings

A Practical Guide for
Mayors & Chairs in Canadian Municipalities

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How to Use This Guide

A Practical Resource for Mayors and Chairs

This guide is designed to support confident, fair, and effective meeting leadership, particularly when Council meetings become contentious or high-pressure. It is not intended to be read cover to cover in one sitting. Instead, it is a reference and leadership playbook to support you before, during, and after meetings.

How to Use This Guide

- **Before meetings:** review expectations, prepare for difficult items, and consult checklists and scripts.
- **During meetings:** use [Appendix A](#) for real-time language and [Appendices B](#) and [C](#) for procedural confidence.
- **After meetings:** reflect, debrief with the CAO and Clerk, and prepare for future challenges.

Throughout this Guide, Chairs will be directed to specific Appendices at moments where quick language, procedural confidence, or checklists are most useful.

You do not need to memorize this guide. You only need to know where to look.

What This Guide Is

This guide provides:

- Clear expectations for the Chair's role and authority
- Practical strategies for managing difficult meeting dynamics
- Ready-to-use scripts for real-time intervention
- Guidance for protecting staff, process, and public trust

It reflects real municipal experience and Canadian governance practice.

Procedural mechanics are addressed where needed, but the focus is on leadership judgment, not technical rule mastery.

What This Guide is Not

- A procedural bylaw
- A parliamentary textbook
- Legal advice
- A substitute for the Clerk's role

Final Reminder

You are not expected to be perfect; you are expected to be fair, calm, consistent, and prepared to lead. This guide exists to support you in that role, especially in moments when leadership matters most.

Introduction: Why Meeting Leadership Matters

Council meetings are where local democracy is practiced – and where public trust is either strengthened or undermined.

In today's municipal environment, Mayors and Chairs are increasingly called upon to lead meetings amid heightened public emotion, complex policy issues, social-media scrutiny, and rising incivility. While many Councils function respectfully and effectively, others face behaviours that strain governance, erode trust, and place staff and elected officials at risk. In this context, how a meeting is chaired matters.

Effective meeting leadership is more than procedural compliance. It is a cornerstone of good governance and a defining influence on Council culture. The way a Chair frames discussion, enforces rules, intervenes when boundaries are crossed, and protects staff can mean the difference between:

- constructive debate and political theatre
- principled decisions and procedural confusion
- a respectful workplace and a harmful environment

Procedure is a tool – not a shield. Procedural bylaws and rules of order exist to support fair, orderly decision-making, not to advance positions, avoid leadership, or escalate conflict. Effective Chairs understand the rules, but rely first on judgment, neutrality, and early intervention to maintain respectful and productive meetings.

Beyond managing motions and speakers, the Chair plays a critical role in creating a psychologically safe meeting environment. This includes intervening when behaviour becomes disrespectful, ensuring disagreement remains focused on issues rather than individuals, and protecting staff from hostile or inappropriate questioning. Psychological safety at the Council table is not optional, it is foundational to good governance, sound decision-making, and public trust.

This guide is a practical, non-partisan resource for Mayors, Wardens, Reeves, Chiefs, Chairs, and Deputy Chairs who preside over Council meetings in Canadian municipalities. Grounded in real municipal experience, it provides clear expectations, practical tools, and ready-to-use scripts to support confident, fair, and consistent meeting leadership.

Practical scripts and sample meeting wording are included in the appendices for Chairs seeking structured support in applying the principles outlined in this Guide.

Whether your Council is functioning well or navigating challenges related to decorum, role clarity, or incivility, this guide offers a roadmap for leading meetings with integrity, professionalism, and confidence – and for protecting both the legitimacy of Council’s decisions and the people at the table.

Chairing difficult meetings can be isolating. Structure, consistency, and clear scripts reduce personal risk and help ensure the Chair is supported by process – not left to manage conflict alone.

For simplicity, the term “Chair” is used throughout this Guide to refer to the presiding officer, regardless of title .

Jurisdictional Note on Voting and Participation

In many Canadian municipalities, the Mayor or Chair votes as a member of Council and may be required to vote under provincial legislation. In some jurisdictions, the Chair may also step out of the presiding role if they wish to actively participate in debate. The guidance in this document applies regardless of whether the Chair votes. The expectation of neutrality relates to how the meeting is presided over, not whether the Chair holds a vote.

Jurisdictional Note: Governance Structures Across Canada

Governance structures, legislative frameworks, and mayoral authorities vary across Provinces and Territories. In some jurisdictions, legislation provides Mayors with enhanced executive authority, commonly referred to as “Strong Mayor” powers, which may affect roles, reporting relationships, and decision-making processes.

This Guide reflects common governance principles and leading practices; however, it does not replace provincial legislation or a municipality’s Procedural Bylaw. Readers are encouraged to refer to their applicable legislation and local governance framework for the most accurate and current requirements.

Part 1: Roles in Local Government: The Governance Foundation

Respectful, effective Council meetings depend on a shared understanding of **who governs, who presides, and who administers**.

When these roles are clear and respected, decision-making is stronger, staff feel safe to provide professional advice, and public trust is reinforced. When boundaries blur, meetings quickly become inefficient, adversarial, and risky.

This section outlines the core responsibilities of Council, the Mayor/Chair, and the CAO, and explains why role clarity is the bedrock of productive municipal leadership.

Core Roles at the Council Table (at a Glance)

Role	Primary Function	What This Role Does	What This Role Does Not Do
Council	Governing Body	Sets vision, policy, priorities, and budgets; makes decisions collectively through motions and votes	Act individually, direct staff, or manage operations
Mayor / Chair	Leader of the Meeting & Protector of Process	Presides neutrally, enforces procedure, maintains order, and protects the integrity of debate	Influence outcomes, direct staff, or use procedure to advance positions
CAO & Administration	Operational Leadership	Provides professional advice; implements Council decisions; leads staff and operations	Engage in political debate, vote, or take direction from individual Councillors
Clerk/Legislative Services	Guardian of procedure and statutory compliance	Advises on the Procedural Bylaw and legislation; records decisions; administers statutory processes; supports the Chair in applying meeting rules; ensures decisions are legally defensible.	Engage in political debate; influence outcomes; direct administration.

Key Governance Principle: Council governs collectively; the Chair protects the process; the CAO leads administration; the Clerk safeguards procedure and the legislative record.

Council: The Governing Authority

Council holds the municipality's decision-making authority and exercises it only when acting as a body. Individual members have no independent authority outside the Council table.

Council's role is to:

- set the municipality's strategic direction and policy framework
- approve budgets, financial plans, and major priorities
- debate issues respectfully and make decisions through formal votes
- hold the CAO accountable for implementing Council's direction

Council's role is not to manage staff, involve itself in operational decisions, or revisit decisions once they have been lawfully made.

Mayor/Chair: Leader of the Meeting, Not the Debate

The Mayor or Chair's authority at the Council table is procedural, not political. The Chair does not lead outcomes, they lead the process by which decisions are made.

The Chair is responsible for:

- presiding over meetings with neutrality, consistency, and professionalism
- enforcing the Procedural Bylaw and meeting rules
- ensuring debate is orderly, respectful, and focused on the motion
- facilitating inclusive dialogue by encouraging balanced participation and ensuring all members have a fair opportunity to contribute
- intervening early when conduct undermines fairness, safety, or decorum
- protecting staff from political pressure or personal attack

The Chair does not:

- direct staff or administration
- advocate for positions while presiding over debate
- use procedure to suppress debate or influence votes

Note: In jurisdictions where the Mayor or Chair is a voting member of Council, they may participate in debate and vote in accordance with local legislation and the Procedural Bylaw. Where active participation is anticipated, some municipalities require the Chair to vacate the chair and allow a Deputy Chair to preside. Chairs must follow their local procedural rules in these circumstances.

CAO: The Sole Employee of Council

The Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) is the administrative head of the municipality and the only employee directly accountable to Council. All municipal staff report through the CAO.

The CAO and administration are responsible for:

- providing comprehensive, impartial, and professional advice to Council
- implementing Council's decisions, bylaws, and policies
- leading staff and managing municipal operations and services
- ensuring legislative compliance, financial stewardship, and risk management
- maintaining a safe, respectful, and ethical workplace

Administration does not engage in political debate, argue with Council, or take direction from individual members.

Governance vs. Operations - Staying in Your Lane

Healthy municipal leadership depends on respecting the boundary between policy-making (governance) and service delivery (operations).

- Council asks governance-level questions
- Administration provides operational expertise
- All staff interaction flows through the CAO

The Chair plays a critical role in protecting this boundary by redirecting operational questioning and ensuring staff are not drawn into political debate.

What are Governance-Level Questions?

Governance-level questions focus on policy, priorities, risk, and outcomes – not day-to-day management.

Examples of governance-level questions:

- How does this recommendation align with Council's strategic priorities?
- What are the financial implications and long-term sustainability impacts?
- What risks should Council consider before making this decision?
- What policy options are available, and what are the trade-offs?
- How will success be measured and reported back to Council?
- Does this require a bylaw amendment or policy change?

Examples of operational questions (to be redirected):

- Why was this staff member assigned to this file?
- Why wasn't this handled differently at the department level?
- Who approved this internal decision?
- Why didn't staff respond sooner?
- Can you direct staff to change how this is being delivered?

Boundary Script (for use when needed)

"Councillor, operational direction flows through the CAO. Please frame your question at the policy level."

Why Role Clarity Matters

When roles are understood and respected:

- meetings are more focused and efficient
- staff feel safe to provide professional advice
- conflict and incivility are reduced
- governance and accountability are strengthened
- public confidence in Council decisions increases
- Council can engage in constructive debate and build on one another's ideas

When roles blur, the opposite occurs – leading to dysfunction, risk, and erosion of trust.

Bottom Line: Role clarity is not theoretical – it is a practical tool for preventing conflict, protecting staff, and supporting effective governance.

Strong Mayor and Executive Authority Models

In some Provinces, legislation grants Mayors enhanced executive authority, commonly referred to as “Strong Mayor” powers. These authorities are statutory and vary by jurisdiction. They may include:

- agenda-setting authority
- veto or override mechanisms
- appointment or removal powers
- budgetary authority
- enhanced administrative direction

These powers are exercised under provincial legislation and typically occur **outside the Council meeting process**. It is important to distinguish between:

- **Executive Authority** - Powers granted by legislation to the Mayor outside the meeting context.
- **Legislative Authority** - Decisions made collectively by Council through motions and votes at a properly constituted meeting.
- **Procedural Authority** - The Chair's responsibility to preside fairly over meetings in accordance with the Procedural Bylaw.

Even in a Strong Mayor system, when presiding over a Council meeting, the Mayor acts as Chair and must:

- apply the Procedural Bylaw consistently
- ensure debate is fair and orderly
- protect staff and participants
- distinguish executive authority from meeting administration

Strong Mayor powers do not replace the Chair's obligation to manage meetings neutrally and in accordance with procedure.

Part 2: Preparing for the Meeting

Preparation Prevents Escalation and Strengthens Public Trust

Effective meetings are rarely improvised. The Chair's ability to lead confidently, remain neutral, and intervene appropriately depends on **advance preparation**. This section focuses on the Chair's practical pre-meeting responsibilities – not leadership philosophy, which is addressed elsewhere in this Guide.

Agenda Mastery

Before every meeting, the Chair must be thoroughly familiar with the agenda and supporting materials. This is essential to maintaining order, fairness, and procedural control.

The Chair should review:

- the full agenda and item sequence
- all staff reports and attachments
- late or supplemental items
- the anticipated length and complexity of each item
- any legal, procedural, or political sensitivities

Key questions to consider:

- Which items are likely to generate strong public interest or attendance?
- Where could emotions, misinformation, or conflict emerge?
- Are there statutory processes or special procedural requirements?
- What rulings or interventions may be required to keep debate focused?

Key Governance Principle: Agenda familiarity allows the Chair to intervene calmly and credibly when issues arise.

Chairs seeking structured wording for each agenda item may refer to [**Appendix H: Comprehensive Council Meeting Script for the Chair**](#), which provides sample language aligned with the principles outlined in this section.

Pre-Meeting Alignment With the CAO and Clerk

Strong meetings are supported by strong coordination behind the scenes.

While the CAO and Clerk are responsible for preparing and issuing the agenda in accordance with legislation and local practice, it is a best practice for the Chair to review the agenda with them prior to the meeting. This may be a short, informal conversation to ensure alignment on sequencing, sensitivities, procedural requirements, and any anticipated challenges. The purpose of this review is coordination – not direction or alteration of staff recommendations.

The CAO and Clerk are the Chair’s primary procedural and organizational partners.

The CAO supports operational readiness and policy context, while the Clerk supports procedural integrity and legislative compliance. Both relationships are essential to strong meeting leadership.

With the CAO, the Chair should:

- review staff roles for each agenda item
- flag operational, legal, or public-facing sensitivities
- identify areas where misinformation may arise
- clarify how staff responses will be handled during debate

With the Clerk, the Chair should:

- confirm procedural requirements for key items
- review motion and amendment structures
- clarify introductions, speaking order, and timing
- confirm statutory obligations, including public hearing processes

Together, confirm:

- delegation lists and time limits
- technology, presentations, or hybrid meeting needs
- room setup, seating, and security considerations
- legal counsel attendance or availability, where appropriate

Key Governance Principle: Pre-meeting alignment allows the Chair to focus on leadership in the room, not troubleshooting from the Chair.

Encouraging Pre-Meeting Questions From Councillors

Effective Councils minimize surprises in the chamber.

Councillors are encouraged to review materials in advance and direct factual or clarifying questions to the CAO or appropriate staff before the meeting. Early questions:

- improve the quality of debate;
- allow staff to prepare accurate responses;
- reduce unnecessary tension at the Council table;
- prevent performative or adversarial exchanges; and
- support more efficient meeting flow.

Meetings should focus on policy direction and decision-making – not fact-finding that could have occurred in advance.

This does not prevent members from asking legitimate clarifying questions during a meeting. However, raising complex or technical issues for the first time in the chamber may create unnecessary delay, defensiveness, or confusion.

Key Governance Principle: Preparation strengthens governance. Surprises weaken it.

Identifying High-Risk Items in Advance

Some agenda items carry heightened risk and require additional preparation.

Common indicators include:

- significant public interest or controversy
- emotionally charged or polarized issues
- prior conflict among Council members
- known misinformation circulating publicly
- complex or multi-step procedural requirements
- legal or legislative sensitivity

For these items, the Chair should:

- work with the CAO to identify likely pressure points
- prepare neutral introductory remarks
- have procedural scripts readily available
- know when to pause, recess, or seek advice if required

For high-risk items, Chairs are encouraged to review relevant scripts in [Appendix A](#), the “First 30 Minutes of a Contentious Meeting” checklist in [Appendix G](#), and the Comprehensive Council Meeting Script in [Appendix H](#) before the meeting.

Setting Expectations for Contentious Items (When Needed)

When heightened tension is anticipated, the Chair may set expectations at the outset of an item or meeting. This is not required for every agenda, but can be effective in managing tone.

Effective Opening Remarks:

- reinforce expectations for respectful conduct
- clarify procedural or statutory requirements
- reassure participants that all voices will be heard
- signal that the Chair will intervene if boundaries are crossed

Example Script: "This item may generate differing views. We will conduct our discussion respectfully, follow our Procedural Bylaw, and ensure all speakers are heard. I will intervene if necessary to keep the discussion focused and fair."

Physical & Virtual Room Management (In-Person, Virtual, or Hybrid)

Staff are responsible for the logistical setup and technical management of Council meetings. The Chair's role is to confirm readiness, understand available supports, and exercise authority during the meeting to maintain order and safety.

See [Appendix "F"](#) for more details on virtual and hybrid meetings.



Physical Space & Security Readiness

Room setup:

- Seating supports respectful, direct interaction
- CAO, Clerk, and presenters seated in clear view
- Delegation podium or microphone functioning and positioned appropriately
- Accessible sightlines for Council, staff, and public

Security considerations:

- Security staff present if tension is expected
- Clear authority and procedures for the Chair to call a recess or request removal
- Awareness of audience composition (large crowds, advocacy groups)
- Staff positioned safely in the room

Technology Requirements

Confirm all systems are functioning:

- Microphones tested for all members and staff
- Presentation screens and audio-visual equipment working
- Livestream and recording systems active
- Backup plans in case of technical failure

Hybrid moderation tools:

- Mute controls
- Waiting room or participant admission settings
- Chat limitations or moderation
- Clear view of online participants

Hybrid Etiquette & Digital Decorum

Expectations to state at the start of virtual/hybrid meetings:

- Microphones muted unless recognized
- Use “raise hand” function to request the floor
- No speaking over others (audio delay considerations)
- Cameras on, if required
- Professional background and minimal distractions
- All comments directed through the Chair
- Patience with minor technical interruptions

Managing virtual disruptions:

- Address poor audio/video immediately
- Stop unrecognized speakers
- Mute or remove participants if needed
- Intervene early when delegations become disrespectful

Closing virtual meetings:

- Thank participants for professionalism
- Confirm adjournment
- Note next meeting or follow-up steps

Part 3: The Chair's Core Responsibilities & Leadership Anchors

The Philosophical and Behavioural Heart of Effective Local Governance

The Chair, whether a Mayor, Warden, Reeve, Chief, or Deputy Chair, is the procedural leader of the meeting, not the political leader of the debate. Their primary responsibility is to protect the integrity, fairness, and safety of Council's decision-making process.

A Chair who leads with neutrality, consistency, and respect creates an environment where:

- Council makes principled decisions,
- staff feel safe and supported, and
- the public can trust the outcome, whether they agree with it or not.

A Chair who steps outside this role, or allows behaviour to slide, quickly contributes to dysfunction, confusion, and incivility.

The Chair Protects the Process - Not the Outcome

The Chair's legitimacy comes from protecting how Council makes decisions, not influencing what the decisions should be.

The Chair must ensure the meeting is:

- **Fair:** every member has an equal opportunity to participate;
- **Orderly:** one person speaks at a time and debate stays focused;
- **Respectful:** behaviour aligns with Codes of Conduct and the Procedural Bylaw;
- **Lawful:** statutory processes, timelines, and hearing requirements are followed.

Meetings become dysfunctional when a Chair:

- debates from the chair,
- signals preference through tone or body language,
- interrupts selectively,
- uses procedure to advance a political position,
- refuses or unreasonably delays recognizing a member who seeks the floor.

Key Governance Principle: A fair process produces legitimate decisions, even when debate is difficult.

Neutrality as a Leadership Discipline

How the Chair Maintains Credibility

Neutrality is not passive, it is an active leadership behaviour. Everything the Chair communicates, verbally and nonverbally, shapes the tone of the meeting.

The Chair must:

- enforce rules consistently, regardless of personal views;
- refrain from influencing debate or steering outcomes;
- step down from the Chair (where permitted) if they wish to advocate.

Loss of neutrality, even for a moment, erodes trust and increases defensiveness among members.

Important Clarification: Neutrality in this Guide refers to procedural neutrality – applying rules consistently, managing speakers fairly, and protecting process integrity.

In jurisdictions where the Chair votes or participates in debate, neutrality means separating advocacy from presiding. When actively participating, the Chair must ensure the meeting continues to be administered fairly and in accordance with the Procedural Bylaw, and where required, step out of the chair.

Key Governance Principle: The Chair is the calmest person in the room.

Procedural Integrity & Predictability

The Structure That Good Governance Sits On

Procedure is the Chair's strongest tool for fairness.

The Chair must:

- apply the Procedural Bylaw consistently to all members;
- use the same rules for allies and critics alike;
- rule on Points of Order promptly and clearly;
- ensure motions and amendments are accurate and understood;
- keep debate focused on the motion;
- consult the Clerk when clarification is needed.

Key Governance Principle: Consistent rules create consistent respect.

Device Use & Professional Conduct in the Chamber

Mobile devices are now a common part of municipal governance. While their use for accessing agendas, bylaws, and digital materials is often necessary, visible device use during debate can affect tone, perception, and public trust.

Best practice includes:

- Using devices primarily for meeting-related purposes;
- Avoiding texting or unrelated activity during debate;
- Refraining from live social media commentary while the meeting is underway;
- Keeping devices on silent mode;
- Maintaining eye contact and visible engagement when others are speaking.

The Chair may remind members of these expectations where device use appears to undermine decorum, participation, or public confidence.

Key Governance Principle: Professional presence in the chamber reinforces institutional credibility.

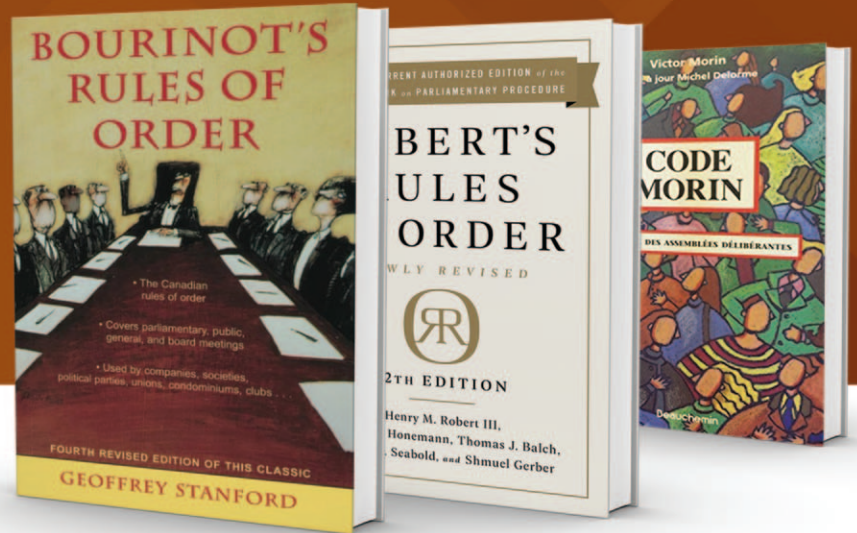


Why This Guide Does Not Teach Bourinot's Rules of Order, Robert's Rules of Order, or Le Code Morin

This guide does not teach Bourinot's Rules of Order, Robert's Rules of Order, or Le Code Morin because its purpose is not to provide parliamentary instruction, but to support effective meeting leadership—particularly when meetings become contentious.

In practice, rules of order are applied through each municipality's Procedural Bylaw, which reflects local legislation, governance structure, and jurisdictional context. These bylaws vary across Provinces and Territories and are best interpreted and administered with the support of the Clerk.

Rather than duplicating or overriding local procedural rules, this guide focuses on how Chairs exercise judgment, neutrality, and authority, using procedure as a leadership tool to maintain order, protect staff, and uphold public trust. Procedural mechanics are referenced only where necessary; the emphasis remains on confident, fair, and consistent chairing—not technical mastery of any single rulebook.



Maintaining Order & Safety

Intervening Early to Prevent Escalation

Respectful meetings do not happen by chance, they happen because the Chair establishes and enforces boundaries early.

The Chair must intervene when:

- debate becomes personal or accusatory;
- members interrupt, talk over one another, or dominate;
- misinformation is directed to staff;
- tone becomes mocking, rude, or hostile;
- delegations or the audience become disruptive.

Failing to intervene allows disrespect to escalate and undermines leadership.

Key Governance Principle: Early intervention prevents conflict later.

Case Study: When Meeting Leadership Works – A Strong Chair, Difficult Issue

Council considered a highly contentious zoning application with strong public opposition, social media scrutiny, and a full chamber.

Chair Actions

The Chair set clear expectations, outlined the statutory process, intervened early when comments became personal, redirected operational questions through the CAO, summarized debate to maintain focus, and called a brief recess when tension rose.

Outcome

The meeting remained orderly. Staff felt supported. Council reached a clear, lawful decision. While not all agreed with the outcome, the process was widely viewed as fair and professional.

Key Lesson

Strong Chairmanship ensures credibility, even in difficult decisions.

Ensuring Inclusive, Issue-Focused Debate

Supporting Full Participation and Respectful Dialogue

Council governs best when debate is inclusive, balanced, and focused on issues – not personalities.

The Chair ensures:

- all voices are heard, not only the most assertive;
- quieter or newer members feel safe contributing;
- irrelevant or tangential discussion is redirected;
- personal attacks and insinuations are stopped;
- disagreement is respected as part of healthy decision-making;
- misinformation is corrected through staff clarification (without drawing staff into political debate).

Key Governance Principle: Inclusion strengthens the decision; respectful debate strengthens the institution.

Protecting Staff: A Legal and Ethical Obligation

The Chair as Guardian of Administrative Neutrality

Staff attend meetings to provide professional, impartial advice – not to defend themselves or engage in political argument.

The Chair must intervene when:

- members challenge staff integrity or motives;
- staff are interrupted, badgered, or cross-examined;
- members seek operational detail or direction directly from staff;
- administration is drawn into political disputes.

Protecting staff is both:

- a legal obligation (workplace safety and harassment legislation), and
- a governance obligation (preserving administrative neutrality and the CAO model).

Key Governance Principle: The Chair is the shield that protects staff from political pressure and public hostility.

Governance Reminder:

- The Chair protects the meeting and its process.
- Administrative leadership flows through the CAO.
- The Chair does not direct, evaluate, or correct staff performance.
- The Chair must ensure Council members follow the same boundary.

A Chair who protects process, rather than pursuing outcomes, strengthens Council's credibility, supports respectful debate, and builds lasting public trust.

Part 4: Running the Meeting: A Step-by-Step Framework

The Practical Guide to Chairing an Effective, Respectful, and Predictable Council Meeting

This section outlines a clear sequence for managing Council meetings in a structured, fair, and respectful manner. It focuses on **what the Chair does**, in order, with simple scripts that can be used in real time.

Quick Reference: This section includes sample scripts at key moments in the meeting flow. A consolidated quick-reference library of Chair scripts, including opening language, redirection, staff protection, decorum, escalation, and procedural interventions, is available in Appendices A, B, and C. Chairs are encouraged to bookmark or print these appendices for easy access during meetings.

Opening the Meeting

Opening the meeting sets the tone for professionalism, respect, and procedural integrity.

Key Tasks for the Chair

- Call the meeting to order clearly and confidently.
- Confirm quorum.
- Deliver land acknowledgement if part of local protocol.
- Review the agenda and invite adoption or amendment.
- State expectations for decorum and conduct (especially for hybrid or high-tension meetings).

Optional Opening Script

"I call this meeting to order. We will hear different viewpoints tonight. All comments must be respectful, directed through the Chair, and focused on the issue before Council. We will follow our Procedural Bylaw, and all voices will be heard."

Additional opening, decorum, and redirection scripts are available in [Appendix A](#) for Chairs who wish to adapt language to their local context.

For contentious items, briefly note:

- the statutory process being followed
- the expected order of speakers
- boundaries for delegations or public comments
- if a public hearing is required, that Council debate will occur only after the hearing is formally closed.

Receiving Staff Reports & Asking Questions

Staff attend to provide professional advice, not to be cross-examined or pulled into political debate.

Chair Responsibilities

- Introduce each item clearly (title, report number, presenter).
- Invite staff to present without interruption.
- After the presentation, open the floor for clarifying questions, not debate.
- Ensure all questions go through the Chair, not directly at staff.
- Redirect questions that become operational direction or political argument.

Useful Script

- Stopping cross-examination: "I'm going to step in. Questions to staff must be respectful and for clarification only."

Key Governance Principle: Staff provide impartial advice, not political argument.

Introducing Motions Clearly

Confusion about what Council is debating is one of the most common causes of dysfunctional meetings.

The Chair Must Ensure

- The mover and seconder are clearly identified.
- The motion is read or displayed so everyone knows the exact wording.
- Debate begins **only after** a motion is on the floor.

Introduction Script

"A motion has been moved by Councillor ___ and seconded by Councillor ___. The motion before Council is as follows: [read or display]."

For complex motions, briefly break the motion into key components and confirm that all members are working from the same version.

Governance Tip: Why Council Decisions Must be Made by Motion and Resolution

Decisions Are Made by Council – Through Motions, Not Consensus

In municipal governance, Council decisions are not made by informal agreement, nodding, or “general consensus.” They are made by motion and resolution, with a clearly identified mover and seconder, debated openly, and voted on in accordance with the Procedural Bylaw.

It is important to distinguish this from formal “consensus governance” models used in some jurisdictions or Indigenous governments, where decision-making structures differ by design. Canadian municipalities governed under Provincial or Territorial legislation make legally binding decisions through motion and recorded vote as required by their Municipal Act (or equivalent legislation) and Procedural Bylaw.

In this Guide, the term “consensus” refers to alignment developed through discussion. Legally binding municipal decisions are made only through motion and recorded vote in accordance with the Procedural Bylaw.

This process is not a technicality – it is a safeguard.

Using formal motions and resolutions ensures that:

- decisions are clear, deliberate, and recorded;
- all members have an equal opportunity to debate and vote;
- the public can see how and why a decision was made;
- staff receive clear and defensible direction; and
- Council decisions withstand legal, audit, and public scrutiny.

When decisions are treated “by consensus,” without a formal motion and recorded vote, important governance protections are lost. Consensus can be ambiguous, unrecorded, and vulnerable to later disagreement, reinterpretation, or challenge.

In many municipalities, motions require both a mover and a seconder under the Procedural Bylaw. However, not all Councils require a seconder. Chairs should follow the requirements set out in their local Procedural Bylaw.

Why Mover and Seconder Matter

Requiring a mover and seconder:

- confirms that at least two members support bringing the matter forward;
- ensures the issue is ready for formal debate;
- prevents informal decision-making or direction outside the meeting process;
- reinforces that Council acts collectively, not individually.

The Chair’s Role

The Chair is responsible for ensuring that:

- no debate occurs without a motion on the floor;
- all decisions are framed as motions or resolutions;
- outcomes are determined by a recorded vote – not inferred agreement; and
- staff direction flows only from adopted resolutions.

Chair Script (when needed):

“For clarity and governance integrity, Council decisions must be made by motion and resolution. Is there a motion on the floor?”

Bottom Line

- Consensus is a discussion tool – not a decision-making tool.
- Motions and resolutions protect Council, staff, and the public interest.

Managing Debate (Speaker Lists, Redirection, Summaries)

Structured, respectful debate is essential for good governance.

How the Chair Manages Debate

- Maintain a speakers list (in-person and virtual).
- Recognize one speaker at a time.
- Remind members that all remarks are directed through the Chair.
- Interrupt when comments become personal, accusatory, or repetitive.
- Bring discussion back to the motion currently before Council.

Redirection Scripts

- Keeping focus: "Colleagues, let's bring our comments back to the motion on the floor."
- Stopping personal remarks: "Debate must remain issue focused. Personal comments are out of order."
- Correcting crosstalk: "Please direct all remarks through the Chair."

Using Summaries

When debate becomes circular or confused, the Chair may summarize:

"To recap, the motion before Council is _____. We've heard arguments on X, Y, and Z. Are there any new points before we move to the vote?"

Summaries provide clarity and nudge the meeting toward resolution.

For additional real-time redirection and escalation language, refer to [Appendix A](#). Formal procedural rulings related to debate control are located in [Appendix C](#).

Handling Amendments Properly

Amendments are a frequent point of confusion. The Chair's role is to keep them clear and contained.

Chair Responsibilities

- Ensure the amendment is stated clearly and recorded.
- Have the Clerk read or display the amendment if needed.
- Remind Council that debate is now on the amendment only.
- Call the vote on the amendment.
- Restate the main motion (as amended or not) before resuming debate.

Clarity Script

"We will now vote on the amendment. Debate is limited to the amendment only. Once that vote is concluded, we will return to the main motion, as amended or not amended."

Calling the Vote & Announcing Results

Voting must be clear, calm, and unambiguous.

Steps for an Effective Vote

1. Restate the motion.
2. Confirm that members are ready to vote.
3. Conduct the vote (voice, show of hands, electronic).
4. Confirm that the Clerk has recorded the vote.
5. Announce the result neutrally.

Vote Announcement Script:

"The motion is carried."

"The motion is defeated."

"The motion is carried unanimously."

"The motion is defeated on a vote of 3-2."

Key Governance Principle: The Chair reports the result – they do not react to it.

Closing the Meeting With Professionalism

The way a meeting ends shapes how Council, staff, and the public feel about the process, especially after contentious items.

The Chair Should

- Thank Council, staff, and delegations for their participation.
- Provide a brief, neutral summary of next steps, if appropriate.
- Confirm the date of the next meeting.
- Adjourn clearly and decisively.

Closing Script

"Thank you, everyone, for your participation and professionalism. This meeting is now adjourned."

After the Meeting - Follow-Through & Communications

The Chair's responsibilities do not end with adjournment. Post-meeting discipline reinforces trust and clarity.

Post-Meeting Responsibilities

- Ensure motions and directions are accurately captured in the minutes.
- Clarify any follow-up items with the CAO and Clerk.
- Avoid re-litigating decisions or debating outcomes in hallways or on social media.
- Avoid public comments that contradict Council's decisions.
- Prepare for media questions with neutral, factual messages.
- Debrief with the CAO on operational impacts and staff well-being, and with the Clerk on procedural integrity, statutory compliance, and the meeting record.

What a Post-Meeting Debrief Might Cover

A brief debrief between the Chair, CAO, and Clerk (as appropriate) may include:

Procedural Review

- Were all motions clearly stated and recorded?
- Were there any procedural rulings that require follow-up or clarification?
- Did any process issues create confusion or tension?

Meeting Flow

- Did debate stay focused on the motion?
- Were time limits respected?
- Did participation feel balanced?

Risk & Public Perception

- Were there moments that may require proactive communication?
- Did any exchanges create reputational or legal risk?

Staff & Safety

- Were staff treated respectfully?
- Did any exchanges require follow-up support?

Opportunities for Improvement

- What worked well?
- What would we handle differently next time?

Debriefs should be reflective and forward-focused, not evaluative of individual members.

Post-meeting behaviour directly affects Council unity, public trust, staff confidence, and clear administrative follow-through.

Part 5: Procedural Tools Every Chair Must Master

The Chair's Procedural Confidence Toolkit

Procedure is not bureaucracy, it is a safeguard. Consistent, neutral use of procedural tools protects fairness, keeps debate focused, and prevents conflict from escalating. This section highlights the **core procedural tools** every Chair must understand and apply confidently.

The Procedural Bylaw: The Chair's Primary Authority

The Procedural Bylaw is the Chair's foundational source of authority. It governs how meetings are conducted, how debate flows, how decisions are made, and what tools are available to maintain order.

When meetings become contentious, the Chair must rely on the bylaw, **not discretion, preference, or political pressure**.

Key Governance Principle: When in doubt, return to the Procedural Bylaw.



Jurisdictional Governance Reminder

While the principles of effective meeting leadership are consistent across Canada, procedural bylaws, statutory authorities, and terminology vary by Province and Territory.

Each municipality's Procedural Bylaw is shaped by:

- Provincial or Territorial municipal legislation;
- local governance practices; and
- adopted parliamentary authorities (e.g., Bourinot, Robert's Rules, Mason's, Le Code Morin).

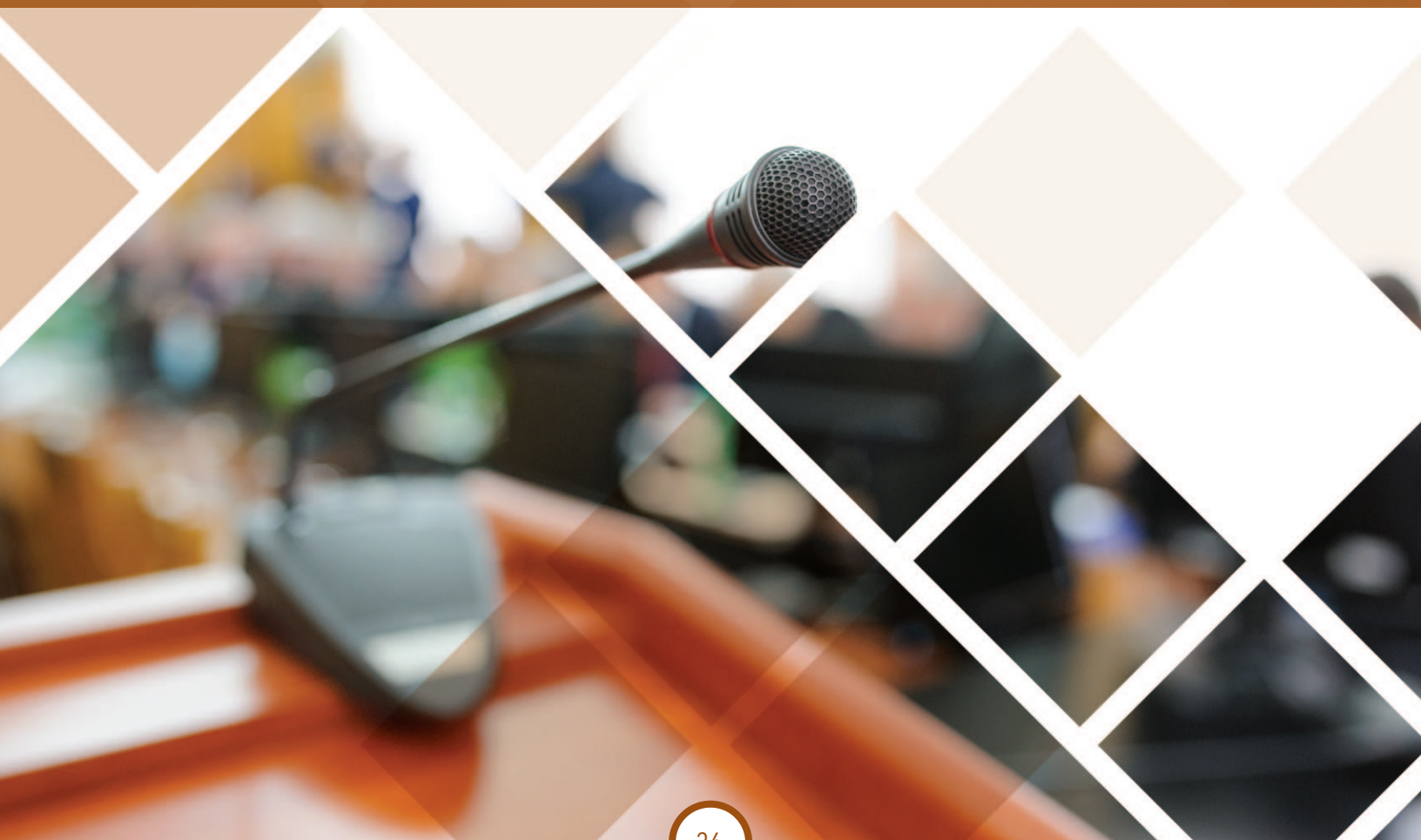
Chairs must always:

- rely first on their municipality's Procedural Bylaw;
- understand whether provincial legislation requires the Chair to vote or permits abstention;
- apply the legislation in their Province or Territory; and
- consult the Clerk or CAO when interpretation is required.

This Guide provides governance principles, leadership practices, and procedural tools that support effective chairing – it does not replace local bylaws or provincial law.

When in doubt, applicable Provincial or Territorial legislation prevails, and the municipality's Procedural Bylaw, enacted in compliance with that legislation, must be followed.

In municipalities operating under enhanced executive authority models, Chairs must clearly distinguish between statutory executive powers and procedural responsibilities exercised within Council meetings.

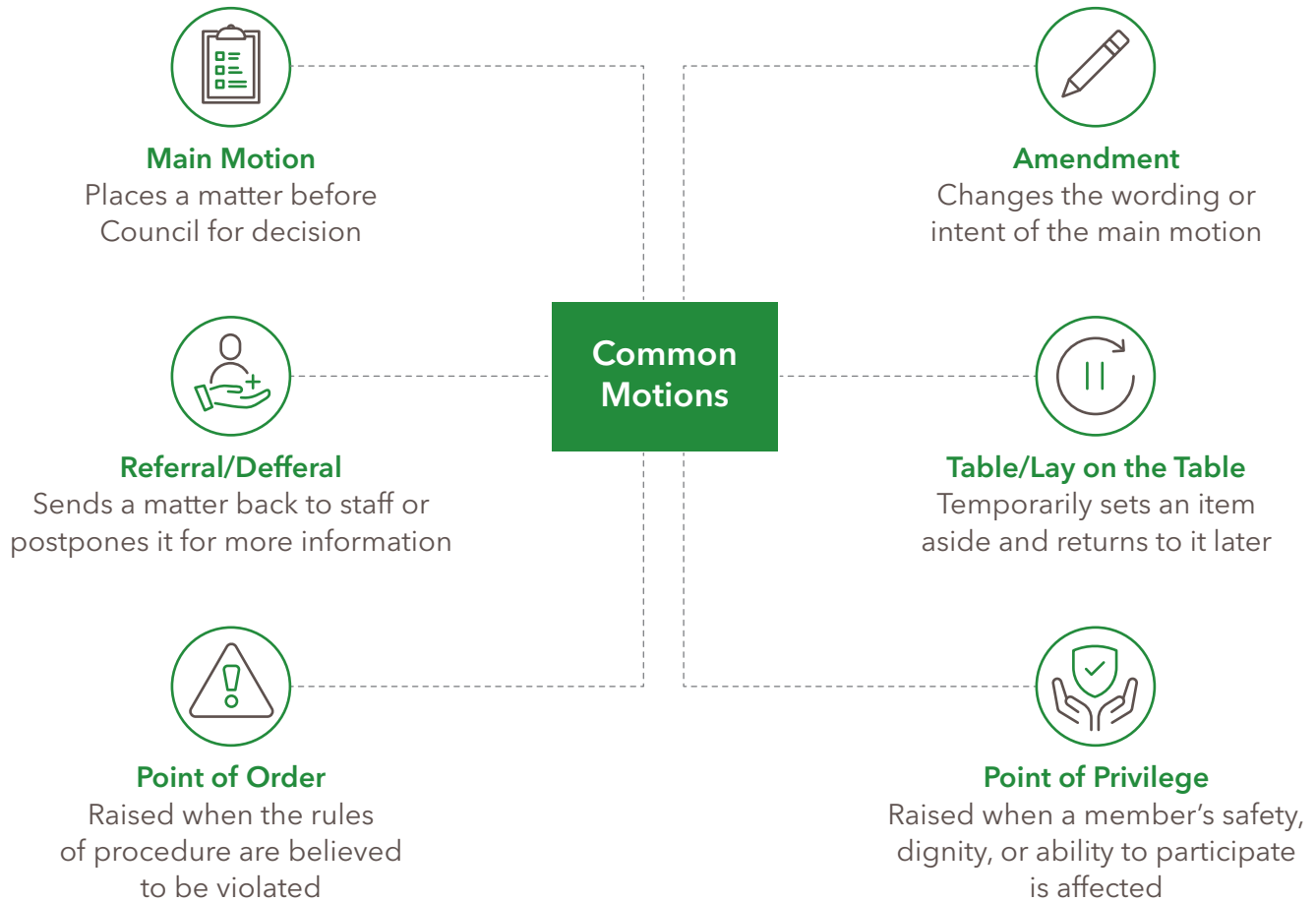


Motions & Amendments: Keeping Debate Anchored

Chairs do not need to be parliamentary experts. They do need to ensure that debate remains anchored to the motion before Council and that members understand what is being decided at each stage.

At a minimum, the Chair must ensure that:

- debate does not occur without a properly placed motion
- amendments are addressed before returning to the main motion
- Council is clear on what question is being voted on



Points of Order and Points of Privilege: Knowing When to Intervene

Points of Order and Points of Privilege are essential tools for maintaining fairness, structure, and safety, but they must be used sparingly and correctly.

- **Points of Order** address breaches of procedure or decorum.
- **Points of Privilege** address issues affecting a member’s safety, dignity, or ability to participate.

The Chair’s role is to:

- interrupt debate when required
- rule promptly and neutrally
- tie rulings to the bylaw
- resume debate without commentary or escalation

Point of Order	<p>What it is: Used when a member believes the rules of procedure are not being followed.</p> <p>When it might be used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• A member is speaking off-topic.• Debate begins before a motion is on the floor.• A procedural step required by the bylaw is skipped.	<p>Plain-language example:</p> <p>“Point of order, Chair. The discussion appears to be moving beyond the motion on the floor.”</p> <p>Chair response example:</p> <p>“Thank you. The point is well taken. Let’s return to the motion before us.”</p>
Point of Privilege	<p>What it is: Used to address issues affecting a member’s ability to participate.</p> <p>When it might be used:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Audio cannot be heard clearly in a hybrid meeting.• A member feels personally misrepresented and seeks correction.• The environment becomes disruptive.	<p>Plain-language example:</p> <p>“Point of privilege, Chair. I’m having difficulty hearing the speaker.”</p> <p>Chair response example:</p> <p>“Thank you. Let’s pause and ensure the audio is functioning properly.”</p>

Appendix B provides formal definitions and ruling language for Points of Order, Privilege, and Appeals. **Appendix C** provides record-ready ruling scripts where clarity and authority are essential.

Key Governance Principle: Procedural tools manage the moment – not the personalities.

Appeals of the Chair's Ruling

The ability to appeal a ruling is a democratic safeguard. It is not a personal challenge to the Chair.

The Chair must:

- state rulings clearly
- allow appeals as required by the bylaw
- put the question to Council without debate
- accept the outcome and proceed

Appeal of the Chair's Ruling

What it is: A mechanism allowing Council to challenge a procedural ruling made by the Chair.

When it might be used:

- A member disagrees with a procedural decision (not a policy position).
- There is disagreement about whether debate should continue.

Plain-language example:

"Chair, I respectfully appeal your ruling."

Chair response example:

"An appeal has been made. Council will vote on whether to uphold the ruling of the Chair."

| **Key reminder:** Appeals relate to procedure – not disagreement with the outcome of a vote.

This process reinforces transparency and legitimacy when used properly.

Conflict of Interest: Protecting Decision Legitimacy

The Chair plays a key role in ensuring conflict-of-interest requirements are followed during meetings.

This includes:

- calling for declarations
- ensuring they are recorded
- directing members to step away when required
- resuming debate only once proper procedures are followed

Preventing Weaponized Use of Procedure

Procedural tools exist to protect fairness, not to obstruct debate or gain political advantage.

The Chair must intervene when procedure is used in bad faith, including repeated or strategic misuse that disrupts the meeting or undermines trust.

Early, neutral intervention and, when necessary, consultation with the Clerk help prevent escalation and maintain legitimacy.

Key Governance Principle: Procedure is a shield, not a weapon.

When the Chair is Unsure - Consulting the Clerk

Pausing to consult the Clerk is a sign of professionalism, not weakness. Even experienced Chairs encounter uncertainty.

The Chair should pause proceedings when needed, seek clarification, and resume with a clear ruling tied to the bylaw.

Key Governance Principle: Confidence comes from knowing when to pause, not from pretending certainty.



Part 6: Behaviour Management & Incivility Response Framework

How the Chair Prevents, Intervenes, and Responds to Behaviour That Harms Governance

Incivility rarely appears all at once. It escalates when early warning signs are missed or inconsistently addressed. The Chair's role is to intervene early, proportionately, and neutrally to protect respectful debate, staff safety, and public confidence.

This section provides a single, consistent framework for behaviour management. **Scripts, examples, and detailed wording are located in [Appendix A](#).**

Preventing Incivility Before it Escalates

Most behaviour issues can be reduced through predictable structure and consistent expectations.

The Chair supports a respectful meeting culture by:

- setting clear behavioural expectations at the start of meetings or sensitive items
- modelling calm, neutral leadership
- applying rules consistently to all members
- keeping debate issue-focused and policy-level
- ensuring staff are not blamed, interrogated, or drawn into political conflict
- using short recesses proactively when tension rises
- ensuring appropriate security for high-risk meetings

Key Prevention Principle: Consistency reduces conflict.

The Behaviour Escalation Ladder

The Chair should escalate **only as needed**, using the least intrusive intervention that restores order.

Meetings rarely unravel all at once. Disruption usually escalates when early warning signs are missed or left unaddressed.

This chart helps the Chair respond **calmly, neutrally, and proportionately**, starting with gentle correction and escalating only when behaviour persists.

Core Principle: Delayed intervention makes escalation harder – and more personal.

Chair language for each level of intervention, from early redirection to recess or removal, is provided in [Appendix A](#).

Behaviour Escalation Framework for Chairs

Level	Examples	Chair Response
Level 1 - Early Drift	Interruptions, side comments, rising emotion, off topic remarks	Gentle redirection; reminder of process.
Level 2 - Disruptive Conduct	Sarcasm, dismissive tone, repeated interruptions, undermining staff	Clear reminder of expectations; formal caution
Level 3 - Out-of-Order Behaviour	Personal attacks, refusal to yield the floor, harassment, audience disruption	Rule behaviour out of order; require compliance; consider recess
Level 4 - Persistent Disorder or Safety Risk	Continued defiance, intimidation, unsafe environment	Suspend speaking privileges; recess or adjourn; removal only as a last resort

Example Interventions for Common Difficult Situations

The following examples illustrate tone and proportional intervention. **Full script libraries are located in [Appendix A](#).**

If This Happens	The Chair Says
Two members talking over each other	"Let's take one speaker at a time. Councillor ___ has the floor; Councillor ___, you'll be next."
Debate becomes personal	"Let's focus on the issue, not the individual. Comments must go through the Chair."
A member challenges staff	"Staff provide professional advice. Comments must remain respectful and policy focused."
Rising tension	"I'm asking everyone to lower our voices. We can recess briefly if needed."
Refusal to follow a ruling	"You may appeal the ruling, but until then we must proceed in an orderly way."
Public delegation becomes disrespectful	"You are welcome to share your views, but remarks must remain respectful and relevant."

Appealing a Chair's Ruling (Quick Guidance)

Most Procedural Bylaws allow a member to appeal a ruling of the Chair.

An appeal is a procedural mechanism, not a debate, and must be handled in accordance with the municipality's Procedural Bylaw, with guidance from the Clerk.

What Chairs Should Know

- Appeals are about process, not personalities
- The ruling stands until Council decides otherwise
- Debate on an appeal (if permitted) is limited and tightly controlled
- The Chair remains neutral and relies on the Clerk for advice

Chair Scripts for Appeals

When an appeal is raised: "An appeal of the Chair's ruling has been raised. I will ask the Clerk to advise on the applicable process."

If debate begins to stray: "Discussion on an appeal is limited to the procedural question before Council. Personal comments are out of order."

If the ruling is upheld: "Council has upheld the ruling of the Chair. We will now proceed."

If the ruling is overturned: "Council has not upheld the ruling. We will proceed in accordance with the decision of Council."

Managing Conflict Between Members

Conflict is expected; unmanaged conflict damages governance.

The Chair must:

- stop crosstalk immediately
- require comments through the Chair
- redirect debate to the issue, not personalities
- treat all members consistently and neutrally
- escalate using the behaviour ladder when needed
- call a recess if emotions prevent productive debate

When Behaviour Exceeds Meeting Management

Some conduct cannot be resolved within the meeting and must follow formal processes.

Indicators include:

- repeated harassment or personal attacks
- discriminatory, hateful, or threatening remarks
- targeted behaviour toward staff
- refusal to follow Chair rulings
- defamatory statements
- conduct creating a hostile or unsafe environment

Chair's responsibilities:

- stop the behaviour immediately
- protect affected individuals
- ensure the incident is documented
- avoid debating the conduct during the meeting
- indicate referral to the appropriate formal process

Key Governance Principle: Procedural authority manages the meeting; Codes of Conduct address patterns.

Principles for Fair and Transparent Behaviour Management

Effective Chairs:

- intervene early and proportionately
- apply rules consistently and without bias
- focus on behaviour, not viewpoints
- escalate only when necessary and permitted by bylaw
- remain calm and procedural
- ensure serious warnings and rulings are documented
- never use procedure to punish dissent

Bottom Line: Clear procedure, applied firmly and fairly, protects Council, staff, and public trust.

Part 7: Protecting Staff at the Council Table

A Core Legal, Ethical, and Governance Duty of Every Mayor/Chair

Municipal staff play a critical role in informed, accountable decision-making. They provide professional, impartial advice to Council and do not participate in political debate. The Chair has a clear responsibility to ensure staff are treated with respect and are not exposed to conduct that undermines their safety, dignity, or professional role.

When staff feel targeted or pressured, the municipality faces increased human resources, legal, and reputational risk, and the quality of advice declines. Protecting staff is therefore not discretionary – it is a legal, ethical, and governance obligation that directly affects workplace safety, decision quality, and public trust.

The Chair's Duty to Protect Staff

The Chair must actively prevent staff from being subjected to:

- harassment, intimidation, or abusive conduct
- personal attacks or challenges to integrity
- hostile or aggressive questioning
- political pressure or public blame
- inappropriate operational direction

Failure to intervene may expose the municipality to workplace safety complaints, Human Resource or Code of Conduct processes, and reputational risk.

Key Governance Principle: Protecting staff is a statutory duty – not a courtesy.

Intervening in Hostile or Improper Questioning

Staff may clarify facts and explain professional advice. They must not be interrogated, cross-examined, or drawn into political conflict.

The Chair must intervene when questioning becomes:

- accusatory, sarcastic, or confrontational
- focused on motives or credibility rather than information
- rapid-fire or entrapment-style
- dismissive of expertise or delivered in an aggressive tone
- operationally detailed beyond Council's governance role

Chair Scripts

- "Questions to staff must remain respectful and for clarification only. This line of questioning must stop."
- "Staff are not here to defend themselves. Please limit questions to factual clarification."
- "Cross-examination is not permitted. Please direct questions through the Chair."

Additional staff-protection scripts and escalation guidance are provided in [Appendix A](#)

Key Governance Principle : When questioning becomes hostile, the Chair must intervene immediately.

Redirecting Operational Drift

When questions shift from governance into operations, the Chair must redirect to protect staff and preserve role boundaries.

Operational drift includes:

- probing day-to-day decision-making
- requesting internal operational detail
- attempting to direct staff publicly
- discussing employee performance or personnel matters

Chair Scripts

- "Operational direction flows through the CAO. Please frame your question at the policy level."
- "That question is operational. Staff can provide high-level context, but operational decisions rest with the CAO."
- "If Council wishes to change direction, a motion is the appropriate mechanism."

Key Governance Principle: If a question sounds operational, redirect it.

Responding When Staff Appear Uncomfortable

Staff may not explicitly state discomfort. The Chair must read the room and act proactively.

Indicators include:

- hesitation or guarded responses
- looking to the CAO or Chair for support
- visible strain or anxiety
- pressure toward political commentary

Chair Responses

- pause the exchange
- redirect the question to the CAO
- restate boundaries around staff roles
- allow written follow-up where appropriate
- call a brief recess if tone escalates

Chair Script

- "I'm going to pause here. That question is inappropriate, and I am redirecting it to the CAO."

Key Governance Principle: If staff appear uncomfortable, intervene – don't wait.

Follow-Up After Difficult Meetings

Protection does not end at adjournment. The Chair should debrief privately with the CAO following meetings where staff were pressured or targeted.

Debriefing may include:

- documenting concerning exchanges
- assessing staff well-being and supports
- determining whether referral under a Code of Conduct is required
- identifying procedural adjustments for future meetings

Chair Script

- "Let's debrief on that exchange to ensure your team feels supported and any follow-up is addressed."

Key Governance Principle: Consistent follow-up prevents recurrence and strengthens trust.



Part 8: Managing Public Delegations & High-Risk Files

Chair Actions for High-Pressure Public Participation

Public delegations and high-profile files often bring heightened emotion, misinformation, and public scrutiny. The Chair's role is to ensure participation occurs within a fair, structured, and respectful process, while protecting staff, Council, and the integrity of decision-making.

Setting Clear Expectations for Delegations

Before delegations begin, the Chair must clearly state the rules of participation. Doing so reduces escalation and supports consistent enforcement.

At the outset, the Chair should confirm:

- time limits for speakers
- that remarks must be respectful and relevant to the item
- that personal, defamatory, or discriminatory comments are not permitted
- that Council questions are for clarification only
- that staff will not be questioned directly
- that audience disruptions are not permitted

Chair Script

"Delegations are welcome. Comments must remain respectful and relevant to the item before Council. Council questions are for clarification only. Personal or defamatory remarks are out of order."

Additional delegation management and interruption scripts are located in [Appendix A](#)

Keeping Delegations Focused on the Item

Delegations may drift into grievances, operational complaints, or political messaging. The Chair must redirect promptly and neutrally.

Chair Actions

- bring speakers back to the agenda item
- redirect operational matters to administration outside the meeting
- stop campaign-style or irrelevant commentary
- prevent delegations from reframing the issue before Council

Chair Scripts

- "Please focus your comments on the item before Council."
- "Operational matters can be followed up with administration outside this meeting."

Key Governance Principle: Delegations inform the decision – they do not redefine it.

Stopping Personal or Harmful Remarks

The Chair must interrupt immediately when delegation comments cross established boundaries.

Intervene when remarks:

- allege wrongdoing or corruption
- attack staff or Council integrity
- present unsubstantiated claims as fact
- target private individuals
- include discriminatory or hateful language

Chair Scripts

- "I'm going to stop you there. Personal or harmful remarks are not permitted."
- "Please focus on the issue, not individuals."

Managing Audience Behaviour

Audience behaviour can quickly affect tone and order. The Chair must intervene early and consistently.

Chair Actions

- remind the audience of conduct expectations
- stop applause, interruptions, or commentary
- pause or recess the meeting if tension escalates
- request security support when required

Chair Scripts

- "Audience participation must remain silent. Disruptions are not permitted."
- "If disruptions continue, we will recess."

Council Questions to Delegations - Clarification Only

To ensure fairness, neutrality, and procedural integrity, Council interaction with delegations is limited to questions of clarification. This approach ensures that all delegations are treated consistently, prevents debate during public presentations, and supports orderly decision-making later in the meeting when matters are properly before Council.

Questions should be factual, concise, and directed through the Chair. Council members should avoid commentary, advocacy, or expressions of opinion at this stage of the process.

Questions to Delegations

Permitted	Not Permitted
<ul style="list-style-type: none">✓ clarifying facts✓ requesting explanation of points raised	<ul style="list-style-type: none">✗ debating or arguing with the speaker✗ challenging motives✗ attempting to persuade or correct✗ pressuring through repeated questioning

Chair Scripts

- "Questions are for clarification only."
- "This is not a debate with the delegation."

When to End a Delegation Early

Ending a delegation is appropriate when conduct disrupts the meeting or undermines safety or fairness.

End a delegation when there is:

- personal, defamatory, or discriminatory behaviour
- refusal to stay on topic or follow rulings
- harassment of staff or Council
- escalating or unsafe dynamics

Chair Scripts

- “Your comments are out of order, and I am ending this delegation.”
- “We will now move to the next speaker.”

Key Governance Principle: Ending a delegation protects the integrity of the meeting.

Debriefing After High-Pressure Meetings: Chair-CAO Debrief

Following contentious meetings or hearings, the Chair should debrief privately with the CAO/Clerk to discuss how the processes can be improved for the next time.

Debrief Focus

- whether staff were targeted or uncomfortable
- misinformation requiring follow-up
- security or crowd-management issues
- whether procedural tools were sufficient
- potential Code of Conduct considerations

Key Governance Principle: Debriefing supports staff, improves future meetings, and reduce recurrence.

Statutory Hearings & High-Risk Files

Files such as rezonings and statutory hearings require heightened precision.

Chair Actions

- clearly outline the statutory process at the start
- ensure equal treatment of all speakers
- keep comments tied to applicable criteria
- prevent inflammatory or irrelevant remarks
- pause to consult the Clerk when uncertain
- ensure deliberation occurs only after the hearing is closed

Chair Script

- “This is a statutory public hearing. I will outline the required process before we begin.”

Key Governance Principle: A flawed statutory process can invalidate the decision – precision matters.

Part 9: Leading Difficult, Emotional, or High-Profile Meetings

Strategies for Maintaining Control, Clarity, and Public Trust

Contentious meetings rarely fail because of the issue itself—they fail due to insufficient preparation, unclear expectations, or delayed intervention. High-risk meetings require more structure, clarity, and intentional leadership than routine sessions. This section provides practical guidance for leading emotionally charged environments with calm authority and procedural confidence.

Anticipating Tension & Preparing Scripts

Effective Chairs prepare for difficult meetings long before the agenda item begins.

Before the meeting, review:

- the item's history and level of public interest
- anticipated delegations and their tone
- misinformation circulating in the community
- advocacy groups or organized campaigns
- operational impacts on staff
- expected emotional responses
- whether added security or legal counsel is required
- potential amendments or procedural challenges

Prepare short scripts in advance for:

- opening expectations
- behavioural or decorum reminders
- interruption and redirection
- staff-protection statements
- procedural explanations (especially for statutory hearings)
- transitions, summaries, and closings

Key Governance Principle: Anticipation, not reaction, build confidence and control.



Opening Statements for Difficult Items

A purposeful opening statement frames the tone and expectations before discussion starts.

Use one when an item is:

- highly emotional or polarizing
- related to zoning, infill, expropriation, or major capital projects
- linked to misinformation or significant social media engagement
- likely to draw large public attendance
- connected to sensitive issues (e.g., safety, children, neighbourhood change)

An effective opening statement should:

- acknowledge strong community interest
- reinforce respectful conduct
- outline procedural steps and time limits
- clarify how and when Council will ask questions
- signal early intervention if decorum declines
- reassure the public that all voices will be heard
- distinguish public participation from Council deliberation

Sample Script:

"Before we begin, I want to acknowledge that this item has generated strong feelings in the community. We will follow our required process, and all comments must remain respectful, focused on the issue, and directed through the Chair. Personal or defamatory remarks will not be permitted. Everyone will have an opportunity to be heard, and Council will debate the item only after the public portion is closed."

Managing Emotions in the Room

Emotional energy influences behaviour and decision-making. Chairs must stay attentive to shifts and intervene early.

Signs of rising tension:

- raised voices or sharper tone
- sarcasm or dismissive comments
- audience murmuring or reactions
- agitated or aggressive body language
- interruptions or rapid speech
- visible discomfort from staff

Strategies:

- slow the pace to stabilize the room
- summarize to reduce confusion
- restate the motion to refocus debate
- use calm, neutral language
- interrupt respectfully but firmly when needed
- call a short recess before conflict escalates
- intervene immediately if staff become targets

Scripts:

"Let's pause for a moment – emotions are running high. We will maintain respect as we continue."

"Colleagues, let's bring our focus back to the motion before us".

Ensuring Clarity Before Voting on Controversial Motions

Clarity is essential for legitimacy. Confusion at the decision stage erodes public trust and exposes the municipality to risk.

The Chair must ensure:

- the motion is read clearly and accurately
- amendments are understood and their effects explained
- members know exactly what they are voting on
- misinformation is corrected before voting
- staff clarification flows only through the Chair
- the Clerk has the correct written version

When confusion arises:

- pause and reset
- restate the motion precisely
- request staff to restate key factual points
- confirm the order of amendments

Script:

“Before we vote, I want to ensure full clarity on the motion before us. I’ll ask the Clerk to please read the motion into the record.”

Why it matters

Clarity protects Council’s credibility, the process, and the final decision.

Using Recesses Effectively

A recess is a strategic leadership tool, not a sign of weakness.

Call a recess when:

- tension is escalating
- a member refuses to come to order
- delegations or audience members become disruptive
- staff appear uncomfortable
- legal or procedural guidance is needed
- misinformation must be corrected
- the meeting needs a reset to restore safety or clarity

Recess principles:

- short breaks prevent escalation
- they give members space to regroup
- they reduce defensiveness and public embarrassment
- they allow the Chair to consult with the CAO, Clerk, or legal counsel
- they signal strong, active meeting management

Script:

“We will take a five-minute recess to allow everyone to regroup. We will reconvene at ____.”

Working With Legal Counsel When Needed

Some issues require legal interpretation to protect the integrity of the meeting and ensure defensible decisions.

Legal support is particularly important for:

- statutory hearings
- expropriation or land-use matters
- planning and zoning decisions
- Charter or human rights considerations
- matters likely to be appealed
- conflicts of interest
- complex procedural questions

Chair responsibilities:

- consult legal counsel in advance for high-risk files
- recess the meeting if legal guidance is required
- seek advice privately to preserve privilege
- avoid proceeding when legal clarity is lacking
- ensure legal advice supports process integrity, not political advantage

Script:

"I will recess briefly to consult with legal counsel to ensure we proceed correctly."

Chairs are encouraged to pre-select and bookmark relevant scripts in [Appendix A](#) and consult the 'First 30 Minutes of a Contentious Meeting' checklist in Appendix G before high-risk meetings

Part 10: Legal, Ethical & Safety Obligations of the Chair

The Governance and Duty-of-Care Framework Behind Every Meeting

The Chair is not only a facilitator of discussion, they are a statutory decision-maker with a legal duty to ensure Council meetings are conducted lawfully, safely, and fairly.

This duty arises from provincial legislation, the municipal Procedural Bylaw, Codes of Conduct, workplace safety laws, and common-law obligations such as privacy and defamation. When these obligations are not met, decisions may be invalidated and the municipality exposed to legal, workplace, and reputational risk.

Key Governance Principle: The Chair's authority comes from legislation and duty of care – not personality, popularity, or political position.

Core Legal Responsibilities of the Chair

At every meeting, the Chair is responsible for ensuring that:

- the Procedural Bylaw and Municipal Act are applied consistently and impartially
- statutory processes, including public hearings, are followed exactly
- motions, debate, and voting comply with legislative requirements
- order is preserved and procedural breaches are addressed promptly
- Council conduct aligns with Codes of Conduct and respectful-workplace standards
- staff, members, and participants are protected from harassment, intimidation, or unsafe conduct
- privacy, confidentiality, and defamation risks are actively managed

When legal or procedural uncertainty arises, the Chair must pause proceedings and consult the Clerk, CAO, or legal counsel before continuing.

Why this matters

Procedural errors, unsafe environments, or unchecked misconduct can invalidate decisions, expose the municipality to liability, and undermine public trust.

When the Chair Must Pause or Stop the Meeting

Legal Duty-of-Care Triggers

Situation	Chair Action
Tension escalates rapidly or debate becomes hostile	Call a recess
A member refuses to follow Chair rulings	Call to order – Recess if unresolved
Discriminatory, harassing, or defamatory remarks occur	Interrupt immediately
Staff appear uncomfortable, targeted, or unsafe	Pause or recess
Audience or delegation behaviour becomes disruptive	Recess or remove individuals
Procedural or legal uncertainty arises	Pause and consult the Clerk
Aggressive behaviour persists after a recess	Adjourn the meeting
There is a credible threat to physical safety	Adjourn immediately
Security, the Clerk, CAO, or legal counsel advises stopping	Adjourn

Key Governance Principle: Stopping a meeting is not a failure – it is an exercise of legal responsibility.

Formal ruling and adjournment language suitable for the public record is provided in [Appendix C](#).

Relationship to Codes of Conduct and Formal Processes

Procedural authority allows the Chair to manage behaviour in the moment to protect the integrity of the meeting.

Codes of Conduct, Integrity Commissioner processes, and human resources mechanisms exist to address patterns of behaviour after the meeting.

When conduct crosses into harassment, discrimination, integrity concerns, or retaliation, the Chair must ensure the matter is documented and referred appropriately, without debating or adjudicating it during the meeting.

Procedural authority protects the meeting; Code processes protect the institution.

Top 10 Mistakes of Chairs - and What Effective Chairs Do Instead

Even experienced Chairs make mistakes, often under pressure, emotion, or public scrutiny. The difference between ineffective and effective Chairs is not perfection, but awareness, consistency, and the willingness to intervene early.

**Effective Chairs don't control outcomes – they protect the process.
The most common meeting failures are predictable and preventable.**

	The Mistake	The Better Practice
1	Debating from the Chair: Advocating or signaling personal views while presiding	Protecting the Process: Protect the process and step out of the Chair role if you wish to advocate
2	Waiting too long to intervene: Letting behaviour slide to “keep the peace”	Early, Proportional Intervention: Intervene early, calmly, and proportionately
3	Weaponizing procedure: Using rules selectively or strategically	Consistent and Neutral Application of Rules: Apply procedure consistently and neutrally – every time
4	Losing neutrality through tone or body language: Eye-rolling, sighing, visible frustration	Calm and Composed Leadership: Be the calmest person in the room
5	Allowing staff to be drawn into political debate: Permitting cross-examination or personal challenges	Protecting Staff and Redirecting Debate: Redirect questions and protect staff immediately
6	Failing to clarify the motion: Allowing debate when members aren't clear what's being decided	Clarifying Before Deciding: Restate the motion and amendments before debate or voting
7	Letting debate drift off topic: Allowing operational detail, grievances, or side issues	Anchoring Debate to the Motion: Anchor discussion to the motion on the floor
8	Avoiding recesses when tension rises: Pushing through conflict to “get it done”	Strategic Use of Recesses: Use recesses strategically to reset and restore order
9	Taking behaviour issues personally: Responding emotionally or defensively	Procedural, Not Personal, Response: Address behaviour procedurally, not personally
10	Forgetting the Chair sets the culture: Assuming decorum will self-regulate	Modeling the Culture You Expect: Model respect, consistency, and calm leadership

Case Study: When Chair Leadership Fails - Loss of Neutrality and Process Breakdown

Context

Council was meeting to consider a high-profile budget adjustment late in the fiscal year. Public interest was high, media were present, and the issue had been discussed extensively outside the chamber.

Chair Actions

The Chair used the opening remarks to justify the agenda and signal personal support for the proposal. During debate, the Chair selectively enforced speaking rules, limited questions that challenged the proposal, and intervened inconsistently when members raised Points of Order. Requests to pause or recess were declined in an effort to “keep things moving.”

Outcome

Members questioned the fairness of the process. Debate became procedural rather than substantive. A ruling was appealed and overturned, creating visible division. The meeting ended without a clear decision, and the municipality faced public criticism about transparency and governance.

Key Lesson

When the Chair abandons neutrality, the process – not the issue – becomes the conflict.



Appendix "A": Chair's Quick-Reference Script Library

Short, ready-to-use lines for Chairs to deploy in real time.

How to Use Appendix "A"

Council meetings move quickly. This Appendix is designed to support you in real time, when pressure is high and decisions must be made calmly, fairly, and lawfully.

You do not need to memorize these scripts, you only need to know where to find them.

What This Appendix Is

Appendix A is a practical tool, not a rulebook. It provides neutral, ready-to-use language to help you:

- Maintain order and fairness
- Protect staff and the public
- Enforce procedure without escalating conflict
- Respond confidently when challenged or unsure

The scripts are intentionally short so they can be used in the moment.

What This Appendix Is Not

This Appendix is not legal advice, a replacement for your Procedural Bylaw, or a limitation on your discretion as Chair.

You may adapt wording to suit your municipality's terminology and meeting context.

How to Use This Appendix During a Meeting

- Use the **first table** when something goes wrong in the moment and you need immediate wording to regain control.
- Use **the responsibility and authority table** when behaviour feels uncomfortable or borderline and you want reassurance that intervention is appropriate.
- Use the **procedural authority table** when a ruling is challenged or you need to anchor your decision in the bylaw or legislation.
- Use **the delegation scripts** when public comments cross boundaries or attempt to debate Council.
- Use **the escalation table** when behaviour persists, warnings are ignored, or safety, decorum, or legality are at risk.
- Use **the safe scripts** when you need time to consult the Clerk or CAO, or when pausing is the wisest leadership move.

Final Reminder

You are not expected to be perfect. You are expected to be fair, calm, and consistent.

Using neutral language lowers temperature, protects the municipality, reinforces public trust, and strengthens Council culture over time. This Appendix exists to support you – one meeting at a time.

If THIS Happens → The Chair Says THIS

Short, neutral scripts for real-time intervention.

Situation	Sample Chair Script
A member interrupts another speaker	"Councillor, please allow the member to finish. You will have your turn to speak."
Members begin debating directly with each other	"All comments must be directed through the Chair. Please address your remarks to me."
Debate becomes personal or accusatory	"Let's keep comments focused on the issue, not individuals. Please reframe your remarks."
A member challenges or criticizes staff	"Operational matters and staff performance are not debated here. Please direct such concerns to the CAO outside this meeting."
A Councillor refuses to come to order	"Councillor, you are out of order. I am asking you to come to order immediately so we may continue."
A member challenges the Chair's ruling	"Under our Procedural Bylaw, the Chair's ruling stands unless overturned by Council. Shall the ruling be upheld?"
Staff appear uncomfortable or attacked	"We will pause here. Staff are not subject to cross-examination. Please ask questions through the Chair related only to the report."
A delegation becomes inappropriate	"I'm going to stop you there. Comments must remain respectful and focused on the item before Council."
The room becomes unruly (whispers, clapping, shouting)	"I will remind everyone in the gallery that silence is required. If disruptions continue, I will recess the meeting."
A member introduces misinformation	"For accuracy, I will ask staff to clarify the facts before we continue."
You need time to consult Clerk/CAO/Legal	"We will recess briefly to ensure we proceed correctly."
Emotions escalate sharply	"Let's pause. We will continue this discussion respectfully and at a measured pace."
Member attempts to revisit a decision after voting	"Council has already made a decision on this matter. If you wish to change it, you may bring a motion in accordance with the Procedural Bylaw."
Audience disruption	"Applause and comments are not permitted. Please allow the meeting to continue respectfully."
Discriminatory or hateful language	"Those remarks are not permitted in this chamber. Please rephrase or conclude your presentation."

Additional Chair Scripts for Virtual or Hybrid Meetings

Situation	Sample Chair Script
A participant speaks without being recognized	"Please wait to be recognized before speaking. I will manage the speaking order."
A virtual participant interrupts or speaks over others	"I'm going to mute microphones to ensure one speaker at a time."
A participant continues to interrupt after direction	"I am muting your microphone to allow the meeting to proceed."
A virtual participant becomes disrespectful	"Remarks must remain respectful. Continued conduct of this nature may result in removal from the meeting."
Disruptive chat messages	"The chat function is for procedural purposes only. Inappropriate messages will result in chat privileges being disabled."
A participant refuses to comply	"You have been directed to comply with meeting rules. I will remove you from the meeting if the behaviour continues."
Technical confusion causes disruption	"We will pause briefly while staff assist. Please remain muted unless recognized."

Behaviour → What the Chair Must Do

A quick diagnostic linking behaviour to the Chair's required response.

Behaviour	Chair Responsibility	Required Intervention
Talking over others	Maintain order & fairness	Redirect → "Please allow the speaker to finish."
Personal attacks	Enforce decorum	Stop → Request rephrasing → Warning if repeated
Accusations of bias or integrity	Prevent conflict & defamation	Stop → Redirect → Document → Possible Code referral
Hostile questioning of staff	Protect staff safety	Intervene → Reframe → Redirect through CAO
Misusing procedure to obstruct	Maintain efficiency & fairness	Clarify rules → Decline improper motions

Behaviour	Chair Responsibility	Required Intervention
Refusing to follow ruling	Uphold Chair authority	Repeat ruling → Warning → Recess → Possible sanction
Audience or gallery disruption	Maintain a safe environment	Remind → Warning → Recess → Removal if necessary
Emotional escalation by members or public	Preserve professionalism & safety	Slow pace → Summarize → Recess before escalation
Discriminatory or harassing comments	Legal duty under OHS/harassment law	Stop immediately → Removal if needed → Document
Questions becoming hostile	Maintain order & fairness	Redirect → "I'm going to stop this line of questioning. Please reframe your question."

Procedural Problem → Rule to Cite

A fast index linking common procedural issues to the correct authority and Chair script.

Problem	Rule or Authority	Sample Script
Debate strays off topic	Procedural Bylaw: Debate must relate to the motion	"Please keep comments to the motion before us."
Improper amendment	Rules of amendments: must be germane	"That amendment is not related to the main motion and cannot be considered."
Motion is unclear	Chair ensures clarity before voting	"We will pause to restate the motion clearly before proceeding."
Member speaks without recognition	Chair controls the floor	"Councillor, you do not have the floor. Please wait to be recognized."
Member questions staff motives	Municipal Act + Workplace Harassment law	"Staff motives or performance are not topics for debate. Please proceed with questions relevant to the report."
Appeal of the Chair's ruling	Majority vote required	"Council will now vote on whether to uphold the Chair's ruling."

Behaviour	Chair Responsibility	Required Intervention
Public hearing rules violated	Statutory legislation (Planning Act, etc.)	"This is a statutory process. We must follow the required steps in order."
Conflict of interest arises	Provincial/Territorial Conflict of Interest legislation	"Before we proceed, I will remind members of their obligations under the Conflict of Interest legislation. If any member has a conflict, it must be declared at this time."
Delegation exceeds time/scope	Procedural Bylaw	"Your time has expired. Please conclude your remarks."

Delegation Issue → Intervention Script

Targeted scripts for managing delegations respectfully and lawfully.

Delegation Issue	Sample Chair Script
Personal attacks on members or staff	"I must stop you there. Personal comments are not permitted. Please speak only to the issue."
Defamatory statements	"Those comments cannot continue. Allegations about individuals are not permitted in this forum."
Off-topic remarks	"Please keep your comments focused on the matter before Council."
Attempt to debate with Council	"Delegations speak once. Council will discuss the item after all presentations."
Disclosure of private/staff information	"That is personal information and cannot be shared in this meeting. Please continue without referencing individuals."
Refusal to stop speaking	"Your time has concluded. If you do not stop, I will end your delegation."
Delegation becomes emotional or distressed	"Take a moment if you need it. When you're ready, please continue with comments relevant to the item."

High-Risk Situations - Chair Response Ladder

A unified escalation framework for any behavioural or procedural issue.

Issue	Sample Chair Script
Redirection	"Please return your comments to the motion."
Reminder of Expectations	"We must maintain respectful conduct."
Formal Warning	"If this behaviour continues, I will rule you out of order."
Out of Order Ruling	"You are out of order. Please stop speaking."
Request for Compliance	"I am asking you once more to come to order."
Suspension of Speaking Privileges	"You will not have the floor again on this item."
Recess	"We will recess for five minutes to restore order and ensure the meeting proceeds respectfully."
Removal (if authorized)	"Security, please escort the individual from the chamber."

When You're Unsure → Safe Scripts to Use

Neutral, risk-free language when the Chair needs time or clarity.

Uncertainty	Safe Script
Unsure of a procedural ruling	"To ensure accuracy, I will consult the Clerk. We will take a brief pause."
Unsure whether comments are defamatory	"Those comments approach personal allegations, which are not permitted. Please rephrase."
Unsure whether an amendment is in order	"We will pause to confirm whether this amendment complies with our bylaw."

Appendix "B": Procedural Rulings Every Chair Must Master: Points of Order, Privilege & Appeals

Clear definitions, when they apply, and exactly what a Chair should say in real time

How to Use Appendix "B"

Procedural rulings, such as Points of Order, Points of Privilege, and Appeals, require the Chair to act impartially, decisively, and in accordance with the Procedural Bylaw.

This table provides clear definitions and exact Chair language for the most common procedural rulings that arise during Council meetings. It is designed for real-time use, helping you:

- Recognize when a procedural tool is properly invoked
- Deliver clear, defensible rulings without debate
- Maintain control of the floor and the meeting record

Use this table only when a member formally invokes a procedural rule or appeals a ruling.

For broader behavioural management or informal interventions, refer to [Appendix A](#).

This table supports rulings that must withstand scrutiny from Council, the public, and the official record.

Procedural Action	Chair's Script (What to Say)
Point of Order	<p>"Councillor ___, I recognize your Point of Order. Please state your point."</p> <p>After hearing it: "My ruling is that the point is well taken." OR "My ruling is that the point is not well taken."</p> <p>If needed: "Debate must remain focused on the motion on the floor." OR "The member has the floor and may continue."</p>
Point of Privilege	<p>"Councillor ___, I recognize your Point of Privilege. Please state your concern."</p> <p>After hearing it: "The Point of Privilege is well taken. We will ___." OR "The Point of Privilege is not well taken, as it does not affect your ability to participate."</p>

Procedural Action	Chair's Script (What to Say)
Appeal of the Chair's Ruling	<p>"An appeal of the Chair's ruling has been made. The question before Council is: 'Shall the ruling of the Chair be sustained?' This is not debatable."</p> <p>Calling the vote: "Those in favour of sustaining the Chair's ruling?" "Those opposed?"</p> <p>Result: "The ruling of the Chair is sustained." OR "The ruling of the Chair is overturned."</p>
Multiple Points Raised at Once	<p>"One moment, please. I will recognize each member in turn. Councillor ____, you raised your point first."</p>
Invalid or Misused Point	<p>"That is not a valid Point of Order. We are returning to the debate." OR "That is not a Point of Privilege. Please reserve those for issues affecting your ability to participate."</p>
Chair Unsure How to Rule	<p>"I'm going to take a moment to consult with the Clerk." After consulting: "Thank you for your patience. My ruling is as follows.."</p>

Appendix "C": Chair Ruling Scripts – Quick Reference

These scripts are examples. Chairs should adapt wording to reflect their Procedural Bylaw and meeting context.

How to Use Appendix "C"

Formal Chair Rulings for the Official Record

Appendix C provides formal ruling language for situations where the Chair's words are intended to be clear, decisive, and defensible on the public record. These scripts are designed for moments when the Chair is making or restating a ruling that may be referenced in the minutes, reviewed by the public, or relied upon in future proceedings.

Use this table when:

- Making a formal procedural ruling
- Responding to or restating a Point of Order or Privilege
- Addressing misuse of procedure or repeated disruption
- Calling or responding to an appeal of the Chair's ruling
- Managing conflicts of interest or safety-related adjournments

The language in this table is intentionally direct and authoritative. It reflects the Chair's role as the guardian of process and ensures rulings are communicated consistently, without inviting debate or escalation.

These scripts are examples and may be adapted to align with your municipality's Procedural Bylaw and meeting context. For short, real-time interventions or de-escalation language, refer to [Appendix A](#).

Situation	Chair Ruling Script(s)
Calling the Meeting to Order	"I call this meeting to order. We will proceed in accordance with the Procedural Bylaw."
Maintaining Focus on the Motion	"The issue being debated is the motion currently on the floor."
Recognizing a Point of Order	"Please pause. A Point of Order has been raised. Councillor, please state your point."
Ruling on a Point of Order – Valid	"Thank you. That is a valid Point of Order. Debate must remain focused on the motion."

Situation	Chair Ruling Script(s)
Ruling on a Point of Order – Not Valid	"Thank you. That is not a Point of Order under the Procedural Bylaw. Debate will continue."
Recognizing a Point of Privilege	"A Point of Privilege has been raised. Councillor, please state your concern."
Ruling on a Point of Privilege	<p>"The concern raised affects a member's ability to participate. I will address this immediately."</p> <p>"Those remarks are out of order. Please withdraw or rephrase."</p>
Intervening in Personal or Inappropriate Remarks	"Comments questioning integrity or motives are out of order. Please focus on the issue before Council."
Redirecting Operational Direction	"Operational direction flows through the CAO. Please frame your question at the policy level."
Managing Repeated Procedural Misuse	"Procedural tools must be used in good faith. Let us remain focused on the substance of the motion."
Restating a Ruling	"For clarity, my ruling is based on the Procedural Bylaw. We will now proceed."
Appeal of the Chair's Ruling	<p>"The ruling of the Chair has been appealed. Council will now vote, without debate."</p> <p>"Those in favour of sustaining the Chair's ruling?"</p> <p>"Those opposed?"</p> <p>"The ruling is sustained / overturned."</p>
Conflict of Interest Declaration	<p>"Are there any declarations of conflict of interest?"</p> <p>"Thank you. The declaration is noted in the record."</p>
Removing a Member from Debate (If Authorized)	"You have been called to order. Please comply with the ruling so we may proceed."
Adjourning the Meeting for Safety	"For safety and legal reasons, this meeting is adjourned. We will reconvene at a later date."

Appendix "D": Pre, During, and Post Meeting Checklists

Council meetings do not succeed by chance. Order, fairness, and public confidence are the result of preparation, consistent leadership during the meeting, and thoughtful follow-up afterward.

This Appendix provides practical, phase-by-phase checklists to support the Chair, CAO, and Clerk before, during, and after Council meetings, particularly those that are complex, emotional, or high-risk. The checklists are designed to help leaders anticipate issues, intervene early when behaviour or procedure begins to deteriorate, and reflect constructively once the meeting has concluded.

These tools are not prescriptive rules. They are prompts to support professional judgment, reinforce role clarity, and ensure that meetings remain lawful, respectful, and focused on decision-making.

How to Use This Appendix

- Use the **Pre-Meeting Checklist** to prepare for agenda complexity, public participation, procedural risks, and staff protection.
- Use the **During-Meeting Intervention Checklist** as a quick reference when behaviour escalates, procedure becomes unclear, or immediate leadership action is required.
- Use the **Post-Meeting Debrief Checklist** with the CAO and Clerk to document concerns, support staff well-being, address procedural issues, and strengthen future meetings.

These checklists are intended to be used flexibly. Not every item will apply to every meeting. Their value lies in encouraging early awareness, calm intervention, and continuous improvement.

Key Governance Principle: Good meetings are prepared for. Great meetings are led.

Pre-Meeting Checklist

1) Agenda & Materials Review

- Reviewed full agenda and sequence of items
- Reviewed all staff reports & attachments
- Identified high-risk, emotional, political, or contentious items
- Checked for late items or materials requiring special handling
- Considered timing, length, and complexity of key items

Ask yourself:

- Will this item draw high public attendance?
- Where is misinformation likely to appear?
- What procedural complexities may arise?
- Is a statutory process required?

2) Pre-Meeting CAO/Clerk Briefings

With the CAO:

- Reviewed staff roles for each item
- Discussed operational, legal, or public-facing sensitivities
- Prepared responses to anticipated misinformation

With the Clerk:

- Reviewed procedural rules for key agenda items
- Clarified planned motions/amendments and vote structure
- Identified any point where Clerk may need to read a motion aloud

3) Delegations & Public Participation

- Reviewed delegations list and time limits
- Confirmed presentation/technology needs
- Determined procedures for late submissions
- Prepared opening remarks to set expectations for respectful behaviour

Plan for:

- How the Chair will open and close delegation remarks
- When questions are allowed and by whom

4) Legal, Legislative & Procedural Risk

- Any legal sensitivities identified
- Determine whether legal counsel should attend or be on call
- Confirm statutory requirements (public hearing, notice, etc.)

Resources ready:

- Procedural Bylaw
- Code of Conduct
- Relevant legislation or case law (if applicable)

5) Room, Technology & Security Readiness (In-Person, Virtual, or Hybrid)

Room / physical setting:

- Seating supports respectful interaction
- Security staff present if tension is expected
- CAO, Clerk, and presenters positioned appropriately

Technology:

- Microphones and presentations tested
- Livestream/recording confirmed
- Hybrid moderation tools ready (mute, waiting room, chat limits)

6) Chair's Personal Preparation

- Neutral scripts drafted for sensitive items
- Recess strategy considered (when and how to call one)
- Confident in ruling on Points of Order/Privilege
- Commitment to remain calm, neutral, and procedural

7) Optional Opening Statement for Contentious Items

Include:

- Expectations for respectful behaviour
- Reminder of rules of order and speaking protocol
- Explanation of statutory/legal requirements
- Reassurance that all voices will be heard

Example:

“Tonight, we will hear different viewpoints. We will keep our discussion respectful, focused on the issues, and guided by our Procedural Bylaw. All voices will be heard, and we will follow the required decision-making process.”

8) Final Touchpoints Before Gavel

- Brief check-in with CAO and Clerk
- Confirm who will speak to each item
- Review escalation plan for warning → point of order → recess
- Ensure all tech, livestream, and recording are functioning

During-Meeting Intervention Checklist

Use this quick guide when behaviour begins to deteriorate or when meetings become disorderly.

1. Early Behaviour Issues

- Redirect gently
- Remind members of decorum
- Clarify the motion before debate continues

2. When Behaviour Becomes Disrespectful

- Issue a formal warning
- Identify behaviour (not the person)
- Rely on the Procedural Bylaw
- Stop personal or accusatory comments immediately

3. Staff Protection

- Intervene if staff are targeted
- Redirect questions through the CAO
- Stop cross-examination
- Allow staff to finish their answers
- Call recess if staff appear unsafe or pressured

4. Amendments or Procedural Confusion

- Confirm what is being debated
- Request written wording for complex amendments
- Deal with one amendment at a time
- Consult Clerk if needed

5. Public Delegation Management

- Set expectations clearly
- Redirect off-topic comments
- Stop personal attacks
- Enforce time limits
- End delegation early if necessary under the bylaw

6. Escalation Sequence

- Warning
- Ruling out of order
- Request for compliance
- Suspend speaking privileges
- Recess
- Removal (if allowed by bylaw)

Post-Meeting Debrief Checklist

Used with the CAO and Clerk immediately after the meeting.

1. Behaviour Review

- Were any behaviours inappropriate or unsafe?
- Did any warnings or rulings require documentation?
- Should any behaviour be referred under the Code of Conduct?

2. Staff Well-Being

- Did staff feel protected and respected?
- Were any staff targeted or placed in uncomfortable situations?
- Does the CAO require follow-up with specific employees?

3. Procedural Review

- Were any procedural rulings unclear?
- Did amendments or motions cause confusion?
- Should any sections of the Procedural Bylaw be clarified?

4. Communication Needs

- Does the public need clarification about decisions?
- Are media requests expected?
- Should the Chair prepare a post-meeting statement?

5. Safety or Security Considerations

- Did crowd behaviour require additional support next time?
- Should security be engaged for future meetings?
- Were any comments threatening or potentially defamatory?

6. Personal Reflection (Chair)

- Did I remain calm and neutral?
- Did I intervene early enough?
- Did I rely consistently on the Procedural Bylaw?
- Are there scripts or approaches I can prepare better for next time?

Appendix "E": Common Pitfalls for Chairs – How to Avoid Them

Even experienced Chairs can unintentionally contribute to tension, confusion, or dysfunction at the Council table. The following pitfalls are among the most common across Canadian municipalities and can erode trust in both the meeting process and the Chair's leadership. Recognizing them, and knowing how to avoid them, is essential to maintaining credibility and ensuring meetings remain respectful, efficient, and fair.

The Behaviour or Risk	Pitfall	How to Avoid/Best Practice
Showing Frustration or Reacting Emotionally	<p>The Pitfall:</p> <p>Sighing, eye-rolling, raised voices, sarcasm, or visible irritation, even momentary, escalates tension and can make members feel dismissed or disrespected.</p>	<p>How to Avoid:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Maintain a neutral tone during all debate. • Pause before responding if emotions rise. • Call a brief recess to reset the tone if needed. • Separate frustration with behaviour from frustration with individuals. <p>Principle: The Chair's emotional discipline sets the ceiling for the entire meeting.</p>
Dominating Debate or Steering Outcomes	<p>The Pitfall:</p> <p>Using the authority of the Chair to subtly influence debate, comment excessively, or shut down dissenting views.</p>	<p>How to Avoid:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Speak last, where appropriate, to hear all perspectives before contributing, or step down from the Chair (where permitted) if actively advocating a position. • Avoid commentary that signals approval or disapproval. • Apply procedural rulings consistently, not strategically. <p>Principle: A neutral Chair protects the legitimacy of the decision.</p>
Allowing Meetings to Drift Off Track	<p>The Pitfall:</p> <p>Debate wanders from the motion, members repeat points endlessly, or side conversations take over.</p>	<p>How to Avoid:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Restate the motion when discussion strays. • Summarize and refocus as needed. • Use the speakers list to maintain order. • Redirect gently: "Let's return to the matter before us." <p>Principle: Early redirection prevents long and unproductive meetings.</p>

The Behaviour or Risk	Pitfall	How to Avoid/Best Practice
<p>Letting Poor Behaviour Slide</p>	<p>The Pitfall:</p> <p>Ignoring interruptions, personal attacks, accusatory questions, or disrespectful tone. Silence from the Chair is often interpreted as permission.</p>	<p>How to Avoid:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address inappropriate behaviour immediately. • Remind members of decorum expectations. • Make firm, respectful rulings. • Use stepped escalation if behaviour continues. <p>Principle: It is easier to intervene early than to repair escalated conflict later.</p>
<p>Failing to Protect Staff</p>	<p>The Pitfall:</p> <p>Allowing staff to be interrogated, blamed, or pulled into political debate. This undermines the CAO model and compromises staff safety.</p>	<p>How to Avoid:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Intervene when questions become personal or hostile. • Reinforce that all direction flows through the CAO. • Pause the meeting if staff appear uncomfortable. • Ensure staff can complete answers without interruption. <p>Principle: Protecting staff is a legal, ethical, and governance obligation.</p>
<p>Improvising Procedure “On the Fly”</p>	<p>The Pitfall:</p> <p>Inventing new rules mid-meeting or making inconsistent rulings, leading to confusion and mistrust.</p>	<p>How to Avoid:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Anchor every ruling in the Procedural Bylaw. • Consult the Clerk rather than guessing. • Apply rules the same way for all members. • Provide short explanations for rulings. <p>Principle: Predictability builds trust, even when rulings are unpopular.</p>
<p>Avoiding Conflict Instead of Managing It</p>	<p>The Pitfall:</p> <p>Hoping tension will dissipate on its own or allowing heated exchanges to continue unchecked.</p>	<p>How to Avoid:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Address behaviour, not personalities. • Interrupt escalating exchanges early. • Call a short recess when needed. • Use neutral, de-escalating language (“One speaker at a time...”). <p>Principle: Managing conflict is a leadership responsibility, not a disruption.</p>

The Behaviour or Risk	Pitfall	How to Avoid/Best Practice
Overlooking Role Clarity	<p>The Pitfall:</p> <p>Allowing members to direct staff, question staff credibility, or blur legislative and administrative roles.</p>	<p>How to Avoid:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Reinforce that Council governs collectively. • Restate that administrative leadership flows through the CAO. • Stop staff direction immediately. • Bring debate back to policy and governance. <p>Principle: Protecting roles protects your CAO, your staff, and your integrity as Chair.</p>
Rushing Complex Decisions	<p>The Pitfall:</p> <p>Pushing votes when issues are unclear, controversial, or not fully debated.</p>	<p>How to Avoid:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Ask if members need clarification before voting. • Restate the motion or amendment clearly. • Allow reasonable debate without enabling delay tactics. • Confirm staff have provided the necessary context. <p>Principle: A Chair who slows down at the right time improves decision quality.</p>
Not Preparing Thoroughly for the Meeting	<p>The Pitfall:</p> <p>Entering a meeting without understanding agenda items, expected challenges, or procedural risks.</p>	<p>How to Avoid:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Review the agenda thoroughly in advance. • Meet with the CAO or Clerk to flag potential issues. • Prepare neutral scripts for anticipated conflicts. • Identify where early intervention may be needed. <p>Principle: Preparation is the single strongest predictor of meeting success.</p>

Appendix "F": Chairing Virtual or Hybrid Meetings

Maintaining professionalism, procedural integrity, and respectful engagement in a digital environment

Virtual and hybrid meetings introduce unique risks: audio delays, technology failures, off-camera distractions, members speaking without recognition, and delegations joining from uncontrolled environments.

The Chair must compensate with heightened structure, clarity, and consistency. This section provides practical tools for leading orderly and professional digital meetings.

Meeting Management Area	Chair Responsibilities & Expectations	Chair Scripts/ Sample Language
<p>Establishing Digital Decorum at the Start</p>	<p>A virtual meeting requires a stronger opening than an in-person meeting.</p> <p>The Chair should state expectations explicitly:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • microphones muted unless recognized • use the raised-hand function for speaking requests • avoid speaking over others due to audio lag • cameras on if required by policy • maintain professional backgrounds and minimize distractions • direct all comments through the Chair • be patient with minor technical delays 	<p>Opening Script</p> <p>“Before we begin, please keep microphones muted until recognized, use the raised-hand function to request the floor, and direct all comments through the Chair. Because of audio delays, I will ensure each speaker is heard in order.”</p>
<p>Recognizing Speakers Fairly</p>	<p>Digital environments make it easy to speak without acknowledgment.</p> <p>The Chair must:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • rely on the raised-hand feature • verbally confirm speaking order • allow a brief pause for audio lag • intervene if members speak without recognition 	<p>Script</p> <p>“I see Councillor __, then Councillor __. Councillor __, you have the floor.”</p>

Meeting Management Area

Chair Responsibilities & Expectations

Chair Scripts/ Sample Language

Managing Interruptions and Cross-Talk

Interruptions escalate more quickly online due to timing delays.

Intervention Scripts

- “Please wait to be recognized before speaking.”
- “Councillor __, this is a reminder to use the raised-hand function.”

If it persists:

“Speaking out of turn disrupts the flow of the meeting. Please follow recognition protocols.”

Cameras, Muting and On-Screen Conduct

Digital decorum must match in-person expectations.

The Chair may direct muting when:

- a participant refuses to stop speaking
- background noise disrupts the meeting
- inappropriate comments occur

Cameras:

- request cameras on if required by bylaw or policy
- acknowledge legitimate technical issues

Common online decorum concerns:

- joining from a vehicle
- distracting filters or backgrounds
- exaggerated facial reactions while muted
- visible engagement in other activities

Script

“I’ll remind everyone to maintain professionalism on camera and keep backgrounds neutral.”

**Meeting
Management
Area**

Chair Responsibilities & Expectations

**Chair Scripts/
Sample Language**

**Handling
Technical Issues**

Technology failures must not compromise procedural fairness.

The Chair should:

- pause calmly when audio/video breaks
- avoid rushing someone through poor audio
- never proceed to a vote when a member is disconnected
- confirm reconnection during key items

Scripts

- “Your audio is breaking up; we will pause until the connection stabilizes.”
- “We cannot proceed with the vote until all members are reconnected.”

**Managing
Online Public
Delegations**

Virtual delegations increase accessibility but add unpredictability.

Expectations:

- delegations must follow the same decorum rules
- cameras may be required
- microphones remain off until recognized

Opening Script

“You will have five minutes for your remarks. Please keep comments respectful and focused on the issue. Personal or defamatory comments will result in your microphone being muted.”

If conduct becomes inappropriate:

“I’m going to stop you there. Please keep comments respectful.”

If repeated:

“This delegation is concluded due to breaches of decorum.”

Meeting Management Area	Chair Responsibilities & Expectations	Chair Scripts/ Sample Language
Managing Chat, Comments, and Emojis	<p>Digital features can create back-channel debate.</p> <p>The Chair should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • prohibit chat as a substitute for speaking • prevent private messaging from influencing debate • instruct members not to use emojis, reactions, or written commentary during proceedings 	<p>Script</p> <p>“Chat and reaction features will not be used for debate. All comments must be verbal and through the Chair.”</p>
Virtual Recesses	<p>Recesses help resolve:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • technology failures • escalating emotion • confusion during complex motions • uneven audio/video access 	<p>Script</p> <p>“We will take a brief recess to resolve the technical issue. Please remain logged in.”</p>
Hybrid Meeting Considerations	<p>Hybrid meetings require extra vigilance to prevent inequity.</p> <p>The Chair must ensure:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • in-room participants do not dominate • virtual members have equal recognition • microphones and screens are optimized so all participants can see/hear clearly • votes are taken in a format that records both in-room and virtual members 	<p>Script</p> <p>“I will ensure both in-room and virtual members are recognized in turn.”</p>
Privacy, FOIP/ATIP & Recording Considerations	<p>Virtual platforms can inadvertently expose personal information or create new records.</p> <p>The Chair should:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • remind participants that the meeting is recorded and subject to access laws • caution delegations not to share personal information • prevent screenshots, chat logs, or private messages from entering the public record 	<p>Script</p> <p>“I’ll remind everyone that this meeting is live-streamed and recorded. Please avoid referencing personal or confidential information.”</p>

Appendix "G": First 30 Minutes of a Contentious Meeting

Chair's Micro-Checklist

The first 30 minutes of a contentious meeting sets the tone for everything that follows. This checklist helps the Chair establish authority, protect staff, and reinforce respectful conduct before issues escalate.

Chair Reminder: You do not need to win the room. You need to lead the process.

Early, neutral intervention builds authority, reduces conflict, and protects the integrity of the meeting.

Minutes	Chair Actions & Focus
Before the Meeting (2-3 minutes)	Before calling the meeting to order: <input type="checkbox"/> Confirm with the Clerk and CAO: Anticipated flashpoints, delegations, or misinformation Any procedural or legislative sensitivities Signals to use if a pause or recess is needed <input type="checkbox"/> Review key scripts (Appendix A): Redirection Staff protection Recess language <input type="checkbox"/> Ground yourself: Neutral tone Calm pace Procedural focus, not outcomes

Minutes 0-5

Calling the meeting to order:

- Call the meeting to order clearly and confidently
- Reinforce procedural authority: "We will proceed in accordance with the Procedural Bylaw."
- Set behavioural expectations early: "Respectful conduct is required from Council and the gallery."
- Signal your role:**
 - Guardian of process
 - Protector of staff
 - Neutral presiding officer

Minutes 5-15

Early agenda items:

- Watch for early warning signs:**
 - Interruptions
 - Side conversations
 - Personal remarks
 - Procedural misuse
- Intervene early and neutrally:**
 - "Please direct comments through the Chair."
 - "Let's keep remarks focused on the motion."
- Address misinformation promptly:**
 - "For accuracy, I will ask staff to clarify before we continue."
- Protect staff immediately if needed:**
 - "Staff are here to provide professional advice, not to debate."

Minutes 15-25

Delegations & public input:

- Clearly state delegation rules before the first speaker:**

Time limits
 Scope of comments
 No debate with Council

- Enforce boundaries calmly and consistently:**

"Please focus your comments on the item before Council."

- Stop inappropriate remarks immediately:**

"Personal or defamatory comments are not permitted."

- Watch gallery behaviour:**

Address disruptions early
 Do not allow escalation

Any time in first 30 minutes

If tension escalates:

- Slow the pace:**

"Let's pause and proceed at a measured pace."

- Reassert expectations:**

"We must maintain respectful conduct."

- Use procedural authority – not debate – to regain control**

- If necessary, recess early:**

"We will recess for five minutes to restore order."
 Early recesses prevent larger disruptions later.

Before moving deeper into the agenda

Final check:

- Is the tone respectful and controlled?
 Are staff protected from personal or hostile questioning?
 Is procedure being followed consistently?
 Does the room understand that boundaries will be enforced?

If yes → Proceed.

If no → Reset expectations or pause.

Appendix "H": Comprehensive Full Council Meeting Agenda Script for the Chair

Adapt to your Procedural Bylaw and applicable legislation

Agenda Item	What the Chair Says
1. Call to Order	"Good evening. I call this meeting of Council to order at [time]." "If you are participating virtually, please ensure your microphone is muted unless recognized."
2. Land Acknowledgement (if applicable)	"Before we begin, we acknowledge that we are gathered on the traditional territory of [Nation(s)]. We recognize and respect their enduring relationship to this land." (Chairs may adapt this acknowledgement to reflect local relationships or personal reflection, where appropriate.)
3. Approval of the Agenda	"Council has received the proposed agenda. Are there any additions or amendments?" (Pause.) "If there are no changes, may I have a motion to adopt the agenda as presented?" (Motion / seconder if required.) "All those in favour?" "Opposed?" "Carried."
4. Declaration of Conflict of Interest	"I remind members of their obligations under the applicable Conflict of Interest legislation. If any member has a conflict to declare, please do so now." (Pause.) If declared: "Thank you. Please leave the table and refrain from participating in discussion or voting on this matter."

Agenda Item	What the Chair Says
5. Presentations / Recognitions / Ceremonial Items (Optional)	<p>"We will now move to presentations and recognitions." (After presentation:) "Thank you for your presentation." If no debate required: "Council will now proceed to the next item."</p>
6. Public Question Period (if applicable)	<p>"We will now move to Public Question Period. Questions must be directed through the Chair and are limited to [time]. This is not a debate, but an opportunity to seek clarification." If response required: "Administration will respond at the appropriate time."</p>
7. Consent Agenda (if applicable)	<p>"Council has received the consent agenda items. Does any member wish to remove an item for separate consideration?" (Pause.) "Seeing none, may I have a motion to adopt the consent agenda as presented?" (Vote.) "Carried."</p>
8. Adoption of Minutes	<p>"Council has received the minutes of the [date] meeting. Are there any corrections or omissions?" (Pause.) "May I have a motion to adopt the minutes?" (Vote.) "Carried."</p>
9. Correspondence	<p>"Council has received the correspondence listed on the agenda. Is there a motion to receive?" If removal requested: "Please identify the item for separate discussion." (Vote to receive remaining correspondence.)</p>
10. Committee / Advisory Board Reports (if applicable)	<p>"We will now consider the report of the [Committee Name]." "Is there a motion to receive the report and its recommendations?" Invite debate. "Is Council ready for the question?" (Vote.)</p>

Agenda Item	What the Chair Says
11. Staff Reports / Business Items	<p>"We will now move to Item [number]: [Title]."</p> <p>"May I have a motion to receive the report?"</p> <p>(Motion.)</p> <p>"The motion is now on the floor."</p> <p>Invite debate:</p> <p>"Council members wishing to speak, please indicate."</p> <p>If debate drifts:</p> <p>"Let's return to the motion before us."</p> <p>If clarification required:</p> <p>"For clarity, the motion reads as follows..."</p> <p>Before vote:</p> <p>"Is Council ready for the question?"</p> <p>"All those in favour?"</p> <p>"Opposed?"</p> <p>"Carried."</p>
12. Bylaws	<p>"This is [first/second/third] reading of Bylaw [number]."</p> <p>"May I have a motion for [reading]?"</p> <p>(Vote as required.)</p> <p>If public hearing required:</p> <p>"This is the public hearing for Bylaw [number]. Are there any members of the public wishing to speak?"</p> <p>(Proceed per legislation.)</p>
13. Notices of Motion	<p>"Is there any Notice of Motion?"</p> <p>(If yes:)</p> <p>"The notice is recorded and will be considered at the appropriate meeting."</p>
14. Council Question Period (if applicable)	<p>"Are there any questions of administration?"</p> <p>Reminder if needed:</p> <p>"Questions should be governance-level and directed through the Chair."</p>

Agenda Item	What the Chair Says
15. Mayor / Councillor Reports (Optional)	"Are there any reports from members of Council?" (Keep concise and within scope.)
16. Strategic or CAO Update (if applicable)	"We will now receive the CAO's update." (Clarifying questions only.)
17. Closed Session	"Council will now consider a motion to enter closed session pursuant to Section [cite legislation]." "May I have a motion?" (Vote.) "Carried. Council will now move into closed session."
18. Rise and Report	"Council has returned from closed session. No decisions were made other than procedural direction to staff." (or appropriate reporting statement per legislation)
19. Confirming By-law (if required in your jurisdiction)	"May I have a motion for the Confirming By-law?" (Vote.) "Carried."
20. Adjournment	"If there is no further business, may I have a motion to adjourn?" (Vote.) "This meeting is adjourned at [time]. Thank you."

