

Chair's Quick Reference Toolkit

Scripts, Checklists & Tools for Leading Effective Council Meetings

Supporting Mayors & Chairs in
Canadian Municipalities

Companion Resource to: Leading Effective Council Meetings:
A Practical Guide for Mayors & Chairs in Canadian Municipalities

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About This Toolkit

This Quick Reference Toolkit is designed to support Mayors and Chairs in real-time meeting situations.

While the full guide “Leading Effective Council Meetings” provides the leadership foundation, governance context, and practical strategies for chairing effective meetings, this companion resource focuses on ready-to-use tools that can be accessed quickly before, during, and after Council meetings.

This toolkit includes:

- Practical scripts for common and challenging situations
- Procedural quick-reference guidance
- Pre-, during-, and post-meeting checklists
- Tools to support confident, fair, and consistent meeting leadership

These materials are intended to reduce uncertainty, support procedural confidence, and provide clear language when it matters most.

You are not expected to memorize these tools—only to know where to find them when needed.

Chair's Quick-Reference Script Library

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

How to Use This Chapter

Council meetings move quickly. This Chapter 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 Chapter Is

Chapter 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 Chapter Is Not

This Chapter 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 Chapter 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 Chapter 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."

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 This Chapter

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 [Chair's Quick-Reference Script Library](#).

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>

Chair Ruling Scripts – Quick Reference

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

How to Use This Chapter

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 [Chair’s Quick-Reference Script Library](#).

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."

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 Chapter 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 Chapter

- 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?

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
<p>Overlooking Role Clarity</p>	<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>
<p>Rushing Complex Decisions</p>	<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>
<p>Not Preparing Thoroughly for the Meeting</p>	<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>

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	<p>Interruptions escalate more quickly online due to timing delays.</p>	<p>Intervention Scripts</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • “Please wait to be recognized before speaking.” • “Councillor __, this is a reminder to use the raised-hand function.” <p>If it persists:</p> <p>“Speaking out of turn disrupts the flow of the meeting. Please follow recognition protocols.”</p>
Cameras, Muting and On-Screen Conduct	<p>Digital decorum must match in-person expectations.</p> <p>The Chair may direct muting when:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a participant refuses to stop speaking • background noise disrupts the meeting • inappropriate comments occur <p>Cameras:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • request cameras on if required by bylaw or policy • acknowledge legitimate technical issues <p>Common online decorum concerns:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • joining from a vehicle • distracting filters or backgrounds • exaggerated facial reactions while muted • visible engagement in other activities 	<p>Script</p> <p>“I’ll remind everyone to maintain professionalism on camera and keep backgrounds neutral.”</p>

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>

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 (Chair's Quick-Reference Script Library): 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.

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	<p>"Good evening. I call this meeting of Council to order at [time]."</p> <p>"If you are participating virtually, please ensure your microphone is muted unless recognized."</p>
2. Land Acknowledgement (if applicable)	<p>"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."</p> <p>(Chairs may adapt this acknowledgement to reflect local relationships or personal reflection, where appropriate.)</p>
3. Approval of the Agenda	<p>"Council has received the proposed agenda. Are there any additions or amendments?"</p> <p>(Pause.)</p> <p>"If there are no changes, may I have a motion to adopt the agenda as presented?"</p> <p>(Motion / seconder if required.)</p> <p>"All those in favour?"</p> <p>"Opposed?"</p> <p>"Carried."</p>
4. Declaration of Conflict of Interest	<p>"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."</p> <p>(Pause.)</p> <p>If declared:</p> <p>"Thank you. Please leave the table and refrain from participating in discussion or voting on this matter."</p>

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."

