

Mayor Intimidation

Location: British Columbia

Topic(s): Council Ethics, Council & Staff Relationships

Please describe the situation.

As a new CAO, the Mayor requested I join him to meet with a developer out of the office. At the meeting the developer expressed complaints about the development application and approvals process. The Mayor wanted the development to happen and without all the bureaucratic nonsense associated with it. I felt pressured by the Mayor to approve the development application without it going through its due process.

What was the current political environment? What factors led to the situation? What were the events that unfolded in this particular scenario?

The political environment was one where the elected officials, mainly the Mayor, made all the decisions and staff were there to assist only when asked. The Mayor made it very clear that staff were to be silent during the Council Meetings unless requested to speak. The Mayor also advised that all communications to Council need to go through him first. This culture was long established and the community had a reputation of going through several administrators.

How did you respond to or address the situation?

When I returned to the office I sent an email to all of Council advising them what had occurred at the meeting, the concerns I had ethically, as well as the requirements set out in the municipal bylaws. I was respectful in the email although made it very clear that Council directs the CAO through resolution or bylaw, not the Mayor through verbal communications. I also reminded Council that the processes I was following were the processes that they as Council collectively put in place. If they wanted to review or amend these bylaws we could do that collectively in an open meeting. It was well-received by Council and we discussed the situation at length at the next closed Council meeting. Basically, Council advised the Mayor to stop this type of behavior, which of course he did not.

What lessons did you learn from this scenario?

Above all stand up for ethics. Your integrity is everything and do not let anyone jeopardize this. Always be respectful and treat all members of Council the same, everyone gets equal information. Be strong, positive and always be willing to listen.

What advice would you give to someone going through a similar situation?

Integrity is your most important attribute and ethics are the most important aspect of good governance and relationships between the CAO and Council.

Always consider how your reaction and body language during communications with members of Council can affect your relationships. Emotional Intelligence is essential to success, it's not what you say, but how you say it. Always be respectful and aware of this.

If you would like more information regarding this case study, please contact:

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