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Town of Coalhurst

Code of Conduct Complaints Review

March 2020

Executive Summary

The Town of Coalhurst is a small community situated approximately ten minutes west of the City of Lethbridge on Highway 3. It is located along the major east-west transportation corridor in southern Alberta and is home to many people who work in the city to the east. The Town of nearly 2,500 people was originally incorporated in 1913 and has since gone through various iterations of incorporation and dissolution, with the current Town status being in place since 1979.

Coalhurst's 2018-2021¹ Town Council comprises five members, all but one of whom have considerable experience serving their local government.

Four of the current members were most recently elected in October 2017, with the fifth member joining Council through a by-election in February 2018. This iteration of Council has been together as a team for just over two years and it has approximately 18 months to go until the October 2021 municipal election.

Over this Council's duration, some negative issues have begun to emerge and evolve, to the point where Council chose to investigate itself in late 2019 following a formal complaint lodged by one Council member under the aegis of Council's Code of Conduct Bylaw (397-18).

Two investigations have followed that initial formal complaint, and this report comprises the result of the second investigation, one that has been conducted by an external company with no links to the Town of Coalhurst or any member of Council or staff.

After research, review and interviews, and allowing for procedural fairness, it is apparent that the Town Council has the rules in place it needs to conduct itself appropriately, but that the rules are not being followed in a reliable or consistent fashion.

Almost all of the issues brought to the Investigator's attention through a review of documentation and interviewing all members of Council and some members of staff are interpersonal.

Some individuals seem to have interpreted the Code of Conduct Bylaw, the Meeting Procedures Bylaw and Alberta's *Municipal Government Act (MGA)* in such a way that it was apparently necessary to lodge formal complaints against other individual Council members.

The Code of Conduct Bylaw does have a section that speaks to 'informal complaints' and the bylaw recommends that informal process be used first. The informal complaint section does not appear to have been used, and certainly not used nearly as much as the 'formal complaint' section by members of the current Council. In all, four of the five members of Council have been named in one or more formal complaints over the past year.

¹ Most of Council was elected in October 2017, with one member joining through a by-election in February 2018.



Fundamentally, intra-Council conflict and inappropriate comments need to stop, contrition need to be expressed, and changes to the meeting process need to be made. Town Council has all the rules it needs, but it has chosen not to follow them.

This has brought Council to a point where its effectiveness in providing good governance to the citizens, businesses and organizations that call Coalhurst home is significantly diminished. Town services continue to be offered, but the vibrancy and thoughtfulness that is expected of a Town Council is not supporting the delivery or providing governance-focused oversight.