

## **Rocky View Residents Need Accountability and Transparency**

### **What exactly do transparency and accountability mean to Rocky View residents?**

If residents want a council that truly represents their interests, we need a council that is both accountable and transparent. Transparency means the public understands how, when, and why decisions are made. Accountability is taking responsibility for those actions. For those seeking re-election, it is also being judged on those actions – that's what elections are for.

### **Why do transparency and accountability matter?**

Because they are the core elements of good governance that maintain public trust. That may sound idealistic, but it translates into residents' day to day willingness to accept the decisions made by their elected representatives.

### **Why is this an election issue in Rocky View?**

Because the current council majority (Kim McKylor, Al Schule, Jerry Gautreau, Greg Boehlke, and Dan Henn) has fallen seriously short on both transparency and accountability. Here are a few examples where this council's majority have failed residents on these critical elements of democracy.

### **Example # 1 – Suppressing questions about county spending**

The council majority has been extremely reluctant to discuss spending \$9.6 million to extend water and wastewater servicing to West Balzac. In July 2019, council asked for a preliminary engineering report to evaluate the proposed extension. In December 2019, the resulting study was accepted solely as information, meaning there was no decision to move the project forward. Samantha Wright was shut down when she asked questions about how the project was included in the 2020 capital budget without council direction.

Then this July, council approved the Rocky Creek development in West Balzac. Its initial phase will use all the capacity provided by the \$9.6 million expenditure. Again, when Wright and this time Kevin Hanson asked questions about cost recovery of the \$9.6 million and the fiscal impact of the development, their questions were shut down by the council majority.

Why was the council majority so unwilling to have questions about this "investment" raised in public? They spent \$9.6 million of ratepayers' funds without discussing the advantages/disadvantages of doing so. They also failed to provide for the recovery of these funds from developers.

### **Example # 2 – Questionable Approach for Assessing Technical Studies**

Most development applications require technical engineering studies. In the three recent controversial gravel pit applications – Lehigh Hanson, Mountain Ash and Burnco – it was made evident that Administration accepts applicants' studies at face value nor do they consider information submitted by residents for public hearings. This includes independent technical studies that contradict the applicants' technical assertions.

When this reality was drawn to council's attention at the Lehigh Hanson hearing, the majority saw no problem with it. This was reinforced at the Burnco Cochrane West hearing when Schule's "reason" for refusing to support Wright's request for a third-party review of technical studies was that conflicting technical reports were only to be expected and there was no need to go beyond what the applicant submitted.

Why is the council majority so unwilling to ensure they have an objective assessment of technical issues? What would be the downside other than such information might make it harder to approve some applications.

### **And a few other examples . . .**

Eliminating newspaper advertising – in late 2019, the council majority decided to stop advertising in the local newspaper. Without easy access to information, transparency suffers, and public input is reduced. This leads one to wonder what it is they are trying to hide.

A needlessly complicated budget process – it's our tax dollars being spent – understanding the process is important.

Massive numbers of information requests (FOIP) – much of the information that is readily available in other municipalities can only be obtained in Rocky View through expensive and time-consuming Freedom of Information requests. Why?

Inadequate reporting on utility operations – the County's water and wastewater systems don't cover their operating costs. However, the County's financial information doesn't disclose how much ratepayers are subsidizing these utilities through general revenues. Why not? Worse, how does council make decisions on such limited information.

### **What should you do about this?**

When you are deciding between candidates, consider where they stand on transparency and accountability. All candidates will undoubtedly say they support these concepts, some going so far as to use them as slogans. You need to ask candidates what they really mean. As the current council majority has repeatedly demonstrated, not everyone is truly committed to these – many are willing to ignore them when convenient.

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