

DISTRICT OF SEHELDT

Bylaw No. 619, 2023

A bylaw to establish a Council Code of Conduct

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**WHEREAS** the District of Sechelt Council deems it appropriate to, by bylaw, establish a Code of Conduct applicable to all members of Council.

**NOW THEREFORE**, District of Sechelt Council in open meeting assembled enacts as follows:

**Title**

This bylaw may be cited for all purposes as “District of Sechelt Council Code of Conduct Bylaw No. 619, 2023”

**PART 1 – COUNCIL CONDUCT**

**Purpose and Interpretation**

- (1) This Bylaw sets out the rules Council Members must follow in fulfilling their duties and responsibilities as elected officials.
- (2) The Residents of the District of Sechelt are entitled to have a fair, ethical and accountable municipal Council that acts in the public interest, conducting its business with integrity and in a fair, honest and open manner.
- (3) The public expects that Council Members will adhere to the highest standards of professional conduct. Honesty, integrity, respect, transparency, leadership, collaboration, and accountability are the core ethical values reflected in this Code. Council Members are expected to perform their functions of office faithfully and to the best of their knowledge and ability, in accordance with these core ethical values.
- (4) The provisions of this Bylaw are to be interpreted broadly and in a manner that is consistent with the *Community Charter*.
- (5) The intention of Council in enacting this Code is not to stifle Council Members or to limit their ability to fully perform the governmental and advocacy functions that their position entails, with all the vigour, flair and freedom that is typical of a well-functioning democratic institution, but instead to guide Council Members to undertake those functions in a manner that accords with sound ethical principles.

## Definitions

(6) In this Bylaw:

“**CAO**” means the Chief Administrative Officer for the District;

“**Committee Member**” means a person appointed to a committee, sub-committee, task force, commission, board, or other Council-established body under the *Community Charter* – Part 5, Division 4 – Committees, Commissions and Other Bodies, or the *Local Government Act*, but does not include a Council Member;

“**Council**” means the Municipal Council of the District of Sechelt;

“**Council Member**” means the Mayor and Councillors for the District;

“**District**” means the municipal corporate of the District of Sechelt;

“**FIPPA**” means the *Freedom of Information and Protection of Privacy Act* (British Columbia);

“**Investigator**” means the investigator appointed in section 54;

“**Resident**” means any person who would be eligible to vote in a municipal election in the District, along with any person holding a valid and subsisting business licence issued by the District; and

“**Staff**” means an officer or employee of the District, but does not include contractors.

## Application

(7) This Bylaw applies to all Council Members, inclusive of their actions in their capacity as members of various boards, committees, and other discretionary appointments.

(8) Unless otherwise provided, this Bylaw does not apply to a Council Member’s conduct in their personal life, except to the extent that such conduct reasonably undermines public confidence in District governance.

(9) For clarity, the provisions of this Bylaw apply without limitation to a Council Member’s use of personal and professional social media accounts.

### **Comply with all Laws**

- (10) Council Members shall comply with all applicable federal, provincial and municipal laws in the performance of their public duties, including but not limited to:
- (a) the *Local Government Act*;
  - (b) the *Community Charter*;
  - (c) FIPPA;
  - (d) the *Financial Disclosure Act*; and
  - (e) all bylaws and policies of the District.

### **General Conduct**

- (11) Council Members shall not engage with others, including Residents, Staff, Committee Members and other Council Members, in a manner that is abusive, bullying, intimidating or derogatory.
- (12) Council Members shall not use their office to attempt to gain personal benefits for themselves, their family members, their friends or business interests.

### **Respect for Process**

- (13) Council Members shall perform their duties in accordance with the policies, procedures and rules of order established by Council from time to time.

### **Interactions with Staff**

- (14) Council Members shall direct questions and inquiries regarding departmental issues to the CAO and shall refrain from contacting Staff directly, unless the communication is minor and for the purpose of seeking administrative clarity.
- (15) Council Members shall not interfere with, hinder, or obstruct Staff in the exercise or performance of their roles, responsibilities, powers, duties, or functions, nor shall they impair the ability of municipal officers or Staff to implement Council decisions in accordance with section 153 of the *Community Charter*.
- (16) Council Members shall not request or require that Staff undertake personal or private work for or on behalf of a Council Member.

- (17) Council Members shall not request or require that Staff engage in political activities, or subject them to reprisal of any kind for refusing to engage in such activities.

#### **Interactions with the Public and Media**

- (18) In an effort to promote respect and integrity for Council decision-making, Council Members shall not misrepresent the decisions of the Council, even if they disagree with the majority decision of Council.
- (19) Council Members shall refrain from making any disparaging comments about other Council Members.
- (20) When presenting their individual opinions and positions, Council Members shall explicitly state that it is their own personal view and that they do not represent Council or the District in those views.

#### **Conduct of Meetings**

- (21) Council Members shall prepare themselves for meetings, listen courteously and attentively to all discussions before the body, and focus on the business at hand. Council Members shall not interrupt other speakers, make personal comments not germane to the business of the body, or otherwise interfere with the orderly conduct of a meeting.

#### **Handling of Confidential Information**

- (22) Council Members shall keep information and records prohibited from release under section 117 of the *Community Charter* in strict confidence.
- (23) Without limiting the generality of section 22, Council Members shall not disclose:
- (a) information or records concerning the property, personnel, legal affairs, or other information of the District distributed for the purposes of, or considered in, a closed Council meeting;
  - (b) resolutions or Staff report contents from a closed meeting of Council unless and until a Council decision has been made for the information to become public; or
  - (c) details on Council's closed meeting deliberations or how individual Council Members voted on a question in a closed meeting.
- (24) Council Members shall not use confidential information to advance, directly or indirectly, their own personal, financial or other private interests.

### **Conflict of Interest**

- (25) Council Members shall not participate in discussion of a matter, or vote on a question in respect of that matter, if the Council Member has a conflict of interest.
- (26) In respect of each matter before Council, Council Members shall:
  - (a) assess whether they have a conflict of interest; and
  - (b) determine whether it is necessary to seek independent legal advice at their own cost, except where the CAO approves the cost, with respect to any situation that may result in a conflict of interest.
- (27) If a Council Member believes that they have a conflict of interest in respect of a matter in a Council or Committee meeting, the Council Member shall:
  - (a) prior to the matter's consideration, notify the Mayor or Chair of the meeting that they have a conflict of interest, stating in general terms why they consider that to be the case;
  - (b) leave any meeting if the matter is discussed and not return until the discussion has ended or voting has been concluded;
  - (c) refrain from discussing the matter with any other Council Member publicly or privately; and
  - (d) refrain from attempting in any way to influence the voting on any question in respect of the matter.

### **Gifts**

- (28) Council Members shall not accept a gift or personal benefit, except in accordance with section 105 of the *Community Charter*.
- (29) Council Members shall disclose a gift or personal benefit, received in accordance with section 105 of the *Community Charter*, as per section 106 of the *Community Charter*.

### **Use of Public Resources**

- (30) Council Members shall not use District public resources such as Staff time, equipment, technology, supplies, facilities or other property for private gain, personal purposes, or election-related purposes.

- (31) Council Members shall not undertake municipal election campaign related activities at the District Office or on other premises owned by the District during regular working hours, unless such activities are organized by the District.

## **PART 2 – INVESTIGATION, COMPLIANCE AND ENFORCEMENT**

### **Implementation**

- (32) As an expression of the standards of conduct for Council Members expected by the District, this Code is intended to be self-enforcing. This Code therefore becomes most effective when Council Members are thoroughly familiar with it and embrace its provisions. For this reason, this Code shall be provided as information to candidates for Council.

### **Complaint Procedure**

- (33) If a Council Member believes that they have observed another Council Member engaging in conduct that would breach this Bylaw, they must attempt to resolve the complaint directly with the other Council Member, if possible, prior to submitting a complaint under section 34.
- (34) Subject to section 33, a Council Member, Committee Member or Staff member may submit a complaint to the Mayor, CAO or Corporate Officer.
- (35) A complaint must be in writing, must be submitted within 60 days of the alleged breach, and must include, with sufficient detail:
- (a) the name of the complainant;
  - (b) the name of the respondent Council Member(s);
  - (c) the conduct that the complainant alleges was in breach of the Code;
  - (d) the date of the alleged conduct;
  - (e) the parts of the Code the alleged conduct breached;
  - (f) the basis for the complainant's knowledge of the conduct; and
  - (g) if a complaint is submitted by a Council Member, whether the Council Member attempted to resolve the complaint informally under section 33.

- (36) A complaint may be accepted notwithstanding that it does not comply with all of the requirements of section 35, if the CAO or the Corporate Officer determines that there has been substantial compliance or if the circumstances otherwise warrant acceptance.
- (37) A complaint submitted outside the time limits set out in section 35 must be rejected, except that the CAO or Corporate Officer may grant an extension of no more than 30 further days if the circumstances of the complaint are sufficiently serious.
- (38) In an election year, complaints submitted from the first day of the nomination period to the general voting day must be accepted and held in abeyance until after the new Council has taken office. At that time, complaints shall only proceed if they relate to a Council Member who was re-elected in that election year. For certainty, if the Council Member who is the subject of the complaint is not re-elected, the complaint must be rejected.

#### **Preliminary Assessment**

- (39) On receipt of a complaint, the Mayor shall immediately refer the matter to the District Solicitor.
- (40) On receipt of a complaint, the CAO or Corporate Officer shall conduct a preliminary assessment of the complaint or forward the complaint to the District's Solicitor to conduct a preliminary assessment. If the CAO, Corporate Officer or Solicitor determines that any of the following circumstances apply, then they must notify the complainant and respondent Council Member in writing that the complaint will be closed, stating the reasons for the closure:
  - (a) the complaint is not with respect to a breach of this Bylaw;
  - (b) the complaint is frivolous, vexatious, or not made in good faith;
  - (c) the complaint would be more appropriately addressed through another process;
  - (d) the complaint was not in compliance with sections 34 and 35, and the respondent Council Member will be prejudiced by the complainant's failure to comply;
  - (e) the complaint concerns the same subject matter as a previous complaint that has already been accepted under this section, and it is not necessary to expand that original complaint or add the new complainant;
  - (f) the complainant wishes to withdraw the complaint, and it would be appropriate to allow the complaint to be withdrawn;

- (h) the complaint was submitted by a Council Member, and the Council Member ought to have first attempted to resolve the complaint informally under section 33; or
  - (g) there are no possible grounds on which to conclude that a violation of this Bylaw has occurred.
- (41) Once a complaint is accepted under section 40,
- (a) the Corporate Officer or CAO must refer the complaint to the Solicitor, if not already referred under section 40, for a determination under subsection (b); and
  - (b) the Solicitor must then determine whether the complaint requires a formal investigation or whether the complaint may be resolved informally.
- (42) If the Solicitor receives multiple complaints concerning the same matter, the Solicitor must proceed with the first complaint accepted, but may expand the complaint and/or add complainants for the purpose of seeking resolution of the complaint.

### **Criminal Conduct**

- (43) If, at any stage in the complaint procedure, the CAO, Corporate Officer, Solicitor or Investigator determines that there are reasonable grounds to believe that there has been a contravention of the *Criminal Code*, or learns that there is an ongoing police investigation into the conduct that gave rise to the complaint, then they must immediately refer the matter to the appropriate authorities and suspend any investigation into the complaint until any resulting police investigation and charge have been finally disposed of, and shall report the suspension to Council, the complainant, and the respondent Council Member.
- (44) For certainty, a complaint must be suspended while the respondent is on a mandatory leave of absence under section 109.3(1) of the *Community Charter*, and may be recommenced only once the mandatory leave of absence ends pursuant to section 109.3(1)(b) of the *Community Charter*.

### **Disqualification Proceedings**

- (45) If, at any stage in the complaint procedure, the CAO, Corporate Officer, Solicitor or Investigator determines that:
- a. the subject-matter of the complaint is being addressed in a disqualification proceeding commenced under section 111 of the *Community Charter*; or

- b. the complainant could commence a disqualification proceeding under section 111 of the *Community Charter* in relation to the matter that is the subject of the complaint

the complaint must immediately be suspended until the proceeding under subsection (a) has concluded or the time-period within which the complainant could commence a proceeding under subsection (b) has expired.

- (46) The CAO, Corporate Officer, Solicitor or Investigator that has suspended a complaint under section 45 may, if

- (a) the Council Member who is subject to the complaint has not been disqualified from office by the British Columbia Supreme Court; and

- (b) it would be in the public interest to do so,

re-commence the complaint upon the conclusion of a disqualification proceeding or the time-period within which a disqualification proceeding could be filed has expired.

#### **Informal Resolution**

- (47) Where the Solicitor has determined that the complaint may be resolved informally, the Solicitor may, at their discretion, either attempt to resolve the complaint directly, or refer the complaint to:

- (a) the Mayor, if the complaint is made by a Council Member, unless the complaint is against the Mayor, in which case the complaint will be referred to the Deputy Mayor; or

- (b) the CAO, if the complaint is made by a Staff member.

- (48) When determining whether the complaint may be resolved informally, the Solicitor may consider culturally appropriate or transformative or restorative justice approaches, and may engage a third-party mediator or facilitator to assist for this purpose.

- (49) Where the Solicitor has referred the complaint in section 47, the Mayor or CAO, as the case may be, may agree to assist in resolving the complaint directly, or may appoint a third party to assist in resolving the complaint at their discretion.

- (50) The person assisting in the informal resolution of a complaint will assess the suitability for settlement or resolution on an ongoing basis and may decline to assist at any point.

- (51) The complainant or respondent Council Member may decline to participate in an informal resolution at any time.

- (52) If the complaint is resolved informally by someone other than the Solicitor, the person assisting in resolving the complaint must notify the Solicitor in writing of the terms of the resolution, upon receipt of which, the Solicitor must close the complaint.
- (53) If the person assisting in the informal resolution of a complaint declines to assist, the complainant or respondent Council Member declines to participate, or 30 days has passed since the determination in section 41 was made by the Solicitor to resolve the complaint informally, then the complaint shall be referred in accordance with section 54.

#### **Referral to Third-Party Investigator**

- (54) If the Solicitor determines that the complaint requires a formal investigation under section 41, or in the event that informal resolution is unsuccessful, they shall refer the complaint to a neutral and independent third-party Investigator of their choosing to conduct an investigation and notify the complainant and respondent Council Member of the referral.
- (55) The Investigator shall, at all times during an investigation, have all of the same powers to dismiss a complaint on a preliminary basis as set out in section 40.
- (56) An Investigator, once retained, may only be dismissed for cause.

#### **Formal Resolution**

- (57) Once retained, the Investigator shall deliver the complaint to the respondent Council Member, along with a request that the respondent Council Member provide a written response to the complaint, together with any submissions that the respondent Council Member chooses to make, within 10 days, subject to the Investigator's discretion to reasonably extend the timeline.
- (58) The Investigator may, at their discretion, deliver the respondent Council Member's written response and submissions to the complainant and request a reply in writing within 10 days, subject to the Investigator's discretion to reasonably extend the timeline.
- (59) The Investigator may:
  - (a) speak to anyone relevant to the complaint;
  - (b) request disclosure of documents relevant to the complaint; and

- (c) access any record in the custody or control of the District, within the meaning of FIPPA, with the exception of records subject to solicitor-client privilege.
- (60) The Investigator has discretion to conduct the investigation as they see fit, but must ensure that the investigation complies with the rules of procedural fairness and natural justice required in the circumstances of the complaint.

### **Adjudication and Reporting**

- (61) The Investigator must conclude the investigation and make a determination regarding the alleged breach within 90 days of referral under section 54, unless the Investigator determines that doing so is not practicable, in which case the Investigator must notify the complainant and respondent Council Member of the delay and provide a revised decision date. The revised decision date may be extended by periods of up to 30 days at a time on provision of written notice to the complainant and respondent Council Member.
- (62) If, after reviewing all the material information, the Investigator determines that a Council Member did not violate this Bylaw, then the Investigator shall:
- (a) prepare a written investigation report providing reasons for their determination, which shall include a determination of whether the complaint was submitted frivolously, vexatiously or in bad faith;
  - (b) deliver a summary of the investigation report to the complainant; and
  - (c) deliver a copy of the investigation report to the respondent Council Member and Council.
- (63) If, after reviewing all the material information, the Investigator determines that a Council Member did violate this Bylaw, then the Investigator shall:
- (a) prepare a written investigation report providing reasons for their determination, which must include:
    - i. a summary of the factual findings of the Investigator;
    - ii. an application of the Bylaw, and any other applicable law, to the facts;
    - iii. a recommendation of the appropriate sanction, subject to subsection (iv); and
    - iv. if applicable, a determination of whether the respondent Council Member took all reasonable steps to avoid the breach or whether the breach was

trivial, inadvertent or due to an error in judgment made in good faith, in which case the Investigator may recommend that no sanction be imposed;

- (b) notify the complainant that the investigation is complete and inform them that the investigation report, or a summary thereof, will be subsequently released by Council in accordance with section 67;
- (c) deliver a copy of the investigation report to the respondent Council Member; and
- (d) 48 hours after the delivery of the investigation report to the respondent Council Member, deliver a copy of the investigation report to Council.

#### **Final Determination by Council**

- (64) Council must, within 45 days of the Investigator's delivery of the investigation report, decide on the appropriate measures, if any, that are warranted by a breach of this Bylaw;
- (65) Prior to making any decision regarding the findings and recommendations set out in the investigation report, the respondent Council Member must be provided with an opportunity, either in person or in writing, to comment to Council on the Investigator's determinations and recommendations.
- (66) While an investigation report may be considered in a closed meeting, if the circumstances warrant, when Council deliberates and votes on the Investigator's recommendation, it will generally do so in an open meeting.
- (67) Within 30 days of receiving the investigation report under section 62(c) or section 63(d), Council must, subject to the District's obligations under FIPPA, release to the public the investigation report, or a summary thereof, along with a summary of Council's decision if applicable.

#### **Remedies**

- (68) Remedies that may be imposed by Council for a violation of this Bylaw include the following:
  - (a) a letter of reprimand from Council, addressed to the respondent Council Member;
  - (b) a request from the Council that the respondent Council Member issue a letter of apology;

- (c) the publication of the letters contemplated in subsections (a) and (b), along with the respondent Council Member's response, if any;
  - (d) directions to the CAO regarding the method of providing documents that contain confidential information to the respondent Council Member;
  - (e) a recommendation that the respondent Council Member:
    - a. attend specific training or counselling;
    - b. complete a specified number of volunteer hours; or
    - c. make a charitable donation of a specified or unspecified amount to a particular charity;
  - (f) limitations on access to certain District facilities;
  - (g) prohibition from representing the District at events and/or attending conferences;
  - (h) suspension or removal of the respondent Council Member from any position appointed by Council;
  - (i) public censure of the respondent Council Member;
  - (j) reduction or suspension of remuneration in accordance with Council Remuneration Bylaw 608, 2022, as amended; or
  - (k) any other sanction recommended by the Investigator, so long as that sanction is within the authority of Council.
- (69) Council must consider the following factors when determining whether to impose a sanction on a Council Member:
- (a) the degree and nature of the conduct;
  - (b) whether the contravention was a single or repeated act;
  - (c) whether the Council Member knowingly contravened the Code;
  - (d) whether the Council Member took steps to mitigate or remedy the contravention;
  - (e) the Council Member's history of other contraventions; and
  - (f) if applicable, the Investigator's finding that the respondent Council Member took all reasonable steps to avoid the breach, or that the breach was trivial or done inadvertently or because of an error in judgment.

### **Confidentiality of Investigation**

- (70) The Mayor, CAO, Corporate Officer, Solicitor and Investigator must make all reasonable efforts to process and investigate complaints in a confidential manner.
- (71) The Investigator and every person acting under the Investigator's instructions must preserve confidentiality with respect to all matters that come into the Investigator's knowledge in the course of any investigation or complaint, except as otherwise required by law.
- (72) Council Members must make all reasonable efforts to keep complaints under this Bylaw, at any stage, confidential, except as otherwise provided in this Bylaw.

### **Obstruction**

- (73) No Council Member, Committee Member, Staff or Resident will obstruct the Investigator, Solicitor, CAO or Corporate Officer in relation to the administration of this Bylaw or the investigation of a complaint. Without limitation, the following shall constitute obstruction:
  - (a) uttering of threats against any person involved in the complaint;
  - (b) destruction of relevant records or documents; and
  - (c) refusal to cooperate with the Investigator.
- (74) A person who is found to have obstructed the Investigator, CAO, Solicitor or Corporate Officer will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, which may include, but is not limited to:
  - (a) sanctions and remedies described above in section 68;
  - (b) termination of employment for just cause; or
  - (c) prohibition against filing a complaint under this Code for a specified and reasonable period of time.

### **Reimbursement of Costs**

- (75) A Council Member may make a request to Council for reimbursement of the costs of legal advice and representation in responding to the formal complaint process outlined

in this Bylaw. If appropriate, after considering all of the circumstances, Council may resolve to reimburse legal fees reasonably incurred by a Council Member, provided that all of the following are met:

- (a) the Council Member has not previously been found to have breached the Code; and
- (b) the amount claimed does not exceed \$10,000.

**Frivolous and Vexatious Complaints**

(76) Any individual covered by this Bylaw who makes a complaint that is subsequently found to have been made in a deliberately frivolous, vexatious or malicious manner, or otherwise made in bad faith, will be subject to appropriate disciplinary action, which may include, but is not limited to:

- (a) in the case of Council Members, sanctions and remedies as described in this Bylaw;
- (b) in the case of Staff, disciplinary action or termination of employment for just cause, as applicable;
- (c) in the case of Committee Members, removal from their appointment.
- (d) in the case of any complainant, prohibition from filing complaints under this Code for a specified period of time.

READ A FIRST TIME THIS	2 <sup>nd</sup> DAY OF	AUGUST, 2023
READ A SECOND TIME THIS	2 <sup>nd</sup> DAY OF	AUGUST, 2023
READ A THIRD TIME THIS	2 <sup>nd</sup> DAY OF	AUGUST, 2023
ADOPTED THIS	6 <sup>th</sup> DAY OF	SEPTEMBER, 2023

  
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Mayor

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Corporate Officer