

Taxpayer-Friendly Municipal Election 'Policy Menu'

The following is a taxpayer-friendly 'menu of policy options' that was developed by the Canadian Taxpayers Federation for council candidates to consider incorporating in their 2014 municipal election platforms.

Alternatively, this document can be used by voters to urge council candidates to commit to some or all of the 25 recommendations in this 'menu.'



Accountability

Freedom of Information Committee – Have an informal committee meet four times a year (or more) to review information requests from the public that have not been fulfilled after 60 days.

Evening Council Meetings – When councillors in Winnipeg are elected, there is a reception and swearing in ceremony at night. It's held at night because that's when council members' family and friends can attend. Similarly, council should hold evening meetings so that more of the public can participate.

No Severance for Quitting – Stop signing employee contracts that pay out severance when people quit.

Commit Fraud? No Pension for You! Copy legislation being considered in Ottawa right now (previously passed by Nova Scotia's former NDP government) that strips politicians of their pensions if they're caught committing serious crimes against taxpayers (eg. fraud). Perhaps even extend it to civil servants?

No Admin/Council Business Dealings – Outlaw business activity between council members and senior members of the administration.

Schedule Disclosure – Commit to disclose elected officials schedules at the end of each month.

Business/Asset Disclosure – Require council members to disclose their business interests and land owned outside the province.

Donation Disclosure – Require disclosure of large election donations prior to Election Day.

Cost Overrun Penalties – Establish penalties for staff that oversee large projects that go over budget by more than 10%.

Public Question Period – Hold public meetings once every 3-4 months with committee chairs and senior members of the administration. Such meetings could give the public an opportunity to ask questions about any municipal activities.

Photo Radar Review – Appoint an independent panel to review Winnipeg's photo radar program to assess whether it is complying with the province's requirements and review any other shortcomings of the program.

Citizens' Commission on Democratic Reform – Announce a citizens' commission on democratic reform which would give taxpayers a chance to review the current democratic structure and make recommendations on how the system could be changed.



Revenue Tool

Union User Fee – Just like some American cities, municipalities could start charging unions a levy in exchange for the service that is currently provided – collecting union dues from employees’ paycheques. This fee would help ensure unions pay their ‘fair share.’

Cost Savings

Pension Reform – Instead of raising taxes to bail out employee pension plans, start putting new employees in a less costly pension plan. Further, raise the pension retirement age to 65 and look at ways to control costs within the plan. Remember, over 70% of people in the private sector have no workplace pension plan. It’s not fair to keep asking them to pay more.

Labour Reform – It’s time for municipal politicians to push for labour legislation reform at the provincial level – arbitrators should be required to take ability to pay and inflation into account when deciding pay decisions.

Managed Competition – Open up government services to competition and encourage existing employees to bid-in for the work (*chances are they know where to trim the fat!*)

Gainsharing – If employees can deliver the same results (or better) while reducing costs, allow them to share in some of the savings.

Library Cooperation – Instead of building new, stand alone library facilities, partner with schools to save money; just like the Britannia Library in Vancouver.

Lift Volunteer Bans – Some labour agreements prevent certain volunteering activities such as putting books back on the shelves at public libraries. Amending these rules could help reduce costs.

Focus! Focus! Focus! – Time for at least a four-year freeze on spending tax dollars on ‘luxury’ or ‘nice to have’ projects. It’s time to focus on road repair and core services.

End Corporate Welfare – Stop giving tax dollars to businesses in the form of grants and loans.

Other Unfair Labour Clauses – It’s time to phase out “no layoff” (redeployment) and sick leave payout clauses in some union contracts. Such clauses are costly and are not common in the private sector.



Economic Development

Land Review – Review land in the municipality that is owned by government (all three levels) once a year and determine if any could be sold off. Once developed, municipalities would receive additional property taxes.

Cap Tax Increases – Once inefficient spending has been addressed, commit to cap property tax increases for the rate of inflation.

Tri-Level Meetings – Commit to hosting public meetings featuring elected official(s) representing each level of government. Such meetings could be a good opportunity to hear from businesses as to economic and red tape barriers that are holding back development.



About the Canadian Taxpayers Federation: The Canadian Taxpayers Federation (CTF) is a federally incorporated, not-for-profit citizen’s group dedicated to lower taxes, less waste and accountable government. The CTF was founded in Saskatchewan in 1990 when the Association of Saskatchewan Taxpayers and the Resolution One Association of Alberta joined forces to create a national taxpayers organization. Today, the CTF has 84,000 supporters nation-wide.