

Contract with Taxpayers

If elected as a mayor or councillor on November 19, I pledge to uphold these principles:

- I will not vote to raise property taxes beyond the provincial rate of inflation (unless I get approval from taxpayers in a referendum)—and will diligently try to get increases lower than that.
- I will move our municipality toward fee for service for as many functions as possible.
- I will not vote to take on or fund services that are the proper jurisdiction of federal, provincial or regional governments.
- I will push my municipality to investigate partnerships with other governments, non-profit organizations and businesses to reduce costs of service delivery.
- Infrastructure and public safety will be my top budgetary priorities.
- Taxpayers' personal property rights will be respected and upheld.
- Under my watch, citizens will receive complete, accurate and timely information from their municipal government. I will ensure taxpayers have the opportunity to participate in open dialogue with the mayor and council, voicing their opinions on any matter affecting the municipality.
- I will publicly disclose and publish copies of all receipts I charge to my municipal expense account.
- I will support measures that improve transparency and accountability, such as a Municipal Auditor General, introduction of municipal politician recall rules, and the use of referenda, plebiscites and citizen initiatives to gauge public opinion on major expenditures and issues.
- I will support the introduction of a Taxpayer Protection Bylaw (similar to the one attached) that financially punishes any mayor and council for raising taxes above the rate of inflation with a one-year, 15% pay cut.

Signed: _____ Date: _____

Candidate for: _____

Website: _____

E-mail Address: _____

Contract with Taxpayers: Backgrounder

The Canadian Taxpayers Federation (www.taxpayer.com) is Canada's leading non-partisan citizens' advocacy group fighting for lower taxes, less waste and accountable government. Founded in 1990, the CTF has more than 70,000 supporters and seven offices across Canada. The CTF is funded by free-will, non tax-receiptable contributions.

During the 2011 BC municipal election cycle, we are offering candidates the opportunity to sign this CTF Contract with Taxpayers, a one-page document capturing many of the values the CTF has been working toward over the years. Taxpayers are stretched thin and are asking candidates for office to give a hard, long look at ways to hold the line on taxes, reduce spending, and become more transparent and accountable. Something has to change in British Columbia's city halls to better protect taxpayers and we believe this 2011 crop of candidates will be pivotal to that effort.

This package also includes a draft Taxpayer Protection Bylaw, believed to be the first of its kind in Canada. If elected, we hope you will introduce this bylaw to your community, enshrining the Contract with Taxpayers principles into your city hall's DNA.

Candidates who sign and return this Contract with Taxpayers will be listed on our website (www.taxpayer.com) and Facebook page and their names and communities will be emailed to thousands of CTF supporters in British Columbia. The CTF will also issue news releases to media outlets with signees listed. This is NOT an endorsement by the CTF (nor should it be advertised as such), but confirmation that candidates have signed the CTF Contract with Taxpayers.

If you have questions, please feel free to contact the Canadian Taxpayers Federation's BC Director, **Jordan Bateman**, at jbateman@taxpayer.com or 604-999-3319. Please return the signed contract via email to jbateman@taxpayer.com. WE MUST HAVE THIS SIGNED CONTRACT BACK BY **4 PM, FRIDAY, NOVEMBER 4, 2011**, TO BE INCLUDED IN CTF RELEASES.

The following is background information for the pledges contained in the contract. By signing the contract, you are supporting the principle, not necessarily this background material.

Principle: I will not vote to raise property taxes beyond the provincial rate of inflation (unless I get approval from taxpayers in a referendum)—and will diligently try to get increases lower than that.

Rationale: Taxpayers are feeling the financial crunch of rising property taxes throughout British Columbia. With very few (but welcome) exceptions, taxes continue to creep upward at a rate higher than the Consumer Price Index rate of inflation, leaving less money in taxpayers' pockets and less money to invest in other community-building functions such as commerce, charities, sports and children activities and more. Remember: every dollar you take out of a taxpayer's pocket is a dollar less in your local economy. Property owners need relief from this tax burden and tax increases should be capped at inflation at most—unless taxpayers give approval in a referendum. This overarching goal would dictate strategy and mandates for costly items like labour contracts.

Principle: I will move our municipality toward fee for service for as many functions as possible.

Rationale: Taxpayers want more control over their taxes. Municipalities must remove services from the property tax base that can be paid for by individuals such as utilities, water, garbage, recreational facilities, etc. Property taxes should be limited to core activities that cannot be billed for on an individual basis such as fire and police departments, roads, traffic signals and snow removal.

Principle: I will not vote to take on or fund services that are the proper jurisdiction of federal, provincial or regional governments.

Rationale: Programs mandated by other levels of government should be funded and operated entirely by those governments. Properties should not be taxed for these programs. As politically tempting as it is to contribute property tax dollars for school, health and social services, each level of government should be responsible for a clearly defined set of services and activities. A clear understanding of who taxes and spends for what purpose is at the heart of accountability.

Principle: I will push my municipality to investigate partnerships with other governments, non-profit organizations and businesses to reduce costs of service delivery.

Rationale: Doing the same thing the way it's always been done is not a forward-thinking nor intelligent strategy. Municipalities need to continually re-examine ways to deliver programs and projects in a more cost-effective manner. For example, why build a public library branch next door to a high school with its own library? Can municipalities and school boards not work together to share building, resource and staff costs?

Principle: Infrastructure and public safety will be my top budgetary priorities.

Rationale: Government must concentrate on the important things in a community and ensuring its taxpayers are safe and healthy is job number one. Police, fire, sewer, water, roads: these are the priorities for a municipality.

Principle: Taxpayers' personal property rights will be respected and upheld.

Rationale: Slowly but surely, through overregulation and increasing bylaws, personal property rights are being eroded. A person should have the ability to do what they want to do on their own property, provided it doesn't infringe on others. Small, home-based businesses should be encouraged. Owners should also have a right to capitalize on the zoning or designation their properties enjoy.

Principle: Under my watch, citizens will receive complete, accurate and timely information from their municipal government. I will ensure taxpayers have the opportunity to participate in open dialogue with the mayor and council, voicing their opinions on any matter affecting the municipality.

Rationale: Making information accessible and available is a cornerstone of democracy. Elected officials should be pushing their municipal staff to proactively release information to the public, rather than wait for requests. This information should be easy to find and understand.

Principle: I will publicly disclose and publish copies of all receipts I charge to my municipal expense account.

Rationale: Like the City of Toronto does, BC mayors and councillors should be willing to publish their municipal expense account receipts online for the public to review. This increased level of accountability and transparency will instil confidence in voters that their elected officials can be trusted with the taxpayer's cheque book.

Principle: I will support measures that improve transparency and accountability, such as a Municipal Auditor General, introduction of municipal politician recall rules, and the use of referenda, plebiscites, and citizen initiatives to gauge public opinion on major expenditures and issues.

Rationale: While municipalities are widely considered as the level of government closest to the people, there are actually very few direct democracy rules in place at city halls. The province's move toward a Municipal Auditor General should be supported, as it will give taxpayers confidence that large municipal projects are being managed correctly. It is another level of accountability that would also provide municipalities a vehicle to appeal federal and provincial decisions and regulations that download cost on to property taxpayers. Municipal politicians should also be supportive of adding a recall mechanism for citizens to fire elected officials who have acted against the interests of the voters. Finally, municipalities should gauge public opinion by using more plebiscites and referenda, especially on significant projects. A citizen's initiative process should also be set up (as laid out in our draft Taxpayer Protection Bylaw—see attached) where voters can get a petition signed by their neighbours and trigger a vote on an issue.

Principle: I will support the introduction of a Taxpayer Protection Bylaw (similar to the one attached) that financially punishes any mayor and council for raising taxes above the rate of inflation with a one-year, 15% pay cut.

Rationale: A Taxpayer Protection Bylaw, such as the one attached, will enshrine these principles in a legal form in a municipality, giving taxpayer's confidence that they will be upheld. Such a bylaw also lays out the rules for a citizen's initiative and a financial punishment—a 15% pay cut—for a mayor and council that raise property taxes beyond the rate of inflation without citizens' approval. Such a bylaw would provide clear, unequivocal direction to senior staff who prepare municipal budgets and agendas.

Taxpayer Protection Bylaw

NOTE: DRAFT ONLY; WOULD BE PUT INTO YOUR MUNICIPALITY'S OFFICIAL FORMAT

TAXPAYER PROTECTION BYLAW

WHEREAS Section 8 and Part 3 of the *Community Charter*, S.B.C. 2003 c. 26 authorize Council to regulate, prohibit and impose requirements in relation to municipal services;

AND WHEREAS Council considers it in the public interest to protect the rights of property taxpayers in our community, and lay out clear direction to municipal staff working on their behalf;

NOW THEREFORE the Municipal Council ENACTS AS FOLLOWS:

Title

1. This bylaw may be cited for all purposes as "Taxpayer Protection Bylaw".

Application

2. This bylaw applies to the mayor, councillors, officers and employees of the Municipality.

General

3. The Municipality's five year financial plan will reflect the following policies of Council:
 - a. Property value taxes for general municipal purposes for a calendar year will not increase beyond the federal rate of inflation for the previous calendar year, unless Council refers the matter to a referendum pursuant to which the electors approve a greater increase.
 - b. The municipality will transition to a user-pay fee for service model for municipal services, works, facilities and activities, as far as reasonably possible subject to public consultation.
 - c. The municipality will not provide or fund services that are under the primary jurisdiction of federal, provincial or regional governments or that are currently being provided by those governments.
 - d. The municipality will investigate and pursue partnerships with other governments, non-profit organizations and businesses to reduce costs of service delivery, to transfer legal and financial liability and risk, and to improve service to the residents of the Municipality.

- e. The municipality will prioritize infrastructure and public safety in budget documents and discussions.
- f. The municipality will respect and uphold taxpayers' personal property rights.
- g. The municipality will ensure citizens receive complete, accurate and timely information. Taxpayers will have the opportunity to participate in open dialogue with the mayor and council, voicing their opinions on any matter affecting the municipality.
- h. The municipality will disclose and publish copies of all receipts elected officials charge to municipal expense accounts.
- i. The municipality will support public policy measures that improve transparency and accountability, such as a Municipal Auditor General, introduction of municipal politician recall rules, and the use of opinion referenda and citizen initiatives to gauge public opinion on major expenditures and issues.

Citizen's Initiative Rules

4. A citizen wishing to:
 - (a) appeal a decision of Council, or
 - (b) introduce an issue to Council,
 may request and obtain a citizen's initiative petition form from the Municipality's Corporate Officer.
5. If the citizen within 60 days of obtaining the petition form collects the signatures, names and addresses of more than 10% of the number electors in the Municipality in support of the petition, and the Corporate Officer certifies this to be the case, Council will consider:
 - (a) reviewing its decision that was appealed by petition, or
 - (b) proceeding with the issue initiated by the Petition,
 as the case may be, or
 - (c) referring the question to a community opinion referendum under section 83 of the *Community Charter*.
6. During the 60 day period, the petition must not be left unattended by the citizen, and each petition canvasser must register with the Corporate Officer before collecting petition signatures.
7. If Council considers the matter to be time-sensitive or if the next general local election will not be held within the next 12 months, Council may hold a referendum under section 6(c) within 90 days of the end of the 60 day petition period.
8. The Municipality may use internet, telephone, mail or conventional "other voting" polls for the referendum.

9. The results of a process under sections 4 through 8 are not binding on the Council. While non-binding, it is Council's policy to consider diligently the results of the initiative or referendum.

Sanction

10. Each member of Council has represented to the electors that if a general municipal property value tax in respect of a current calendar year is increased beyond the level of the previous calendar year by a percentage that is greater than the annual provincial rate of inflation for the previous calendar year, without an opinion referendum first being passed on this increase, the mayor and each councillor will forego 15% of their remuneration that otherwise would be payable to them during the current calendar year by the Municipality.

11. In this bylaw,

“citizen” means a resident or ratepayer of the Municipality, and

“taxpayer” means ratepayer.

--End--