



CAO COMPLAINT REVIEW REPORT

MAY 2022



1 Executive Summary

Strategic Steps Inc. was recently approached by the Town of Irricana to assist the Town by reviewing formal complaints levied against the Town's Chief Administrative Officer (CAO). In particular, these complaints included the appropriate use of Town resources, whether the Town is meeting the needs of its residents, hiring practices, and how well the Town is adhering to bylaws, policies, and procedures.

This is a *review* rather than a formal complaint *investigation*. Essentially this means that the purpose of the process is to understand the concerns of the complainants and provide feedback and recommendations on how to move forward in a way that best serves the interests of the community. This type of process is undertaken with the goal of illuminating the substance of complaints relevant to this review and recommending next steps related to the surface-level issues at hand while also uncovering any underlying or deeper issues that may exist.

According to the 2018-2021 Strategic planning document, Irricana's vision is: *"A refreshing and thriving community that presents an escape from the city, filled with potential for families and businesses alike to enjoy the safe and quiet country surrounding, overlooked by Alberta's big blue sky."*

This vision is interpreted as the ultimate expression of success for the Town and the complaint review was conducted with that vision as the desired end some years from now. All efforts should be focused on achieving this vision, or more properly, efforts that do not work towards the vision should be stopped or at least very thoughtfully considered. The latter applies not only in the service delivery to residents, but also to municipal culture that contributes to benefitting local stakeholders relating to areas of focus within the municipal vision.

Several areas of concern were brought forward that were reviewed in-depth as identified within three formal complaints filed against the CAO. The substance of the accusations in the complaints included:

- Using Town resources for personal use;
- Appropriate procedures of hiring and supervising staff while avoiding nepotism;
- Writing expense cheques without the appropriate support documentation or approval; and
- Violating a court order and questions around financial accountability.

These specific complaints are addressed in detail within the report with the goal of providing Council with a clearer understanding of each issue and the reasons for the conclusions made.

Overall, the review team identified opportunities for improvement in the way the Town of Irricana delivers services, interacts with residents, and how Council interacts with Administration and each other.

During the review, the team encountered some activities that brought merit, in part, to some of the complaints which were presented as the catalyst for this review process. It also became evident through the review process that problematic municipal culture

relating specifically to governance has contributed to contra-visionary work at a significant scale within the Town of Irricana.

The CAO's employment is a responsibility that rests with Council as a whole, not with community members nor with individual members of Council. Harassment and bullying of any employee by the public or by Council should not be tolerated.

In commissioned investigations and Municipal Inspections for the Minister similar to this one that the review team has conducted in the past, the issue of the presence or absence of goodwill comes into stark focus. If there is mutual goodwill, the municipality can thrive and flourish, but if there is a lack of goodwill, the municipality often founders and the business of the people is slowed to a crawl.

Much of what appears to be happening in Irricana can be attributed to this issue. Until council, staff, and citizens decide to pull together, and refrain from 'gotcha' politics, the absence or presence of bylaws and policies will not fundamentally change things. Municipal government is a human business, and the humans must choose to act appropriately for the benefit of themselves, their community, and future generations.

Addressing the gaps noted below will help on the path to good governance and goodwill, but it must go hand in glove with the desire to succeed as a community.

Gaps for Council's Consideration:

- **Understanding and Adherence to Acts, Bylaws, and Policy** – Are appropriate bylaws, policies, and administrative procedures in place, are these being followed to mitigate risks and provide confidence in the decision-making process? Is Council receiving the appropriate and sound advice it needs from its CAO?
- **Role Clarity** – Does everyone from Council to the frontlines understand how they can best contribute to the Town's success within the scope of their role and authority?
- **Code of Conduct** – Are interactions amongst Council and Town staff respectful and conducive to creating and maintaining positive and functional working relationships? Are Town staff and Council held accountable to these standards through the consistent application of Town bylaws and policies?

Council is expected to work to ensure that the Town of Irricana continues to serve its local and regional stakeholders, while achieving organizational sustainability and stability.