



Navigating Public Discourse



AKBLG Convention 2024 • April 21, 2024

who we are

Catalyst Communications works in specialized areas of local government communications:

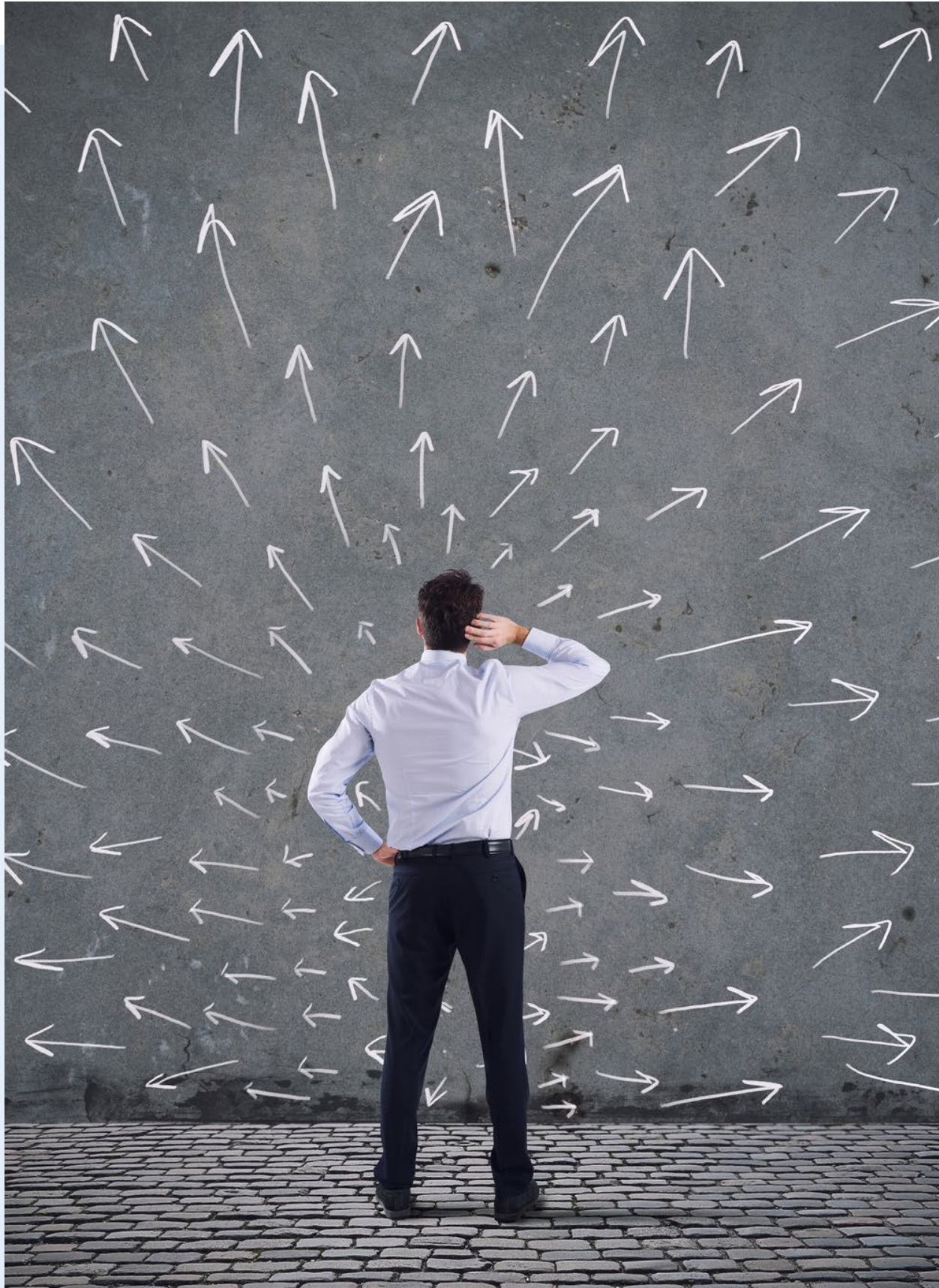
- Crisis Communications
- Reputation Management
- Public Engagement
- Communications Planning
- Communications Workshops
- Strategic Advisory Services



today's agenda

- The Current State of Public Discourse
- Discussing Your Pain Points
- Building Trust with Residents
- Public Engagement with Intent
- Council's Role in Communications





community expectations

- 1 Accountability
- 2 Transparency
- 3 Immediacy
- 4 Empathy
- 5 Consistency



external factors

- 1 Politicization
- 2 History
- 3 Personal Experiences



identifying the problem

TOP 10 TRUSTED* SOURCES



Family
75%



People like me
74%



Local broadcast news
72%



Friends
71%



CBC News
68%



My local paper
67%



CTV News
66%



Internet Search Engines
64%



Local/municipal government
63%



CBC Radio
60%





identifying the problem

Trusted sources: Canadian Political Parties



Compared to *all other parties*, Liberals are significantly more likely to trust...

- Justin Trudeau
- Canadian government
- *The Globe and Mail*
- CNN
- journalists

Top trusted source:

- Local broadcast news (84%)



Compared to *all other parties*, Conservatives are significantly more likely to trust...

- *The Sun*
- *Rebel News*
- family
- *Fox News*
- *Breitbart*

Top trusted source:

- Family (84%)



Compared to *all other parties*, New Democrats are significantly more likely to trust...

- local/municipal government
- *The Toronto Star*
- internet search engines
- *CTV News*
- colleges and universities

Top trusted source:

- Local/Municipal government (86%)



Top trusted source**:

- local paper (92%)



Top trusted source**:

- *CBC Radio* (100%)



Top trusted source**:

- family (93%)

identifying the problem

TOP 10 SOURCES THAT SHOULD BE AT LEAST "SOMEWHAT RESPONSIBLE" FOR COMBATting DISINFORMATION



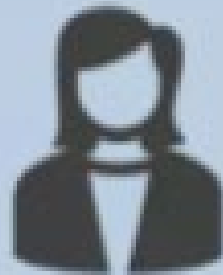
Journalists
83%



My provincial government
83%



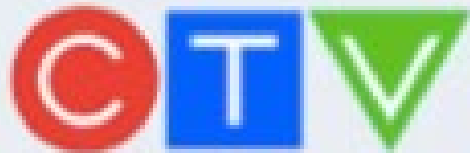
Justin Trudeau
82%



Politicians
82%



Canadian government
81%



CTV News
80%



Local broadcast news
80%



CBC News
80%



Local/municipal government
80%



Federal agencies
79%



overlapping crises

Wildfire Evacuation



Town of Edson 2023

Toxic Smoke Cloud



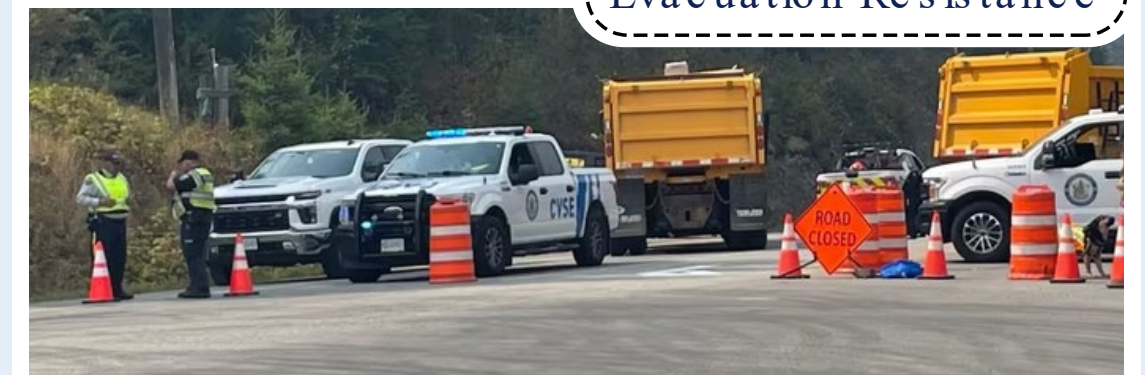
Minburn County 2024

Speculation of Arson



Edmonton Journal 2023

Evacuation Resistance



CBC News 2023



overlapping crises

Disaster



Town of Edson 2023

Emergency



Minburn County 2024

Crisis



Edmonton Journal 2023

Crisis



CBC News 2023



misinformation & disinformation



some of what we're seeing

- People are anxious and local government is an easy target
- Increased polarization between Council Members
- Provincial and federal ideological debates are reaching municipalities
- Ideologically -formed groups are successfully organizing
- Council meetings are being “hijacked”
- Public safety is being compromised by “freedom fighters”



discussion



What issues of public discourse are you seeing in your community?



building resident trust

Warranted or not, there are trust
issues in local government.

We must work to build resident
trust through transparency, and
meaningful engagement and
communications.

Transparency a key issue in municipal governance

If you are looking for answers from the city beyond what has already been
should file a freedom of information request, council heard St. Albert's chi
administrative officer say on Aug. 30.

Rachel Narvey
Oct 6, 2021 2:00 PM



local government transparency

transparency:

Proactive, open communications that provide residents with valuable information that is not otherwise readily available, and which will serve them in being better informed and invested in their community.



OPINION | Shutting Whitehorse citizens out of municipal process troubling idea

Proposed policy to close meetings to public reveals deeper problems in municipal gov't transparency: Fox



Lori Fox · for CBC News · Posted: Jul 15, 2019 7:00 AM MDT | Last Updated: July 15, 2019



During last Monday's meeting Mayor Dan Curtis referred to ATIPP requests as 'a beast' to deal with, which seems a flimsy excuse, writes Lori Fox. (Kaila Jefferd-Moore/CBC)

CBC News, July 15, 2019

procedure bylaw considerations

Restrictions over removal.

- Set a time limit for presenters
- Require pre-registration, including advance notice of discussion topic
- Require that topics relate to an agenda item
- Require that presenters are local residents (not applicable to non-profits & societies)



overcommunicate

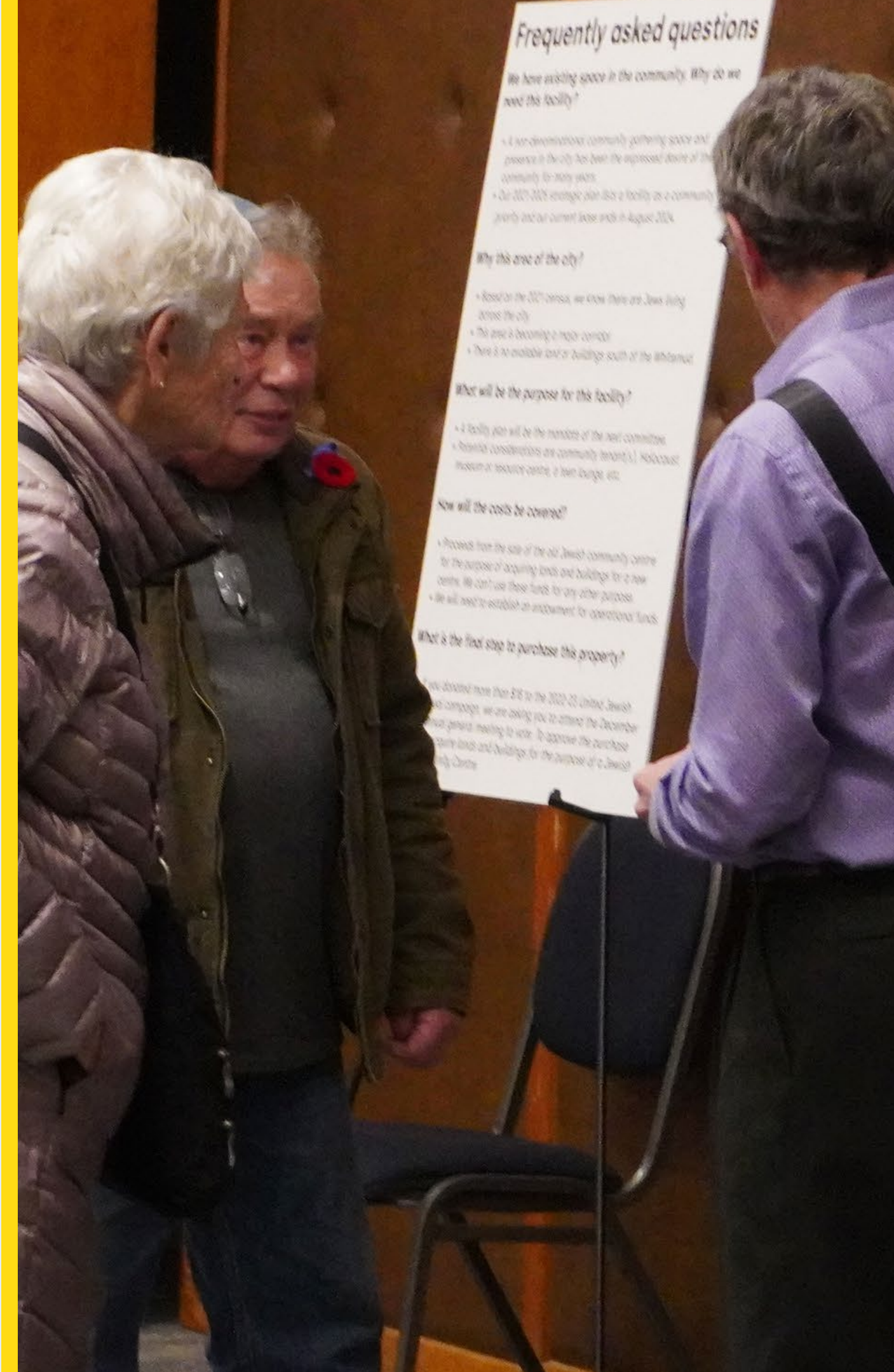
- 1 Be proactive
- 2 Make things easy to understand
- 3 Meet people where they are



public engagement with intent

Not all engagement is equal. Engaging for the sake of engaging is the wrong decision.

Engagement needs to be meaningful, with the potential to have an impact on municipal decisions or process.



engagement with intent

- 1 Why are you engaging?
- 2 What are you prepared to change?
- 3 How will engagement results be used in the decision-making process?
- 4 How will residents' involvement be maintained?



public engagement

INFORM

Provide residents with information pertinent to an engagement process, including insight into their own level of involvement.

CONSULT

Obtain public feedback on analysis, alternatives, and/or a decision to be brought before Council.

INVOLVE

Work directly with the public throughout a process, creating consistent engagement.

COLLABORATE

Partner with the public at every level of the decision-making process, including more complete input from residents.

EMPOWER

Place final decision-making in the hands of the public.



increasing participation

- meet residents where they are
- make things easy to understand
- show the value of participation
- sensibly incentivize affordability
- establish a 'control group'



engaging through controversy

not all controversies are equal –
but for those which are objectively
valid:

- step into the discussion
- ensure resident understanding
- listen in earnest



transparency in engagement



Rebrand Fact vs. Fiction



07 Mar 2023



Fiction: The rebrand will cost 1.2 Million dollars
Fact: The rebranding exercise, which included research, consultation, design, revisions, videography, photography, editing, template creation, and more, cost \$65,000. These funds were approved in the 2022 capital budget. In 2023, City Council approved \$50,000 in the capital

budget for implementation. Existing assets, such as park signs, street signs, and printed materials, will be replaced once they reach the end of their useful life.



engaging as humans

Who's Listening

Marc MacDonald

Manager, Corporate
Communications
City of Welland



Phone 905-735-1700 x2337

Email marc.macdonald@welland.ca

Katie Miller

Communications Student
City of Welland



Email katie.miller@welland.ca

Who's Listening

Tracy Dalzell-Heise

Manager, Communications and
Legislative Services



Email tracydalzell-heise@morinville.ca



council's role

Empower effective communications and bolstered public engagement:

- Advocate for Public Engagement with Intent
 - Undergo review of current engagement efforts to determine future needs, including capacity and costing
- Review Public Participation Policy for intent
- Develop public-facing Public Engagement Framework
- Actively communicate with residents within your governance role
- Budget in reflection of what you want to see in communications



set the tone

Everything you say during your time on Council is being said as an active elected official.

Fort Macleod town councillor charged in Coutts border protest steps down



Marco Van Huigenbos, a Fort Macleod town councillor, stepped down during Monday's council meeting ahead of his upcoming trial for charges connected with the Coutts border protest. (File)

checklist

- 1 Will my actions comply with conduct expectations?
- 2 Am I speaking in an official capacity?
- 3 Is there a conflict of interest, bias, or personal vendetta?
- 4 Is it in the best interest of the municipality as a whole?
- 5 Will this reflect negatively on my colleagues?
- 6 Can I justify my actions and statements?
- 7 Am I doing the right thing?



building trust through crisis

Never waste a good emergency.

Crises provide an opportunity to:

- Build trust with residents
- Develop a relationship with the community
- Maintain trust moving forward



live streams



Chapters

These chapters are auto-generated

Edson & Yellowhead County
Wildfire/Evacuation Update

June 12th, 2023 - 8pm

Introduction

0:00



Edson Fire Update

5:05



Thank You

5:45



Special Access Permits

6:32



Evacuation Order North of 572

9:00

Sync to video time
Highway 16 Opening



reputation management

In addition to building trust with your residents, there is a 'trust' factor related to your municipality's reputation.

- Evaluate what's being said about the organization/community externally
- Identify and evaluate those outside conversations' impact to the municipality
- Proactively identify the potential of reputational damage
 - Design and execute plans to mitigate any potential impacts, as appropriate



hypothetical

Hypothetical Situation:

Residents bring forward a successful petition to ban Pride flags and crosswalks throughout your municipality.

What is the potential reputational damage?



thank you



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