

## **Written submission to the Local Government Elections Task Force**

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### ***Recommendation:***

The Local Government Act should be amended so that candidates are not required to publicly disclose their residential addresses.

### ***Background Information:***

Section 72(1)(e) of the Local Government Act (LGA) requires a candidate to provide her or his residential address as part of the nomination process. The exact reason for this is unclear, particularly as there is no requirement for a candidate to reside in a specific municipality in order to stand for election in that municipality. The only residency requirement is that a candidate must have lived in British Columbia for a period of six months (LGA s.66).

LGA s.73 outlines how members of the public can access nomination papers during the election period and beyond. It also includes provisions for posting these documents on the Internet. Unfortunately, the nature of the Internet is such that once a sensitive piece of personal information is placed online it is often in the public domain forever.

A simple Google search is all that is required to locate the residential addresses of many councillors and trustees across the province of British Columbia. For example, the 2008 "Notice of Election" for School District 61 is still online, in spite of the fact that the election was held almost eighteen months ago. This document includes the home addresses of all candidates, including those who were not successful in that election [1].

### ***Discussion:***

Various groups of people are underrepresented in our political system. These groups include women, minorities as well as individuals with experience in select job occupations. This is a complex social issue and so a full analysis of this problem is beyond the scope of this submission. That said, one reason for the status quo might be the legal requirement for the disclosure of home addresses. Several examples will illustrate this point:

First, consider the example of a successful business owner who would like to become a municipal councillor. She may be perfectly qualified to lead her community through difficult economic times. Yet she declines the opportunity, knowing that disclosure of her residential address would leave her home vulnerable to a break and enter while she attends council meetings.

Second, consider a correctional officer who is thinking about running for a school trustee position. Perhaps he sees that many of the inmates at his prison have poor literacy skills. He wants to address one of the root causes of crime by improving the public education system. However, he holds back from participating in the school board election; he is concerned that if he discloses his home address, an ex-convict might show up at his front door with a grudge to settle.

Third, consider a candidate who wishes to campaign on a controversial topic. There is no shortage of these issues, but in this example imagine that a young man commits to organizing a gay pride parade as part of his platform for city council. He returns home one day to find derogatory language spray painted on the wall of his townhouse.

Many individuals are willing to accept the personal safety risks that may accompany the increased exposure of a political campaign or a term in office. What is unacceptable, however, is the possibility that a criminal may target a politician's family or home while that person is attending a campaign event or a pre-scheduled, publicly advertised government meeting. Added to the above, in each of these examples it is difficult to see how transparency and accountability are improved by the current law, and yet the impact on safety and public discourse is clear.

This issue is particularly important because political experience at the local level is sometimes the starting point for a larger political career. Anything that deters good candidates from entering local politics may have a ripple effect in terms of the candidates who eventually run for office at the provincial or federal level.

### ***Proposed Solution:***

There are many ways to solve this problem, but perhaps the simplest option is to incorporate language similar to s.61(1)(b) of the Alberta Election Act [2]. This section describes how provincial candidates in Alberta are required to file their nomination forms. It requires the nomination papers to contain "an address within Alberta at which documents may be served and notices given respecting the candidate".

This solution balances the needs of all interested parties. Although candidates would still be required to provide some form of contact address, the privacy and security of their homes would remain intact. The Chief Election Officer would still be able to investigate and confirm residency if there were any concerns about the eligibility of a candidate. Finally, the provincial government would be encouraging political diversity by making this small change; this is a worthy goal for any government.

### ***Conclusion:***

Thank you for taking the time to read this submission. The opportunity for electoral reform does not occur often, and I sincerely hope the Local Government Elections Task Force will consider the suggestions presented in this document.

***References:***

[1] 2008 Notice of Election for School District 61:  
[http://www.sd61.bc.ca/pdf/Notice\\_of\\_Election\\_Oct\\_08.pdf](http://www.sd61.bc.ca/pdf/Notice_of_Election_Oct_08.pdf)

[2] Alberta Election Act:  
<http://www.elections.ab.ca/Public%20Website/566.htm>