



Revised Committee Report

The Blue Mountains

Accountability and Transparency Committee

Date: Thursday, February 26, 2026
Time: 9:30 a.m.
Location: Virtual Meeting, Teams
Prepared By:
Susan Cameron, Legislative Coordinator

Accountability and Transparency Committee Recommendations

Note: The following are recommendations from the Accountability and Transparency Committee to be considered for adoption by Council:

E. Matters for Discussion

E.1.1 Report and Reflection

THAT the Accountability and Transparency Committee receives for information the verbal update regarding the Strategic Plan implementation provided by Director of Strategic Initiatives Tim Hendry

AND THAT the Accountability and Transparency Committee requests that Discussion Paper is forwarded to Council for their consideration and referral to staff for their review.
CARRIED

E.2 Staff Report Template

THAT the Accountability and Transparency Committee request the staff report template be given to the CAO for consideration in the creation of a standard to be used for recommendations brought before Council **CARRIED**

E.3 Procedural By-law & Governance Review

THAT the Accountability and Transparency Committee receives for information the verbal update on the Procedural By-law and in its discussions noted concerns regarding limitations on the number of deputations a member of the public can appear on the same topic and limiting Councillors permitted questions in Council meetings and looks forward to providing comments to the updated Procedural By-law **CARRIED**

Date: February 18, 2026

Subject: Discussion Paper for Accountability and Transparency Committee: Guardian Layer and Strategy Plan Alignment

Authored by: June Porter Chair of the Accountability and Transparency Committee, and endorsed by the members of the Accountability and Transparency Committee

Purpose: Defining recommendations to operationalize and measure impact of the "Guardian Layer"—the accountability and transparency framework to implement *Our Path Forward* strategic plan.

Context and Cost of Inaction

Council mandated the Accountability and Transparency (A&T) Committee through the Terms of Reference to foster trust in Town decision-making, ultimately enhancing the well-being of all residents and visitors.

To avoid repeating the implementation gaps of previous initiatives, we must address the structural vulnerabilities that previously allowed key governance actions to remain 'not initiated'. In the *Blue Mountains Future Story*, Big Move 4 (Action 17)— Establish decision-making and reporting structures within The Town of The Blue Mountains was to ensure decisions contribute towards the Vision and Goals was consistently marked "not initiated" or "below target."

The Guardian Layer of the Strategic Plan is designed to solve this specific structural vulnerability by delivering transparent, effective, and evidence-based governance and decision making.

What is the Guardian Layer?

The Guardian Layer within *Our Path Forward* is actually the direct operational fulfillment of this Committee's mandate. Far from an elective addition, this layer provides the formal structure required to execute the Town's standing commitment to accountability and transparency. Specifically, it serves as the primary vehicle for operationalizing Policy POL.COR.07.01 (*Accountability and Transparency of Town Actions*).

The Guardian Layer: From Vision to Execution

By institutionalizing this layer, we ensure the strategic plan is governed by a modernized framework that enforces alignment, responsive, evidence based decision making governance. It is the filter through which all major decisions and reports must pass. The primary risk to any strategic plan is not a lack of vision, but a failure in execution.

Strategic alignment ensures Council, staff, and residents are rowing in the same direction. When anchored in evidence-based decision-making, the Town moves away from "historical precedence and unsubstantiated assumptions toward a strategy backed by data, evidence and repeatable results.

Three Key Components of the Guardian Layer

When a government is transparent, it operates inside a “glass house.” Residents can see exactly how their tax money is being spent, how bylaws policy and other regulations are being drafted, and who is influencing them. This openness acts as a natural disinfectant against mistrust.

- **Access to information:** This is the lifeline of transparency and allows residents to ask questions. Why was this road delayed? How much did this pump equipment cost? When the government answers, trust is built.
- **Digital governance:** In the modern era, technology plays a huge role. When tenders for government projects are awarded, their dollar value are available, how did it impact the overall budget or timelines.

The Insight: Transparency doesn't always prevent the unexpected problem, but it prevents the surprise.

Transparency allows Council, staff and residents to see what is happening; public participation ensures residents have a say in what happens. Participation is the cornerstone of healthy governance. It goes far beyond simply casting a vote once every few years. It means residents, stakeholders, vulnerable groups, and minorities have a voice in decision-making. The recent engagement process for the new Strategic Plan demonstrated through the comments received from the public – most notably saying, ‘We feel that we have been heard.’ Residents who are involved, informed and engaged tend to hold more trust

If transparency is seeing the rules, and participation is helping write the rules, then accountability is ensuring there are consequences for breaking the rules. Accountability is arguably the most difficult pillar to enforce because it requires staff and Council to be humble enough to accept criticism and correction.

Who is accountable to whom? In a democracy, elected officials are accountable to the voters. Staff are accountable to the government. But it is rarely that simple.

Types of Accountability:

To understand this better, consider looking at the different layers of accountability that keep a community functioning:

- **Political Accountability:** This is the check that voters hold over elected. If a leader fails to deliver on promises, they can be voted out
- **Administrative Accountability:** This ensures that Council and staff developing and implementing policies are doing so efficiently and without bias
- **Social Accountability:** This is where community organizations and the media step in. They hold Council and staff answerable for their impact on their lives, often through newsletters, social media, deputations, correspondence and or public comments

Pillars of Evidence-Based Decision-Making

To ensure consistent execution, the following four specific sources of evidence are proposed for consideration to guide the Decision Making:

Pillar	Description
Internal Data	Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), financial metrics, and operational realities.
External Evidence	Upper tier government mandates, economic climate, and peer-reviewed benchmarks.
Stakeholder Values	Direct feedback from Council, residents, and community partners.
Professional Expertise	The "knowledge and experience" applied to interpret data accurately.

Strategic Alignment

Existing and or Planned Projects:

The importance of the Strategic Plan as a **"filter"** for all major decisions through a **Three-Filter Test** (Stop, Synergy, and KPI filters) for current and planned projects:

Consider the benefit of running them through these questions to assess strategic alignment – especially important in the preparation of the annual budget and capital process:

- Stop" Filter: What are we currently doing that conflicts with the new strategy?
- Synergy Filter: Does this help another department or remain a siloed effort?
- KPI Filter: Which specific metric in the strategic plan will this move?

Metrics/Outcomes for Consideration:

Staff & Operational Alignment

Focus: Efficiency and "Line of Sight" between work and goals.

- Report Alignment Rate: % of staff reports explicitly tied to a Strategic Pillar.
- Alignment Accuracy (Quality Control): % of reports returned or deferred due to insufficient strategic justification.
- KPI Velocity: Quarterly audit results showing the % of strategic KPIs on track vs. delayed.

Governance & Council Decision-Making

Focus: Ensuring leadership remains the "Guardians of the Plan."

- Strategic Tagging Integrity: % of Council motions/resolutions with a verified link to *Our Path Forward*.
- Non-Aligned Delta: Volume of "Off-Plan" items (Notice of Motions, Delegations, or Advisory recommendations) as a percentage of the total agenda.

- Advocacy Alignment: % of Conference/Ministry Delegations that directly support specific Council-approved strategic priorities.
- Refined Policy Suggestion: To ensure legislative discipline, require that all Notice of Motions include a Strategic Impact Statement

Public Participation & Trust

Focus: Closing the loop between community input and results.

- Community Impact Score: % of staff reports that can explicitly document how public input modified the final recommendation.
- The Trust Index: Annual baseline survey measuring public perception of transparency and strategic progress.

Understanding Why This Matters for Governance

In the past, the lack of these reporting structures was the "most critical gap" in the town's ability to move from planning to implementation, leading to "below target" results. By institutionalizing this "Guardian Layer," one can move to a modernized, evidence-based governance model.

The new Guardian Layer framework aims to shift culture toward evidence-based governance. A few examples below illustrate how.

- **Ensuring Staff and Governance Discipline:** Requiring a strategic link for all Staff Reports/Recommendations, Council Decisions and Notices of Motion prevents "scope creep" or "derailment" and preserves staff capacity for adopted priorities.
- **Valuing Public Voice:** Forcing a direct answer to "*Where did input make a difference?*" ensures community engagement is a core component of the final recommendation, not an afterthought.
- **Data-Driven Auditing:** Providing a quantifiable "Trust Index" and "Strategic Density" score for our quarterly performance reviews.

This discussion paper does not address aspects of implementation which may include:

- Project roadmap
- Translating corporate values to employee behaviours
- Templates & Standardized Processes: These would be required to implement the "Report Tagging" and "Three-Filter Test" recommended. Without standardized templates, staff cannot consistently tag reports with their corresponding strategic pillars.
- Detailed Operational Procedures: These would define the "KPI Filter" by identifying which specific metrics in the strategic plan a project actually moves
- Governance Review:
 - Clear roles and responsibilities so the board and staff each know what's theirs to lead
 - Stronger meetings that focus on strategy, decisions, and impact—not just updates
 - Better alignment with the mission and goals, so Council and staff time supports what really matters
 - Up-to-date policies and structures that reflect today's standards and the organization's needs