

NOW YOU'RE A TRUSTEE

A PRACTICAL REFERENCE FOR BOARD GOVERNANCE



Gabriola Fire Protection
Improvement District

So Now You Are a Trustee

(Working Reference, Prepared March 2026)

Serving as a Trustee carries a clear responsibility to govern in the public interest. Decisions made by our Board affect public safety, services, and the responsible use of taxpayer dollars. Because of this, Trustees are expected to operate within a framework that is consistent, transparent, and grounded in legislation, bylaws, and established policy.

The role of a Trustee is governance. It involves setting direction, making informed decisions, and ensuring accountability, while respecting the boundaries between governance and operations. This requires a shared understanding of authority, process, and expectations at the Board table.

This document is intended to provide a simple, practical reference to support that work. It does not replace the governing materials, but helps bring them together in a way that is accessible and easy to apply. Board membership will change annually, and this document helps support continuity so that governance remains steady, regardless of who is serving.

Over time, this reference should be reviewed and refined. Ongoing use, feedback, and experience will help strengthen its clarity and usefulness, ensuring it continues to support effective governance and informed decision-making.

Core Documents

Strong governance begins with a clear understanding of the documents that define authority, roles, and expectations. These materials are not just background reading. They are the foundation for every decision made at the Board table. Becoming familiar with them early helps ensure consistency, reduces confusion, and supports confident participation.

www.gabriolafire.ca

Checklist:

- Code of Conduct (on website)
- Letters Patent (on website)
- Valid Bylaws (on website)
- GFPID Policies (on website)
- Improvement District Manual (online)
- Local Government Act (online)
- Robert's Rules (basic understanding)
- FIPPA guidance (online)



Hierarchy and Precedence

Not all documents carry the same authority, and understanding how they relate to each other is essential. Trustees are expected to make decisions that align with the proper hierarchy. When uncertainty arises, knowing which document takes precedence helps ensure decisions remain valid, defensible, and consistent with governing legislation.



Checklist:

- Understand legislation as highest authority
- Understand bylaws must align with legislation
- Recognize bylaws override policies

Notes: _____

Legal vs Policy

A clear distinction must be made between what is legally enforceable and what serves as internal guidance. Trustees are responsible for operating within the law while also using policies to guide decisions and behaviour. Confusing the two can lead to improper decisions or overstepping authority.



Checklist:

- Understand legislation/bylaws are enforceable
- Understand policies are guidance
- Recognize legal consequences apply to legislation/bylaws
- Recognize policies do not override law

Notes: _____

Role of a Trustee

The role of a Trustee is governance. This includes setting direction, making decisions in the public interest, and ensuring accountability. It does not include managing day-to-day operations, which are the responsibility of staff and operational leadership. However, governance takes precedence where operations are inconsistent with Board-approved bylaws, policies, or strategic direction. Maintaining this distinction supports clear roles, proper boundaries, and effective, respectful working relationships.

Each trustee has a single vote and their power lies in the ability to convince the other trustees to agree with their point of view. Therefore, one trustee cannot commit the district to any particular action, not even the chair. The powers of trustee are collective, rather than individual.

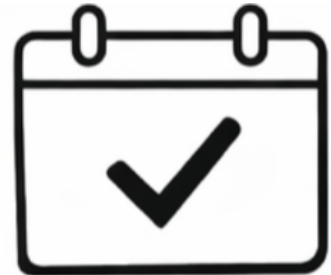
Checklist:

- Focus on governance
- Support decisions in the public interest
- Follow established authority structure
- Maintain transparency and accountability
- Avoid directing day-to-day operations

Notes: _____

Key Dates and Deadlines

Certain responsibilities follow fixed timelines and must be met each year. These dates are tied to legislative and reporting requirements and are not flexible. Awareness and early planning help avoid last-minute issues and ensure compliance.



Checklist:

- Budget submitted to Ministry (end of October)
- Election/AGM information submitted (by May 15)
- Key dates tracked and planned ahead

Notes: _____

Good Governance in Practice

Good governance is built through consistent behaviour, respectful and safe discussion, and a shared understanding of process. Trustees are expected to approach discussions thoughtfully, focus on issues rather than individuals, and contribute to a stable and professional Board environment. This is supported by established frameworks such as Bylaw 97/117 (DRAFT, Meeting Procedures), the Respectful Workplace Policy, the Code of Conduct, Policy for Handling Complaints, Policy for the Role of Chair, and the Meeting Safety Guidance chart, which together help guide expectations and reinforce a consistent standard for how the Board operates.

Checklist:

- Refer to source documents when needed (many are on the Trustees' website)
- Ask questions when unsure
- Focus discussions on issues, not individuals
- Maintain respectful conduct at all times
- Support consistency and continuity

Notes: _____

General Notes

Keep the process steady, consistent, and well-documented. When questions arise, rely on the other Trustees and the agreed upon processes.

Notes: _____

As a working reference, this document should be reviewed and refined over time. Lessons learned over time, along with practical feedback, should be incorporated to strengthen clarity, consistency, and overall effectiveness. Any questions, suggested improvements, or requests for clarification in this document should be directed to the Corporate Officer at corporateofficer@gabriolafire.ca.