

The BtoB directive is a civic based platform developed and championed by Vincent Cauley to Dispel apathy, to Invigorate the community, to Restore Good Governance, and to Establish an Environment to Attract Investors. The purpose of this directive will be to spark personal responsibility by asking the questions for each person to reflect on and keep oneself accountable and keeping others accountable.

B to B stands for Back to Basics. It is observed that the need is to get Back to Basics in the following areas

1. The Role of the People
2. The Role of the City Council
3. The Role of the Mayor
4. Conclusion

The Role of the People

In order to revitalize, reinvigorate and revive the city of Niagara Falls, it starts with the residents of Niagara Falls, the People, the electors and the voting population of the city. That's where the power is supposed to be and that's where the power must come from. If the People abdicate this power because of apathy, hopelessness and disengagement, then the people will continuously be disappointed and remain in a state of constant anger and frustration.

A. Election Process

Assuming that the election is legit, certifiable and conducted properly, the elected officials are the voice of the people. If those elected officials are not listening to the people that elected them, barring criminal charges, the ultimate accountability is contingent upon not electing those individuals back to office. But before those individuals are elected, the following questions must be asked:

Do the electors understand the positions they are voting for? Are the roles understood? Did the people vet the candidates? Did they seek them out? Did they ask them questions on the record? Off the record? What questions were they asked? What were their answers? Were the answers clear and concise and substantive? Or vague, vapid and meaningless? Was there a sense of genuineness? Does the candidate care about their constituents? Did the candidates make themselves available? What outreach and community engagement did the candidates do? Are they men and women of character?

Moreover, Is everyone of voting age registered to vote? Of those that are registered to vote, how many actually voted? Of those that voted, what were their motives for voting for that person? Were they selfish reasons or were they selfless reasons? Was the best interest of the city at heart or were special interests front and center? How much nepotism and cronyism is involved in the decision to vote for a particular candidate? The professional avenues must be utilized as well such as the newspaper, live debates, candidates' forum etc. The people must partake in these events and then have public discourse and debate amongst themselves at

home, at the store, at other social gatherings. This can be done in the spirit of moving forward together. There is no need to disrespect, disregard, reject, or harass one another. It can be conducted civilly and respectfully. But politics can be personal and anything can happen. It is the people that must accept responsibility, if it wants the power. "With great power comes great responsibility."

The people must be empowered and challenged to vote and to make an informed vote. This must be done one person at a time, person to person. The community must engage in continuous, serious discussion about who the candidates are, what they have done, what they want to do and why they want to do it. Does the candidate have a plan? This is the responsibility of freedom and the right to vote. Civil rights and Women's suffrage were fought and engaged individuals were on the front line to fight for the right to vote. Many people today are not registered and many of those that are registered are not voting. The culture of the community should deem this unacceptable and inexcusable.

B. Expectations of Government

Once the election is over and the candidates are declared winners, the people must still be engaged and maintain responsibility for holding those elected persons accountable for what they said during their campaign and then what they do in their respective position. The people can unite and gather in town halls at their own convenience with the advent of technology and social media. This is a 24/7/365 forum. Other opportunities include public meetings held at city hall such as planning board meetings and zoning board meetings; the bi-weekly city council meeting; community events that are happening throughout the year; other community informational meetings that are occurring at other venues throughout the city. Information can be exchanged and organic conversations can occur in more relaxed settings such as the annual World of Beer event at the NACC, the Italian festival or the Juneteenth festival, where hot topics can be discussed. How many people are in attendance at council meetings? How many people have reviewed the agenda? How many people have sent an email to The Council or Mayor/City Administrator? Is it the same handful of people? Are the people forming active groups to elevate the city or for other interests? The City Council meeting is an opportunity to backup your vote with your voice by showing up. If there are questions that need to be asked in public, that's an excellent venue to do so. If there is information to be conveyed, that is a time to meet with other community-minded individuals and exchange ideas.

We must not expect the government solve our personal problems. We must take responsibility for our own well-being. We cannot expect the government to do for us what we can do for ourselves. Are we engaging in productive activities on a daily, weekly, monthly, yearly basis? Do we want our streets safe? Do we want our community to be healthy, vibrant, prosperous and thriving? Do we want the law applied equally to everyone, in every case? Yes, these are the hard questions that We the People must ask of ourselves.

The public must actively engage in oversight and accountability of those that are elected. Each agenda item is an expenditure of city funds; a piece of legislation as to how the city operates; or a philosophy those in power want to function under. We must expect the city government to provide an environment that allows the people to succeed and find their own success. The city government should provide services that the people can't provide for themselves. How are the City Council and Mayor spending our tax dollars? What services are we getting? What is the quality of the services? What services are we not getting? What is the quality of those services? Is the government providing refuse and recycling services? Are the roads and streets being maintained all year round? Is city-property being well-kept? Is the infrastructure being maintained and upgraded on a continuous basis? Are the numerous parks being taken care of? Are dead trees or trees that are hindering residents and/or services being removed and at a reasonable pace? Are public utilities being delivered with the best quality and the best price possible? Are the streets well lit at night? Is the city government developing and fostering good relationships with the local business community, local entrepreneurs and local owners? Do residents feel safe? Are crimes being solved? Are criminals facing immediate consequences for their actions? Are people getting fair investigations and trials? Are the mentally-ill and homeless populations receiving proper attention and resources? Are the non-profit organizations being held accountable for resources they are receiving for their stated objectives? DO residents receive information about what's happening in the city in a timely manner? Is each stage of the process of city projects constantly promoted to keep people in the know? Is their transparency in city projects? Is handling business with the city user-friendly? Do residents believe that they are being listened to and heard? It is up to the People to apply the constant, unrelenting pressure on the elected officials by the various avenues of contact: TV, radio, newspaper, internet, email and most importantly their fellow residents to sway them. In addition, if the government must be compelled to provide information, the People can engage in the FOIA (Freedom of Information Act) process. That is another tool in the toolbox of the People for accountability.

The population is on the decline. Those that have the ability to move are and will do so. The people that remain are not able to, don't want to or have surrendered their livelihoods to the powers that be. Its the law of decreasing interests that has been occurring. By this, as fewer and fewer people are engaged, only a handful of people have been able to take control of the government and have shaped it to their will. And the more people that leave, the less voters are needed for them to hold on to power. There is one last group, those who believe things can change. We the People have to expect better, expect more from our city government and of our community. The fire must be lit from within the people of Niagara Falls to change the city of Niagara Falls from within.

The Role of the City Council

The City Council is the most front-facing body of government. The City Council has privileges that are not supposed to be interfered with by the Executive. There are more elected officials in this body of government

than the Executive branch. They makeup the branch of government fully elected by the people. They are the group closest to the people, more accessible, more responsible. This body has at least two public meetings a month in which the public can come and address these individuals with any and all concerns, or learn about the latest policies of the city and issues of the residents.

In the present form of government, these five (5) individual are responsible for the budget and legislation. It is supposed to be up to the Council to lead the city from this perspective. They must take responsibility and ownership as elected officials and as the Legislative branch of government. They may have different backgrounds, with different thoughts, ideas and opinions on how to move the city forward in a positive and productive way, but that is something up for debate amongst the five members. This direction should be based upon what they stated their platform was over the course of their campaign. This should be what they were voted by the People into office to do. The Council members were elected to do what they said they were going to do for the People, for the residents and for the City. They must hold each other accountable for making the best decisions on behalf of the People and the City. These decisions are in the form of their vote. Three of the five votes constitutes a majority. With each Yay or Nay, the People and the City are going in one direction or another. They should explain their logic, reasoning and justification in the ears of their constituents. The more contentious the item up for vote, they should be even more beholden to a thorough explanation.

With each Council meeting there is an agenda to which they vote on the items, Yay or Nay. This agenda belongs to the City Council. They must take ownership of it. They are the branch of government it belongs to. It should thus reflect the will of the people. This agenda should also be spear-headed by the Council members themselves. They should be actively engaging the public, interacting with the People and they should have the pulse of the Community as to what needs to done. Per the Charter, The Council has the power to stand up "citizen advisory bodies....to provide itself with advice and recommendations with respect to specific matters..." if the deep knowledge and experience is insufficient for a given topic. For example, there is already a sub council per the charter known as the "CONSERVATION ADVISORY COUNCIL" whose "legislative intent" pertains to "The preservation and improvement of the quality of the natural and man-made environment within the City of Niagara Falls, in the face of population change, urbanization, and technologic evolution with their accompanying demands on natural resources, are found to be of increasing and vital importance to the health, welfare, and economic well-being of present and future inhabitants and require forthright action by the City of Niagara Falls." Where has this body been employed in the midst of today's technological advancements?

Furthermore, if there are insufficient funds, resources, or assets to carry out any function, the Council is in control of the budget. They are supposed to recognize the deficiency or a member of the Council recognizes the deficiency and presents that case to the rest of the members in order to gain their support. Then they are to come to an

agreement to allocate funds, create a position, or anything related thereof to carry out their official capacity. It is well within their authority to do so. It is obligatory to do so. Failure to do so is dereliction of duty. Hard decisions must be made. With limited funds comes limited decisions. But even to that point, the City Council has the power to grow the budget through commerce and creativity. It can do this because it has the power "To enter into contracts, franchises, and other agreements, including agreements with other units of government for all lawful purposes." Shouldn't the City Council be acting in such a manner to do so?

Currently, the bulk of the agenda comes from the Executive. If there are different views on a particular issue/topic/item coming from the Executive, it is up to the members to discuss the pros and cons of such requests. It is the responsibility of Council to do their due-diligence to ensure that each particular expenditure is the best use of city funds, resources and assets. This is contingent upon the crucial function of the Council members is that they are supposed to be the chief investigators and are authorized to be as such. From the Charter, the "Power of Investigation" states that "The Council shall have the power to investigate the affairs of every City department, board, commission, agency or other instrumentality of City government and the official conduct of every City officer except the Mayor. The Council shall have access to all records and papers kept by all City officers, departments, boards, commissions, agencies and other instrumentalities of City government and shall have the power to compel the attendance of witnesses and the production of books, papers and other evidence at any meeting of the Council, and for that purpose may issue subpoenas signed by the Chairman of the Council."

If the City Council or in effect the majority of the City Council subjugate themselves and their power and their authority to the Executive for whatever reason, the city government is wholly compromised. They are utterly derelict to their duty. The separation of powers and the system of checks and balances is no longer in effect and providing that firewall for the People. This is no longer an American form of government. Moreover, if the Executive does not have the best interests of the city at heart, the resulting city government becomes a dictatorship with the People as mere pawns used to get their money only to spend it on anything else for anyone else other than the very own constituents from which it was obtained under penalty of law. Per the Charter, "The Council shall be responsible for appropriating public revenues and levying taxes. It shall have the duty and power to find the facts it deems necessary and proper, through investigative powers heretofore provided, to formulate and assure the faithful and effective execution of its fiscal policies."

These five individuals should care about the entire city, regardless of where they live or what demographics he/she may represent. It is expected that they would fight to exercise their powers as delegated to them by the Charter. If they are not permitted to take certain action by the Charter, they have the ability to initiate a change of the Charter per the Charter itself. Nonetheless, they are expected to be an independent branch of government. They are not supposed to work for the Executive but

they are supposed to work with the Executive to carry out their duties through the budget, legislation and due-diligence of the issues at hand.

The Role of the Mayor

Per the Charter, "The Mayor shall be the chief executive and administrative officer of the City and head of the executive branch of government. He or she shall be responsible for the execution and enforcement of the laws of the State and the local legislative acts of the Council, within the City boundaries." In other words, he or she shall carry out the budget and legislation that the City Council votes in. The Executive has veto power of course. The Mayor has privileges that are not supposed to be interfered with by the City Council. The Mayor appoints the City Administrator, who is the Boss of the day to day operations. He is over the heads of all the departments.

Per the Charter, "All policies, rules and regulations of the executive branch shall be promulgated by executive order signed by the Mayor" and by thus the Mayor determines how the Administration shall be ran. It will reflect his or her will, his or her character or lack thereof, and ultimately his or her leadership abilities or lack thereof. Since the City Council is so accessible, the bulk of the complaints fall at their feet, but it is the Mayor and City Administrator that are responsible for the management of the departments of the city. What are the departments? Assessor, City Clerk, Code Enforcement, Community Development and Leased Housing, Controller, Corporation Counsel, Economic Development, Engineering, Fire, Human Resources, Library, Management Information Service (IT), Planning and Environmental, Public Works and Parks, Police and Purchasing.

The Mayor is supposed to provide a vision for the city. He or she is supposed to set a trail that leads the city into future. He or she is supposed to leverage the personnel and work with the City Council to use the public revenue to make a place where visitors want to come, residents enjoy living and businesses want to operate.

Conclusion

Whether its sports, education, construction, music/arts or anything other field of endeavor, mastering the basics must be first priority. There must be a proper foundation to build upon. Can you build a mansion on the foundation of a shed? Can you be good a point guard in basketball if you don't know how to dribble? Can you succeed in math if you don't know how to properly add, subtract, multiply and divide? Developing an attractive, user-friendly, vibrant city is no different. The problem must be effectively diagnosed. Only then can the proper solution be found. The everyday, ordinary person must assume responsibility for their vote. He or she must apply that vote to the most qualified individuals to elevate them to public service. Those individuals must be dedicated to public service, not self-service or private service. They must come together per their Constitutional oath with the intention to serve and make the community for all, not just a select few. The People must be relentless in their pursuit of such individuals. If the current elected officials

are not doing their job, then the People must not allow the another term.
Otherwise, they get what they allowed and ultimately what they voted for.