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Profile in Public Integrity: Lynda Taschereau

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Profiles in Public Integrity: Lynda Taschereau

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Lynda Taschereau serves as Executive Director of the Strategic and Corporate Policy Division of the City of Toronto, Canada. In that role, she is responsible for key functions including inter-governmental relations, strategic planning and policy development, governance and decision-making structures for Toronto's City Council and City's agencies and corporations, and the policy framework for the City's Accountability Officers. Taschereau's team leads government-wide initiatives and provides objective, professional advice to the Mayor and City Council. She is committed to public service and has a special interest in the policy development process and the role of leaders throughout organizations. Taschereau was a recipient of the 2014 City of Toronto Ombudsman's Award recognizing outstanding public service.



You've played a key role in developing and implementing Toronto's unique Accountability Framework. What is this framework and why was it introduced?

The framework sets out the policy provisions for Toronto's four independent Accountability Officers – collectively: the Auditor General (focused on the use of public funds and value for money); the Ombudsman (focused on administrative fairness and equitable service delivery); the Integrity Commissioner (responsible for Codes of Conduct for elected officials, advice and complaint resolution); and the Lobbyist Registrar (promoting transparency through public disclosure of lobbying).

The policy framework forms part of the City's Municipal Code (City legislation) and includes principles of independence balanced with direct accountability to City Council. Key provisions include fixed terms of office, a transparent selection process, the requirement for a two-thirds majority vote of Council for appointment and removal, removal for cause only, and a direct reporting relationship to City Council, not through City staff/administration. The framework details the Accountability Officers' powers and duties in law, and their distinct mandates, responsibilities and jurisdictions as established by Council. In addition to a direct reporting relationship to Council, other mechanisms that support accountability include annual reports and annual attest and compliance audits.

Accountability, transparency, fairness, integrity – these are all attributes that governments aspire to achieve. In 2002, following a significant municipal amalgamation, Toronto began implementing

measures in all of these areas. City Council appointed an Auditor General in 2002 and an Integrity Commissioner in 2004. At the same time, the Province of Ontario was creating Toronto-specific governing legislation (the City of Toronto Act). Toronto asked the Province to include a requirement in the Act for these two positions as well as an Ombudsman and a lobbyist registry (with the ability to appoint a Lobbyist Registrar), and that the positions be empowered through the legislation.

Because these actions took place over a number of years we recognized the need to clearly establish a robust policy framework – to underpin and clarify roles and responsibilities and ensure sustainability over time.

How did you and your colleagues win over skeptics and make the case that the Accountability Framework would contribute value to city government?

Momentum had been building in this area. The significant amalgamation of six local municipalities and one regional municipality into the new City of Toronto had created the largest City government in Canada and the fourth-largest in North America. We had just been through an Inquiry into allegations of conflict of interest, bribery, and misappropriation of funds around computer leasing contracts. Our Mayor and Council were ready to take leadership. As a city we were ready to put more robust measures in place to support accountability and transparent decision-making. There was a general recognition of the need for these measures and the importance of enshrining them in both Provincial and City legislation to make sure they had substance and longevity.

Imagine a major city with chronic corruption problems. A new reformist mayor takes office and wants to create a new accountability system, with Toronto as a potential model. What factors should the new government consider? What challenges should they anticipate?

From a policy-development perspective, it is really important to have a clear picture of the desired outcome. We started out with incremental actions like appointing an Integrity Commissioner and building accountability requirements into Provincial legislation but recognized that we needed more. There was an understanding that the City needed stronger accountability tools to govern effectively. Toronto had a new Mayor who believed this should be a priority. There was also a core group of senior staff who had given the matter considerable thought and who were able to visualize the ultimate framework and its component policy pieces.

One key challenge is being able to resist the pressure to deal with corruption on a case by case basis without taking the time needed to create sustainable, workable policies and processes that set clear expectations and strengthen prevention. This is what our accountability framework is – a well thought out, policy based approach.

Congratulations on winning the 2014 City of Toronto Ombudsman's Award for outstanding public service. What has motivated you to devote your career to city government?

Toronto's government is extraordinary – it is a system built on the idea of finding consensus, rather than on opposition, with a very open and transparent decision-making process. It is a fascinating place to work and I am motivated by knowing that I play a part in helping the government make good decisions through sound public policy advice. City government is the closest to the people and our services impact nearly every aspect of daily life for Torontonians. There are many professional and personal reasons that my career has been focused here; it's a privilege to be part of the Toronto public service. I gain a great deal of satisfaction knowing that the results of my work can be seen and felt in a very real way.

You recently participated in CAPI's Global Cities: Joining Forces Against Corruption conference. Did you take away any lessons from the event, or from speaking with other delegates, that have informed your understanding of the fight against municipal corruption?

I found it interesting that the participating cities had sometimes quite different methods but all have a similarly principled view of the work. There's a true community of practice that has developed somewhat independently across the world but shares a strong belief that people deserve accountable, ethical government with decisions that are driven by public benefit, not private gain.

It's important to hear about the different legislation, policies and processes and to consider what might be applicable here in Toronto to strengthen our approach – for example, increased training and education or new investigative methods.

The opportunity to come together, share experiences and learn from each other is of significant value. I hope to maintain the connections made at CAPI's Global Cities conference.