

**Office of the Integrity Commissioner
Town of Essex
2025 Periodic Report**

In fulfilment of my role as the Town of Essex appointed Integrity Commissioner pursuant to the rules of Part V.1 of the *Municipal Act*, I respectfully submit the 2025 Periodic Report of the Office of the Integrity Commissioner for the Town of Essex (the “Town”) for Council’s consideration and receipt. Subsection 223.6(1) of the *Municipal Act* states that “If the Commissioner provides a periodic report to the municipality on his or her activities, the Commissioner may summarize advice he or she has given but shall not disclose confidential information that could identify a person concerned”. I was appointed as Integrity Commissioner for the Town effective December 1, 2025 .This report covers the period from December 1, 2025 to December 31, 2025.

Role of the Integrity Commissioner:

Of assistance in clarifying the role of an Integrity Commissioner is a review of the relevant sections set out by Justice Bellamy in the 2005 Bellamy Report:

An integrity commissioner provides significant profile to ethical issues inside City government and sends an important message to constituents about the City’s commitment to ethical governance.

No matter how comprehensive the rules, there will on occasion be situations where the ethical course of action is not clear and an individual will need authoritative advice and guidance.

Without enforcement, the rules are only guidelines. Although research shows that a values-based approach to ethics policy, focusing on defining values and encouraging employee commitment, is preferable to a system of surveillance and punishment, where the public interest is involved, there should be a deterrent in the form of consequences for bad behaviour. The rules must have teeth.

Justice Bellamy went on to state that an Integrity Commissioner should have certain attributes, which include:

- excellent and effective communication skills in functions including presentations, public speaking, and one-on-one interactions with employees of all levels
- objectivity and thoughtfulness
- ability to establish and maintain credibility and trust throughout the organization
- ability to quickly assimilate information relating to complex issues
- ability to network on all levels of an organization
- political astuteness
- personal and professional maturity

- working knowledge of applicable laws and regulations
- discretion and ability to protect confidential information
- ability and willingness to take a difficult or unpopular position if necessary

Justice Bellamy and Justice Cunningham, Commissioner of the Mississauga Inquiry, recommended that an Integrity Commissioner should be an ethics professional with the skills and attributes to conduct a fair and objective investigation in accordance with the by-laws of the municipality.

The Integrity Commissioner is not the arbiter of personalities and will not allow the Office to be weaponized or used for a purpose other than that which is set out in the *Municipal Act*. The Integrity Commissioner investigates complaints about a Member's conduct under the Code of Conduct for Members of Council and Boards (the "Code"). If the alleged conduct relates to another process such as access to information, human resources or the Criminal Code, the Integrity Commissioner will invite the complainant to pursue the matter through another process. Where following the investigation of a formal complaint, there is a finding of a violation of the Code, the Commissioner reports on her findings and makes recommendations to Council on possible penalties or corrective action. . In circumstance in which, the complaint raises important questions around governance and transparency or systemic issues, the Integrity Commissioner will report these in her periodic or Annual report to Council. The Integrity Commissioner is not responsible for the receipt, review or investigation of the actions, decisions or omissions of staff, or decisions of Council as a whole.

Municipal Election and Social Media:

In accordance with section 18.06 of the Code, between nomination day (August 21, 2026 this year) and voting day, there shall be no requests for an inquiry, no reports from the Integrity Commissioner on Code contraventions and no meetings of Council or a local board to consider imposing any penalties on a member of Council or a local board.

While this Office cannot receive Code complaints during this period leading up to the municipal election (between Nomination Day and Voting Day), I remain available to provide guidance on the Code rules to sitting Members with respect to their obligations as elected officials until voting day. This Office cannot provide candidates with *Municipal Elections Act* ("MEA") advice and has no jurisdiction to enforce the rules of the MEA.

Of particular importance given that this is a municipal election year is Members' use of social media. Section 8 of the Codes is entitled, Use of Town Property, Services and Other Resources:

8.0 Members are required to follow the provisions of the Municipal Elections Act, 1996. No Member shall use the facilities, equipment, supplies, services or other resources of the Town for any election campaign or campaign-related activities. Members shall not undertake campaign-related activities on Town property and

shall not use the services of persons for election-related purposes during hours in which those persons receive any compensation from the Town.

While the Code does not include any specific reference to “social media”, section 8 of the Code links Town logos, contact information and the official identifiers to Use of Town Property. As a result, Members should be mindful that using disclaimers such as “all views are my own” may help clarify the authorship of personal Social Media messages; however, this does not absolve a Member from the responsibility of adhering to the rules in the Code.

As a best practice, Members participating in Social Media for personal use should not:

- Claim to represent the Town as a Town spokesperson directly or indirectly;
- Use a Town email address or contact information to register an account;
- Post false or misleading information about the Town, its programs/services, partners, Members of Council or staff;
- Reveal confidential Town information or compromise resident privacy, including posting photos without appropriate written consent;
- Use Town-owned logos, uniforms, photographs, graphics or other media;
- Make inappropriate comments with respect to the Town, Members or staff or comments that may reflect negatively on the Town.

Activities of the Office:

In this reporting period, since it relates only to one month, the Office did not have significant activity. I received only a few inquiries from Members of Council requesting guidance on how the Code rules govern their role as elected officials and 2 requests for written advice with respect to their obligations under the *Municipal Conflict of Interest Act* (the “MCIA”). This year is a municipal election year and an underlying principle of the Code is that Members will conduct themselves in a manner that promotes public confidence and will bear close public scrutiny. Members are advised to transparently and clearly establish a separation between their election-related activities and their private activities as candidates and to avoid any use of Town resources to support election-related activities which may be in contravention of the Code. Under the *Municipal Act* and the Code, the Integrity Commissioner cannot receive any complaints during the period starting on nomination day ending on the date of swearing in of Council members. However, Members may seek the Code and MCIA advice from the Integrity Commissioner throughout this year up to election day.

Code of Conduct General Inquiries

From Members of Council	From the Public	From staff	Total Inquiries
2	0	2	4

Code of Conduct Complaints

	2025
Formal complaints - Disposition	0 NA
Informal complaints - Disposition	0 NA
Total Code of Conduct Complaints	0

Bill 9:

With Bill 9, the *Municipal Accountability Act, 2025*, the Province is proposing to strengthen accountability by creating mechanisms of enforcement to allow municipal councils the ability to remove members who commit egregious breaches of the Code of Conduct, as well as introducing enhanced duties for the Provincial Integrity Commissioner.

The Bill is currently at third reading. The Bill:

- seeks to expand the application of municipal policies related to municipal accountability regimes with respect to *Codes of Conduct for Members of Council*, to include the removal of a member in exceptional circumstances where there has been an egregious breach of those rules.
- would enable the creation of a standard municipal code of conduct and code investigation process in a protocol, with the intent of creating consistency across all Ontario municipalities.
- would create a role for the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario, to provide oversight of municipal integrity commissioners, including providing training to municipal integrity commissioners and training to members of council.
- proposes to establish a mechanism to permit the municipality to allow the Integrity Commissioner to recommend the removal and disqualification of members of council and certain local boards, for a period of four years for the most serious code of conduct violations. This mechanism would include Council’s receipt of a concurring report from the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario, and a unanimous vote of council on that report. If there is a unanimous vote, this would have Council decide to remove the Member from office and the Member would be ineligible for re-election (or to sit on a local board) in the municipality for a period of four years.

Statement of Expenditures

No invoices submitted – Integrity Commissioner Services (including remuneration for advice to Members of Council and Council, as well as Informal and Formal Code

Complaint reviews and investigation).

Respectfully submitted,



Suzanne Craig
Integrity Commissioner

April 13, 2026