

Notice of Motion

Monday, May 12, 2025

From: Councillor Phelps Bondaroff

“That the Union of British Columbia Municipalities request the Provincial Government establish and administer an opt in lobbyist registration and regulation system for municipal governments similar to the provincial mechanism under the BC Lobbyist Registration Act.”

Draft UBCM Resolution:

Municipal Lobbyist Registration Administered by the Province

Whereas the *Lobbyist Transparency Act* (formerly the *Lobbyists Registration Act*) requires individuals and organizations who lobby public office holders, and meet specific criteria, to register their lobbying activities in an online public registry;

And whereas the goal of the BC *Lobbyists Transparency Act* is to promote transparency in lobbying and government decision-making:

Therefore, be it resolved that UBCM request that the provincial government establish and administer an opt-in lobbyist registration and regulation system for municipal governments, similar to the provincial mechanism under the BC *Lobbyists Transparency Act*.

Background

Transparency and accountability are foundational principles of good governance. Public confidence in government decision-making depends on the ability of citizens to understand who is influencing their elected officials and how decisions are made. In British Columbia, lobbying activities at the provincial level are subject to oversight by the Office of the Registrar of Lobbyists under the *Lobbyists Transparency Act* (LTA),¹ formerly known as the *Lobbyist Registration Act* (LRA).² However, no comparable system exists to regulate lobbying at the municipal level, creating a significant gap in transparency.

Current Provincial Framework

The *Lobbyists Transparency Act* requires individuals and organizations who meet certain criteria to register their lobbying efforts with public office holders in a searchable, online database. The goal of the legislation is to ensure that lobbying activities are transparent and accessible to the public.

Oversight is provided by the Office of the Registrar of Lobbyists, an independent office of the BC Legislature. Its mandate includes monitoring lobbying compliance, conducting investigations, and promoting transparency in government interactions with external

¹ See Government of British Columbia (2001). Lobbyist Transparency Act [SBC 2001] CHAPTER 42. Available at https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/complete/statreg/01042_01 and see Government of British Columbia (2001). Lobbyists Registration Act [SBC 2001] CHAPTER 42. Available at https://www.bclaws.gov.bc.ca/civix/document/id/consol18/consol18/00_01042_01

² Title changed to *Lobbyists Transparency Act* by the *Lobbyists Registration Amendment Act*, 2018, SBC2018, c. 52, s. 1, effective May 4, 2020 (B.C. Reg. 235/2019).] available at <https://tinyurl.com/35k583rb>

actors. As the Office notes: “A strong democracy is built on access to a government that conducts its business transparently and is willing to listen to its constituents.”³

Municipal Gap in Oversight

Despite the provincial registry’s clear benefits, lobbying at the municipal level remains largely unregulated in British Columbia. There is currently no provincial legislation that applies to lobbying of local governments, nor any legal framework that allows municipalities to enforce their own lobbying registries with the same authority as the provincial system.

This legislative gap has led to a patchwork approach. A small number of B.C. municipalities, including Surrey (since 2008)⁴ and Kelowna (September 2023),⁵ have developed their own local lobbyist registries. More recently, Port Moody City Council debated but ultimately voted down a similar initiative in May 2024.⁶ These efforts, while commendable, lack uniformity and enforcement power, and place the onus (and cost) on individual municipalities to develop and fund their own systems without legislative backing or consistent standards.

The Case for a Province-Led Municipal Lobbyist Registry

A municipally scoped lobbying registry overseen by the Province would offer several key benefits:

1. Improved Transparency and Trust: A province-led system would provide consistent public access to information about who is attempting to influence municipal decision-making across all BC communities. This would increase trust in the decisions made by local governments and help reassure the public that policy choices reflect public interest, not private pressure.
2. Consistency Across Jurisdictions: Without provincial legislation, each municipality is left to design, implement, and administer its own system – if it chooses to do so at all. This results in inconsistent practices, compliance challenges, and public confusion. A single, province-wide framework would simplify compliance for lobbyists, reduce administrative burdens for municipalities, and ensure uniform transparency across all local governments.

³ Office of the Registrar of Lobbyists BC (n.d.). “About us.” Available at <https://www.lobbyistsregistrar.bc.ca>

⁴ City of Surrey. (2025). “Lobbyist registrations.” Available at <https://www.surrey.ca/city-government/mayor-council/lobbyist-registrations>

⁵ City of Kelowna. (n.d.). “Lobbyist registry.” Available at <https://www.kelowna.ca/lobbyist-registry>

⁶ Bartel, M. (2024 May 21). “Port Moody looking at registering lobbyists.” *Tri City News*. Available at <https://www.tricitynews.com/local-news/port-moody-looking-at-registering-lobbyists-8773524>; and see Penner, P. (2024 May 23). “No time for lobbyist registry, Port Moody council decides.” *Tri City Dispatches*. Available at <https://tricitydispatch.com/lobbyist-registry-port-moody/>

3. **Democratic Integrity:** Lobbying is a legitimate and valuable part of the democratic process, offering critical input into policymaking. However, without clear rules and disclosure requirements, the process becomes opaque. A registry makes visible the relationships and interactions that shape local decisions, enhancing democratic integrity.
4. **Cost and Administrative Burdens:** Having each municipality develop and manage their own lobbyist registry is administratively and financially burdensome. The alternative of having each municipality design, develop, implement, and administer their own registries leads to a host of unnecessary costs to municipalities.

Engaging with the Province

This is not the first resolution calling for a municipal lobbyist registry to be presented at UBCM. The most recent resolution was adopted by UBCM in 2019.⁷ The province's response was promising, and it requested additional input from UBCM regarding details of what was being proposed, noting that:

“Provincial and local governments across the country have approached the creation of municipal lobbyist registries in a variety of ways, including: voluntary registries, registries administered at the local level and those administered at the provincial level. In moving forward, the Province will need a clearer understanding of what local governments hope to achieve through a municipal lobbyist registry to ensure that an approach is taken that meets those intended outcomes and meets the needs of any local government interested in having a lobbyist registry.”⁸

This resolution seeks to engage with this question from the province directly by clearly asking that the province establish and administer an opt-in lobbyist registration and regulation system. Having the system established and administered by the province will remove administrative burdens from municipalities and ensure the existence of a province-wide system, accessible to all lobbyists. Having this serve as an opt-in program allows municipalities to decide if they would like to participate, creating flexibility and supporting municipal autonomy.

Conclusion

British Columbia's current lack of municipal lobbying oversight presents a significant transparency gap. While local governments can and have taken independent steps to address this issue, the absence of enabling legislation and administrative support severely limits their efforts. A centralized municipal lobbyist registry, overseen by the Province, would provide clarity, consistency, and trust across all local governments.

⁷ UBCM (2019). “Resolution B74: Lobbyist registration.” Available at <https://www.ubcm.ca/convention-resolutions/resolutions/resolutions-database/lobbyist-registration>

⁸ UBCM (2019). “Resolution B74: Lobbyist registration.” Available at <https://www.ubcm.ca/convention-resolutions/resolutions/resolutions-database/lobbyist-registration>

By supporting this resolution, UBCM delegates will be calling on the Province to fulfill its expressed willingness to work with local governments on this issue. Such a system would not only improve transparency and governance at the municipal level but also strengthen the overall democratic health of our communities. This resolution builds on past successful resolutions adopted by UBCM and provides additional details stipulating a preference for an opt-in municipal lobbyist registry that would be established and administered by the province.

Previous Resolutions

Lobbyist Registration

Year: 2019

Number: [B74](#)

Sponsor(s): Richmond

Whereas the BC Lobbyists Registration Act LRA requires individuals and organizations who lobby public office holders and meet specific criteria to register their lobbying activities in an online public registry;

And whereas the goal of the BC Lobbyists Registration Act is to promote transparency in lobbying and government decision-making:

Therefore be it resolved that UBCM request that a lobbying regulation system for municipal government, similar to the provincial mechanism under the BC Lobbyists Registration Act, be established.

Provincial Response: Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

The Government of BC is willing to discuss initiatives, like a municipal lobbyist registry, which will increase local government accountability and promote openness and transparency in interactions between public servants, elected officials and lobbyists. Provincial and local governments across the country have approached the creation of municipal lobbyist registries in a variety of ways, including: voluntary registries, registries administered at the local level and those administered at the provincial level. In moving forward, the Province will need a clearer understanding of what local governments hope to achieve through a municipal lobbyist registry to ensure that an approach is taken that meets those intended outcomes and meets the needs of any local government interested in having a lobbyist registry.

Convention Decision: Endorsed

Municipal Lobbyist Registry

Year: 2017

Number: [B99](#)

Sponsor(s): Vancouver

Whereas other provinces have enacted legislation that allows for municipal lobbyist registries ranging from Quebec, which requires municipal lobbyists to register in the provincial registry, to Ontario, which allows for municipalities to set up their own registries with enforcement powers;

And whereas British Columbia does not currently allow municipalities to use the provincial lobbyist registry nor does it extend the legal authorities municipalities would need to enforce lobbyist rules with a local registry:

Therefore be it resolved that the Province of BC provide municipalities with the ability to register lobbyists, create rules for lobbyists conduct in their interactions with elected officials and public servants, and the ability to enforce those rules.

Provincial Response: Ministry of Municipal Affairs Housing

The Government of BC believes in openness and transparency. This is why a provincial lobbyist registry was created in 1996. Currently, local governments can take voluntary approaches to establishing a municipal lobbyist registry. For example, they can establish a voluntary lobbyist registry in their community, as has been done in the City of Surrey. Self-declared lobbyists voluntarily file a form with the City of Surrey to provide the citizens of the City with access to information about persons who attempt to influence decision-making. However, as noted in the resolution, current authorities do not allow local governments with a registry the ability to enforce compliance. If local governments, through the Union of BC Municipalities, express interest in establishing mandatory lobbyist registries, the Province is willing to discuss the matter further.

Convention Decision: Endorsed