



The Corporation of the Township of Huron-Kinloss

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Honourable Rob Flack
Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing
College Park, 17th Floor, 777 Bay St.
Toronto, ON M7A 2J3
Via email: minister.mah@ontario.ca

Re: Implementation of Strong Mayor Powers in Small and Rural Communities

Dear Minister Flack,

On behalf of the Council and residents of the Township of Huron-Kinloss, please accept congratulations on your recent appointment as Minister of Municipal Affairs & Housing. We look forward to working with you and Ministry Staff.

The Ministry of Municipal Affairs & Housing announced on April 9, 2025, an expansion of Strong Mayor Powers to additional Ontario municipalities, including small and rural communities such as ours. I am writing to respectfully express our thoughts and concerns regarding this expansion of powers.

We understand and appreciate the Ministry's intention to provide Mayors with the tools to deliver on provincial priorities, particularly housing and infrastructure. While these changes may enhance the ability of large urban centres to act swiftly, their implementation in small and rural municipalities warrants careful examination.

The proposed expansion of strong mayor powers in 169 additional municipalities marks a significant policy shift that could streamline project delivery in line with provincial priorities. However, this approach raises serious concerns—not only about the erosion of traditional democratic processes and reduced municipal autonomy, but also regarding the negative impacts on staff relationships, professional integrity, and the clear demarcation between council and staff roles.

In small rural municipalities, these powers risk exacerbating existing governance challenges, potentially leading to decisions that do not adequately reflect local priorities or community interests. The current relationship between staff and Council in our municipality is positive, collaborative, and built on mutual respect.

This strong working relationship supports open communication and allows staff to provide professional, unbiased advice that helps guide informed decision-making.

While there are no current concerns about the use of strong mayor powers with the existing Council in place, the structure of governance should be designed to protect effective decision-making practices regardless of who holds office.

Without sufficient safeguards, future changes in Council composition could create a risk of diminished collaboration or politicization of administrative roles.

To help ensure the appropriate and effective use of these powers in small and rural municipalities, we respectfully propose the following measures:

- 1) **Opt-Out or Exemption Options for Small Municipalities** – Municipalities should be granted the ability to opt out of the strong mayor framework or be exempted based on clearly defined population size or housing growth thresholds. This ensures that only those municipalities with the capacity and demonstrated need for such powers are included.
- 2) **Tailored or Scaled Powers Based on Local Context** – Strong mayor powers should not be applied in a one-size-fits-all manner. A graduated model, allowing municipalities to adopt only those powers that align with their needs and governance structures, would better support effective local administration. Municipal Councils should also be permitted to vote on which powers, if any, are delegated to the Mayor.
- 3) **Stronger Oversight and Accountability Mechanisms** – The introduction of independent third-party audits of decisions made under strong mayor powers would promote transparency and public trust. A formal review process led by the Province, specific to the municipal impact of these powers, would further ensure they remain aligned with intended outcomes.
- 4) **Protection for Municipal Staff and Professional Advice** – To preserve the professional integrity of municipal staff, legislative protections should be introduced to shield staff from dismissal or reprisal when offering professional advice. Safeguarding staff ensures that governance decisions continue to be based on evidence and expertise.
- 5) **Council Override Mechanisms** – A functional system of checks and balances must be preserved. Lowering the threshold required for Council to override a mayoral veto would support democratic decision-making and provide assurance that all voices on Council continue to hold weight.
- 6) **Mandatory Public Consultation on Key Decisions** – Public input must remain a cornerstone of municipal governance. Strong mayor powers should

not undermine public participation, especially on decisions related to land use, development, budgets, or other matters with lasting community impact.

- 7) **Provincial Reporting and Evaluation** – The Ministry should publish an annual report summarizing how strong mayor powers are being utilized across Ontario. In addition, we recommend a province-led review of the impact of these powers within two years of implementation, including direct consultation with affected municipalities.
- 8) **Mayoral Experience Requirements** – Strong mayor powers should be restricted to individuals who have served at least one full term on Council. This would help ensure that those entrusted with expanded authority possess sufficient understanding of municipal governance and are not seeking office solely for access to these powers.
- 9) **Support for Transition to At-Large Council Models** – To encourage more cohesive Council operations, particularly in small communities, we recommend that the Province explore strategies and provide guidance to support municipalities in transitioning from ward-based to at-large systems. This would encourage unity, reduce political fragmentation, and enhance collaboration in the decision-making process.

In closing, we appreciate the Province's commitment to improving municipal efficiency and responsiveness to housing and infrastructure needs. However, the unique governance styles, staffing structures, and community dynamics of small and rural municipalities require thoughtful and flexible approaches to policy implementation.

We respectfully urge the Ministry to consider the recommendations outlined in this letter as part of ongoing discussions. We remain committed to working collaboratively with the Province to ensure that any governance changes are both effective and respectful of the values and capacities of Ontario's diverse municipalities.

Sincerely,

Don Murray

Mayor, Township of Huron-Kinloss

cc: Doug Ford, Premier of Ontario

Lisa Thompson, MPP for Huron-Bruce, Minister of Rural Affairs

Jodi MacArthur, Chief Administrative Officer, Township of Huron-Kinloss

Jennifer White, Clerk, Township of Huron-Kinloss