



The Corporation of the Township of Huron-Kinloss

Staff Report

Report Title: Expansion of Strong Mayor Powers Announcement

Date: Apr. 23, 2025

Report Number: CLK-2025-13

Department: Legislative Services

File Number: C11 CLK 25

Prepared By: Jennifer White, Manager of Legislative Services/Clerk

Attachments: Correspondence MMAH, News Release Strong Mayor Powers, Resolutions/Correspondence Other Municipalities, AMCTO Advocacy Update April 9, 2025

Recommendation:

THAT the Township of Huron-Kinloss Council hereby receives for information Report CLK-2025-13 prepared by Jennifer White, Manager of Legislative Services/Clerk;

AND FURTHER provides any direction to staff.

Background:

On April 9, 2025, the Government of Ontario announced its plan to extend strong mayor powers – initially introduced for Toronto and Ottawa in 2022 – to heads of council in 169 additional municipalities. According to the official news release (attached) these enhanced powers aim to streamline governance to support provincial priorities, which include at this time, accelerated housing development and infrastructure projects.

This report will speak mainly to the stated intentions of the Strong Mayor Powers, an overview of the benefits, risks and controversies associated with the use of these powers. Staff in this report will address the merits of the proposed powers, as sufficient time has not been provided to fully address the potential administrative impacts. Further reports will be brought forward to educate Council on the specifics of each of the expanded mayoral powers, any required procedural updates, and opportunities for the mayor to delegate these expanded powers.

Discussion/Analysis/Overview:

By way of a press release and letter to the Head of Council (attached) from the Minister of Municipal Affairs, and Housing, the province announced that effective May 1, 2025, an additional 169 Ontario municipalities, including the Township of Huron-Kinloss, will have strong mayor powers extended to the heads of Council. This represents all single and lower tier municipalities with municipal councils of six members or more.

Despite this representing a significant change to municipalities, no previous indications were provided that small, rural municipalities would be included in these

expanded powers. The commenting period was open from the time of the announcement on April 9, 2025 until April 16, 2025.

Key provisions of Strong Mayor Powers

The expanded strong mayor powers ([Part VI.1 of the Municipal Act, 2001, S.O. 2001, c.25](#)) would enable the head of Council to:

- Unilaterally
 - appoint the municipality's chief administrative officer,
 - hire certain department heads, establish and re-organize departments
 - create committees of council, assign their functions and appoint the Chairs and Vice-Chairs of committees of Council
- Propose the municipal budget, which may be subject to Council amendments and a separate mayoral veto and council override process
- Initiate and prepare in-year budget amendments to raise additional amounts from property tax.
- Veto certain by-laws if the Mayor is of the opinion that all or part of the by-law could potentially interfere with a provincial priority
- Bring forward matters for council consideration if the Mayor is of the opinion that considering the matter could potentially advance a provincial priority
- Propose by-laws if the Mayor is of the opinion that considering the matter could potentially advance a provincial priority. These by-laws could be passed with only one-third of council members in favour.

The Mayor may direct staff related to their additional powers and duties, including undertaking such tasks as researching policies and programs, preparing budget proposals, and implementing decisions related to the Mayor's power.

These measures are designed to reduce bureaucracy and expedite necessary projects; however, they also represent a significant shift from the traditional, consensus-based model of local governance.

Provincial Priorities

[Ontario Regulation 580/22](#) details the current provincial priorities prescribed for the purposes of sections 248.10, 248.11 and 248.11.1 of the Municipal Act.

At the writing of the report, these provincial priorities have been identified in the legislation:

1. Building 1.5 million new residential units by December 31, 2031.
2. Constructing and maintaining infrastructure to support housing, including,
 - i. transit,
 - ii. roads,
 - iii. utilities, and
 - iv. servicing.

Benefits

The province believes these powers will help mayors act faster and remove delays in decision making. The expansion of these powers is intended to streamline local governance, reduce obstacles preventing new housing and infrastructure development and accelerate delivery of provincial priorities.

Strong mayor powers have been used across the province to support the building of more homes. Unlike previous expansions of these powers, there is no indication from the province that municipalities will be required to commit to a housing pledge to be granted the powers. The powers are proposed to come into effect on May 1, 2025 with no ability for a municipality to opt out of them.

Key Risks

1. Erosion of Democratic Process and Local Autonomy

Strong mayor powers represent a significant departure from the traditional consensus-based model of local governance. By allowing mayors to make unilateral decisions, these powers reduce the collective input of council members and weaken municipal independence. Municipal councils and professional organizations—such as the Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers—have voiced strong opposition, citing concerns about the diminished role of elected officials and reduced public accountability.

2. Impacts on Staff Relationships, Roles, and Integrity

The concentration of authority in one individual can significantly impact internal staff dynamics:

- Staff may feel pressured to align with the mayor's position out of concern for job security, especially if the mayor can hire or fire key staff unilaterally.
- This environment can discourage open dialogue and honest, independent advice, ultimately undermining the quality of recommendations provided to council.
- The traditional division of roles between staff (who provide professional, operational advice) and council (who offer governance and oversight) may become blurred, reducing the effectiveness and objectivity of municipal administration.

3. Reduced Transparency and Community Engagement

Bypassing the traditional council process increases the risk that decisions are made with limited public input. Rapid, top-down decision-making may not reflect the values or needs of the broader community—particularly in matters related to land use and development.

4. Misalignment with Local Priorities in Rural Communities

Small and rural municipalities often face unique challenges that differ from those in urban centres. The strong mayor model, which is designed to accelerate high-

density housing and large-scale infrastructure projects, may not be well-suited to smaller communities that prioritize gradual, consensus-driven growth. Additionally, local councils in these areas typically rely on collaboration and shared decision-making, which may be disrupted under this model.

5. Potential for Misuse and Lack of Checks and Balances

When significant authority is placed in the hands of a single official, the risk of misuse increases:

- Decisions may be made arbitrarily, without adequate consultation or evidence-based planning.
- The absence of strong accountability mechanisms may allow political considerations to override sound governance.
- Staff may be discouraged from offering dissenting views, creating a governance model more prone to executive overreach.

Early Examples of Use

The use of Strong Mayor powers has been varied across the province.

Some municipalities who previously opted out when offered these powers (Haldimand and Norfolk County, and Newmarket) are now being included without the option to opt out.

Some Mayors (Toronto, Ottawa, Kingston, Whitby, Waterloo, North Bay, Cambridge) have expressed a commitment to a collaborative approach to governance and to using the powers sparingly.

Many have delegated certain powers back to staff or councils including Sarnia, Richmond Hill, Oshawa, Innisfil, Guelph, Clarington and Brantford.

Mayors in St. Catharines, Mississauga and Ajax have used the powers to expedite new housing developments, including 2 60-storey mixed use buildings. Other Mayors, (Hamilton, Aurora) have used their veto powers to overturn By-laws, that they have deemed as interfering in a provincial priority.

In a recent decision, the Mayor of Orillia issued a mayoral direction letter rescinding the appointment of the new chief administrative officer (CAO) and used strong mayor powers granted to help the city during its state of emergency to appoint a new CAO. Other municipalities (Caledon, Hamilton, Welland, Windsor) have also used these powers to replace senior staff or restructure positions or departments.

Many municipalities have used strong mayor powers to expedite the budget process and determine budget priorities. Staff are not aware at this time of any use of the powers to initiate and levy in-year budget amendments.

Potential Areas of Advocacy

Staff have identified the following as potential areas that Council could advocate for changes or updates to the Strong Mayor Powers framework to ensure fairness, accountability and alignment with local governance values – especially for small and rural communities:

1. Opt-Out or Exemption Options for Small Municipalities: Allow municipalities to opt out of the strong mayor framework or establish population or housing growth thresholds to determine if the powers are appropriate.
2. Tailored or Scaled Powers based on local context: Develop different levels or scopes of strong mayor powers that can be adopted based on local needs. Allow Councils to choose which powers, if any, are delegated to the mayor.
3. Stronger Oversight and Accountability Mechanisms: Introduce independent third-party audits of decisions made under strong mayor powers, and a formal review process from the province of the implementation of these powers, specific to the impact on meeting the identified priorities.
4. Protection for Municipal Staff and Professional Advice – include legislative protections for municipal staff from reprisals or dismissal related to providing professional recommendations.
5. Council Override Mechanisms – ensure a functional check and balance system to prioritize democratic decision making. Lower the threshold required for Council to override a mayoral decision or veto.
6. Mandatory Public Consultation on Key Decisions – ensure opportunities for residents to continue to have a voice in key decisions, particularly related to land use, development and budgets.
7. Provincial Reporting and Evaluation - Request that the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing publish an annual summary of how strong mayor powers are being used across Ontario. Ask for a provincially led review of the impacts of the policy within two years, including consultations with municipalities.

Conclusion

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 from Staff—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. For small rural municipalities, these powers risk exacerbating governance challenges, potentially leading to decisions that do not adequately reflect local priorities or community interests.

The current relationship between staff and Council 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. At this time, there are no concerns about how the strong mayor powers would be used with the current Council in place. However, it is important to acknowledge that future changes to the composition of Council may not guarantee the same level of collaboration or respect for professional boundaries. The structure of governance should be designed to protect good decision-making practices regardless of who is in office.

Financial Impacts:

Unknown administrative financial impacts related to updating policies, procedures and documentation.

Performance Measurement:

Unknown.

Strategic Area:

- | | |
|--|---|
| <input type="checkbox"/> Embrace a thriving rural lifestyle | <input type="checkbox"/> Enhance Municipal Service Delivery |
| <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Prepare for Inclusive Growth | <input type="checkbox"/> Ensure Financial Stability |

Strategic Goal: Ensure municipal systems support future growth**Respectfully Submitted By:**

Jennifer White, Manager of Legislative Services/Clerk

Report Approved By:

Jodi MacArthur, Chief Administrative Officer