

Sheralee Mitchell-MacEwan

From: Kim Ramsay
Sent: August 28, 2025 4:27 PM
To: council
Subject: Strong Mayor Powers
Attachments: Strong Mayor Powers AMANS Position.pdf

Councillors,

As we prepare for the Fall sitting of the Legislature, I want to bring the issue of Strong Mayor Powers (SMP) to your attention. Although not all municipalities have a mayoral system, I believe that requirement will be part of any legislation that comes forward (IF it is tabled).

Although media reports have indicated that the Province is working with the NSFM on this file, there has been no indication from NSFM on what their advocacy looks like, nor have they stated a public opinion on the matter. It is important that you, as Councillors and NSFM members, are aware of the potential impact Strong Mayor Powers or some variation of that title, will have on municipal government in Nova Scotia. If this hits the legislature, there will be little time to learn and provide opinion or feedback.

The Mayor as a leader among equals and having a single vote at council, remains as the form of local government in place across Canada, with the only exception now being in Ontario. Ontario introduced strong mayor powers, to be used to advance the provincial priority of building more houses, with three main elements: Administrative, Provincial Priorities and Municipal Budgets. There is no evidence that SMP in Ontario is helping to build housing.

The attached position paper from AMANS outlines the consequences of the administrative and budget elements of SMP well. It does not dive into the political imbalance that comes with SMP in Ontario. Although we do not know specifically what the Nova Scotia legislation might say, here is what you should know about Strong Mayor Powers in general:

- I. There has been no evidence that SMP are needed in Nova Scotia, there has been no reason provided as to “why” this is being contemplated.
- II. Most SMP legislation removes the management of the CAO (and other senior officials such as Directors and Managers) from the Council to the Mayor alone. The Mayor can hire, fire and rearrange the senior levels of the organization without Council knowledge or approval.
 - The politicization of the CAO and senior management roles will set Nova Scotia municipalities back decades. Local government needs functional foundations that execute the will of the whole of Council.
 - Running the day-to-day operations of a municipality is a difficult role, one that must balance the needs of the community, the execution of Council’s strategic plan and keeping the public safe from harm.
 - The CAO’s role as a neutral, professional administrator is vital for effective governance, transparency, and accountability. Maintaining the integrity of the CAO’s position is essential to uphold public trust and ethical standards.
 - The attached position paper dives deeper into this issue from an intended and unintended consequence perspective.

- III. The Ontario SMP gives the Mayor the power to make and set municipal budgets. The Municipal Budget is a complex tool that takes into consideration complex capital and operational planning, debt policies and formulas, long term reserve planning and tax burdens for local citizens, businesses and developers. Taking this fundamental role away from Council as a whole undermines the role of Councillors and the open and transparent public process of setting a municipal budget.
- IV. Under the Ontario SMP, the mayor has control over committee structure and committee leadership appointments.
- V. In Ontario, for designated 'Provincial priorities' (as the mayor interprets them locally), the mayor can veto council measures - subject to a 2/3rd override by council. More remarkably, the mayor can force through a legislative proposal related to provincial priorities, provided it enjoys the minimum support of 1/3rd of council.

As summarized in the attached brief, adopting "Strong Mayor" legislation in Nova Scotia threatens to undermine the foundational democratic principles that ensure accountable, transparent, and effective municipal governance. It risks politicizing local government, weakening the role of municipal senior management and members of Council, and reducing public confidence in municipal institutions, all of which are crucial for healthy democracy.

If you have any question, please feel free to reach out. This will be posted for Council information as well, although the legislation may be on the floor before the Regular Meeting of Council on the 27th.

Regards,
Kim

The email below was sent in my role as President of the Association of Municipal Administrators. Some of you may be interested in more of a deep dive into the Ontario SMP landscape.

From: Kim Ramsay
Sent: July 23, 2025 4:11 PM
To: 'Pottie Bunge, Valerie A' <Valerie.PottieBunge@novascotia.ca>
Subject: Strong Mayor Powers Position & Resources

Valerie,

Thanks for meeting with AMANS earlier this month to discuss Strong Mayor Powers. As discussed, I am sending along our position paper on Strong Mayor Powers in Ontario and the potential impact on SMP in Nova Scotia municipalities as they relate to the administrative and budgeting powers in the Ontario model.

As discussed at the meeting, we are missing the "why?" behind consideration of SMP. Mayor Filmore's comments in the media are certainly misleading the public when he states that he reports to the CAO in the Halifax structure. The examples he gives to support his frustrations, such as staff not preparing a flat tax rate budget (per his platform), are not the work of a strong mayor or the CAO. Yes the work is done by staff but the direction on service levels and projects comes from direction of Council, not a mayors platform. We concede that the Halifax systems may need some modernization to speed things up, but we would suggest this is not the tool to do that. We ask DMA to consider the cost of SMP to the

foundations of municipal government in Nova Scotia. There has to be other regulatory tools that gets us to the Minister or Premier's objectives – what ever they may be.

There are links below from AMCTO that outline some of the issues in the Ontario model. There are also two links here to papers written on this subject and to the Windsor issues in the news:

CAMA's white paper: [The Role and Significance of the Chief Administrative Officer Position in Canadian Municipal Government](#)

Aird & Berlis LLP paper by John Mascarin and Jennifer Bilas: [Strong Mayor Powers - The Erosion of Municipal Democracy](#)

Windsor:

An interesting list of Mayoral special powers and duties used since 2023 can be found on the City of Windsor website: <https://www.citywindsor.ca/city-hall/municipal-accountability-and-transparency/mayoral-decisions-pursuant-to-the-municipal-act-2001>.

News articles out of Windsor include a motion made by their Council to [remove strong mayor powers](#) and another article about [Windsor hiring the Mayor's wife](#) to a full-time project management role.

AMCTO Position

AMCTO has continually voiced its opposition to strong mayor powers as they related to impacts to the administration and staff. They have also raised the need to clarify certain aspects of the legislation. They have communicated this ongoingly through many channels such as through a provincial election priorities document, correspondence and meetings with the Minister and ministry staff etc.

Their position has also been communicated with government through the below formal opportunities:

- April 2025 - [Response to Proposed Amendments to Ontario Regulation 530/22 to Expand Strong Mayor Powers and Duties to Additional Municipalities](#)
- October 2022 - [Regulatory Registry Submission, MMAH Minister's Regulations related to Bill 3](#)
- October 2022 - [Regulatory Registry Submission, MMAH Provincial Priorities related to Bill 3](#)
- August 2022 - [Response to Announcement of Bill 3: Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act](#)

In addition, they wrote to the Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing seeking guidance and clarity regarding certain aspects of the legislation and regulations. More information about their inquiries and the governments responses is available here: [Advocacy Update: Response from Provincial Staff on Implementing Strong Mayor Legislation](#)

Advocacy Toolkit and Research

With the help of municipal staff across strong mayor municipalities, AMCTO were able to monitor and assess how mayors and municipalities have used and implemented strong mayor powers and its effect on municipal staff and communities. The full research report, research insights and key messages can be found here: [Strong Mayor Powers Advocacy Toolkit | AMCTO](#). I'll note that this research was released in October 2024 so things may have changed since then and it does not include information from the municipalities who were added to the regulation on May 1, 2025. AMCTO is planning to do an update of this research soon.

Support for Strong Mayor Powers Implementation Webinar - Following the most recent expansion of municipalities subject to strong mayor powers, AMTCO hosted a free webinar for municipal staff with a panel of three clerks who had experience with strong mayor implementation as their municipalities were granted the powers in previous expansions. You can view the webinar here: [Support for Strong Mayor Powers Implementation Webinar - April 25, 2025 - YouTube](#)

Thanks to Charlotte Caza (AMCTO Policy Advisor) for supporting my ask for supporting documentation.

I hope this information is useful in your work. If you have any questions please reach out. I will be sharing this information with CAOs as well.

Regards,
Kim

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