

An Overview of Strong Mayors Powers in Ontario.

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Strong Mayor Powers in Ontario

Adapted and adopted from a model that has been employed in some municipalities in the United States, the Province of Ontario implemented legislation granting additional powers and duties to the head of council in designated municipalities (Mullaly, 2023). These strong mayor powers apply to the head of council regardless of whether or not they use the term “mayor”; however, for simplicity, the head of council will be referred to as the mayor in this report.

In order to be granted strong mayor powers, the mayor was required to agree to support Provincial priorities related to building 1.5 million new residential homes by December 31, 2031 and to support the construction and maintenance infrastructure to support housing as outlined in [Ontario Regulation 580/22](#). Municipalities had to agree to specific housing targets by the end of 2031. The City of Thunder Bay was assigned a housing target of 2,200 homes (City of Thunder Bay, 2023).

The implementation of strong mayor powers has resulted in some concerns about the potential for abuse of power or an undermining of democracy, but others see it as a potentially useful tool to facilitate more efficient government and to enable the provincial priorities.

Designated Municipalities

The City of Toronto and Ottawa were granted strong mayor powers in the Fall of 2022. Twenty-six municipalities were added in June 2023 and an additional 18 municipalities (including Thunder Bay) were added on October 2023. See Appendix A for a list of the municipalities included (Ontario, 2023)

Municipalities need to commit to a housing target through a housing pledge. Four municipalities (Newmarket, New Tecumseth, Norfolk County and Haldimand County) did not accept the new powers, primarily due to concerns about being able to meet those obligations (Jones, 2023).

Relevant Legislation

[The Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act, 2022](#), an Act to amend various statutes with respect to special powers and duties of heads of council and the [Better Municipal Governance Act, 2022](#) an Act to amend the [City of Toronto Act, 2006](#) and the [Municipal Act, 2001](#) and to enact the Duffins Rouge Agricultural Preserve Repeal Act, 2022 enabled the strong mayors powers. Municipal by-laws may also be proposed related to the [Planning Act](#) section 2 of the [Development Charges Act](#).

Powers Granted

The strong mayor powers include the following powers or duties:

- To appoint a chief administrative officer
- To hire municipal division heads (except for statutory positions) ⁱ
- To create or reorganize the structure of the municipality, within the limits of relevant collective agreements or contracts.
- To create, assign functions and appoint chairs for council committees.
- To bring forward matters for council consideration related to provincial priorities identified in [Ontario Regulation 580/22](#).
- To propose municipal by-laws that advance provincial priorities and require council to consider and vote on a proposed by-law. A by-law proposed by the mayor in this context can be passed if more than one-third of all council members support it.

- Municipal procedure by-laws and those related to filling a vacant council seat are excluded.
- To veto certain by-laws that could potentially interfere with a provincial priority. The mayor must provide written notice to council of the intent to consider vetoing within two days after the by-law was passed by council.
 - Council can override a veto within 21 days with two-thirds of all council members (including the mayor).
- To provide written direction to staff to do certain things, such as undertake research or advise on policies.
- To delegate powers to council, including the appointment of a chief administrative officer, or creating committees and appointing chairs or determining the functions of those council committees.
- To delegate powers to either council or the chief administrative officer to hire certain municipal division heads or to change the municipality's organizational structure.
- To propose the municipality's budget by February 1 each year and within timelines
- To initiate in-year budget amendments related to property taxes.
- To veto a council amendment related to the budget.
- To shorten the veto period.

Other Relevant Features

Written documentation related to mayoral decisions and directives under the strong mayor powers are required to support accountability and transparency. This documentation is provided to the municipal clerk and council by the next business day. Municipalities also maintain a public record of the mayoral decisions and directives (these are provided in Appendix A).

The mayor must also declare conflicts of interests in municipal matters.

With municipalities with strong mayor powers, mayoral vacancies must be filled through a by-election following a prescribed process. (Ontario, 2023)

Use of Strong Mayor Powers

It has been reported (Jones, 2024) that for the most part, mayors are using their strong mayor powers in a limited way – and the majority have used them either infrequently or for decisions that are not controversial. Some have delegated some of the powers to council or the chief administrative officer, and others have stated publicly that they do not intend to use them - for example the Mayor of Greater Sudbury (Clarke, 2023). Others have stated that they intend to only use them as far as the law requires (e.g., responsibility for the budget) and that there are potential negative consequences for using them, preferring to build support on council.

The Mayor of Thunder Bay sought the powers despite council voting 9-4 against it (CBC, 2023), but to date has used them minimally. A few mayors have used them more than others (e.g., Ajax, Caledon, Hamilton, and Mississauga). The Mayor of Hamilton used them to develop affordable housing on municipal parking lots. The Mayor of Caledon, who has received some criticism for her use of the powers, reversed a decision regarding rezoning applications after a negative response from the community (Jones, 2024).

Support for strong mayor powers includes a belief that centralized decision making will result in greater efficiency. Another argument is traditional municipal governance models give the mayor

one vote on council, but the mayor has been directly elected by the citizens and therefore should have greater influence than other councillors. Some believe that the powers will provide a more efficient budget approval process. Concerns also exist that there is the potential for abuse, that they are not necessary for effective municipal governance, and that their existence undermines democracy. One of the concerns is that the ability to appoint the chief administrative officer and department heads could lead to a politicization of municipal governments. Although rarely exercised, the veto of a bylaw passed or the proposal of a new by-law only requiring one-third of council member votes in favour also have resulted in the criticism that the powers undermine the value of diverse perspectives and community representation of the rest of council (Jones, 2024; CBC, 2023).

Analysis of Decisions

Mayoral Decisions and Directives from municipal websites as recorded as of October 24, 2024 were included in this analysis.

Between the implementation of the Strong Mayors powers in Ontario, we found that there were 1157 decisions recorded up to October 24, 2024. Table 1 provides an overview of the nature of the decisions made. These results are consistent with a newspaper report from July 2024 (Jones, 2024).

Table 1: Categorization of Decisions and Directives

Type of Decision	Number	Percentage
Approval of By-laws/Decision not to Veto	842	72.8%
Decision to Veto By-laws	6	0.5%
Shortening or removing period to veto	27	2.3%
Delegation of authority to City Council	33	2.9%
Delegation of authority to City Manager or Chief Administrative Officer.	55	4.8%
Decision by Mayor to hire division heads	37	3.2%
Decision or Directives by the Mayor to change the organizational structure of the municipality	2	0.2%
Decision related to council committees, their function, or the appointment of a chair.	62	5.3%
Decisions or Directives by the Mayor related to the development or approval of the budget.	62	5.3%
Directive by the Mayor to bring an issue or resolution to Council	18	1.5%
Other	20	1.7%
	1157	

Note: percentages add up to 100.5% because some decisions related to more than one category

Use (or not) of Veto Power

The results reflect that the majority of the reported mayoral decisions reflect the written approval to approve, or the decision not to veto, by-law changes and in a few cases other decisions by Council. The majority of municipalities did not provide specific details about what was contained in the by-laws, but some did include information about zoning changes and land use.

There were a small number of cases in which the mayor did use their authority to veto a by-law passed by Council. Two of the recorded decisions relate to the same by-law in the City of

Hamilton - notice of intention to consider vetoing (March 27, 2024) and the actual veto of a part of a By-law (March 28, 2024). The rationale provided for this veto is that the by-law did not fit with provincial priorities by not allowing City-owned properties to be used for affordable housing units in the City.

The Mayor of Ajax similarly vetoed the Community Benefits Charge By-law because it could potentially interfere with provincial priority of building new residential units and additional barriers and costs for purpose-built rental units.

The Mayor of the Town of Aurora also vetoed a part of a by-law related to Council compensation because the 42.6% total compensation increase had not been included in the adopted budget. The Mayor also vetoed budget amendments approved by resolution by City Council to reduce the budget for the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame and delay hiring staff positions. The rationale provided was that they would “undermine the Town’s ability to succeed and to build the town in a positive manner”.

Decisions to Shorten the Veto Period

Several decisions related to the shortening or removing of the 10-day veto period, which were most often related to budget approval. This decision to end the veto period often corresponded with the approval (or in one case with a veto).

Delegation of Authority to City Council

There were 33 delegations of mayoral authority to city councils. These cases related to the hiring or dismissal of a chief administrative officer or other senior positions in the municipality, the organization of committees of the council, or the appointment of chairs or vice-chairs to committees. The Mayor of Thunder Bay delegated the ability to appoint or dismiss the City Manager to City Council.

Delegation of Authority to Chief Administrative Officer

There were 55 mayoral decisions to grant authority to the chief administrative officer to make hiring decisions for leadership positions or to manage the structure of the municipality’s organization. With respect to the hiring of managers and other leaders, in some cases, this delegated authority was for specific position (e.g., the City of Windsor) and in other cases it was a broader delegation (e.g., the City of Welland). The Mayor of Toronto delegated these powers to both City Council and the City Manager in 2022 and this decision was rescinded and replaced with a similar decision in 2023.

There were four instances of the mayoral decision that specifically delegated authority to the City Manager of determine the organizational structure of the city.

Decision by Mayor to Hire Division Heads

Although this power was frequently delegated to Council or the Chief Administrative Officer, there were 34 instances in which the mayor appointed individuals to senior positions within the municipality. The appointment of a City Manager/Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) was the most common decision. Aside from the City Manager/CAO positions, the appointments made by Mayors typically were high-ranking positions (e.g., Interim City Managers, Deputy CAO, Director of Growth Services, City Solicitor, Commissioners, Executive Directors). In two instances an individual was removed from the position and an interim assignment made in the decision (a Chief Administrative Officer and a Commissioner, Infrastructure Services).

Four decisions related to the appointment of individuals to task forces or committees, but it was not clear if they were employees or council members.

In one instance the Mayoral Decision was to direct the Acting Executive Director, Human Resources was directed to enter negotiations with a candidate for the position of City Manager.

Decisions by Mayor Related to Structure

Two decisions related to the structure of the municipality's divisions. With respect to the decisions regarding the municipality's organizational structure, in one the Mayor of Windsor defined three divisions within the city and appointed division heads and the Mayor of Caledon revised the organizational structure of the Town to include Building Services and Municipal Law Enforcement.

Decisions regarding Council Committees

There 62 decisions related to the Council committee structure, its membership, and the committee terms of reference.

Decisions Regarding Budget

The majority of the 62 mayoral decisions related to budget were related to directing municipal executives to prepare a budget. That direction frequently included parameters such as a strategic plan or other economic parameters. Other decisions related to notices and approvals of budgets.

Decisions/Directives to Bring Issues to Council

Of the 18 mayoral decisions to bring issues to council, most related to housing or development. Five related to initiatives intended to support housing development, including, acquisition of land, use of city owned property, or the development of infrastructure to support housing. Four referred to specifically zoning and land use changes. Another four were related to initiatives intended to respond to the needs of unhoused people, health support services, and street-involved behaviour. One referred to an audit of consulting fees and related costs associated with a development. One was a request to consider funding support for Habitat for Humanity in Toronto. The exception was a directive to develop a protocol for reporting concerns about municipal staff.

Other Mayoral Decisions/Directives

Twenty decisions were classified as "other". These were primarily the rescinding of previous decisions or directives. Two related to Chief Administrative Officer performance objectives or evaluation. One was a declaration of an interest in matters before Council, and the remainder related to specific directions to respond to requests for information or engage in community consultation.

Appendix A: Municipalities with Strong Mayor Powers

Table includes a link to the Municipality's website where decisions and directives are posted.

Granted Fall 2022	
City of Toronto	https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/council/council-committee-meetings/mayoral-decisions/
City of Ottawa	https://ottawa.ca/en/city-hall/open-transparent-and-accountable-government/public-disclosure/mayoral-decisions-pursuant-municipal-act-2001
Granted June 2023	
The Town of Ajax.	https://www.ajax.ca/en/inside-townhall/mayoral-decisions.aspx
The City of Barrie._	https://www.barrie.ca/government-news/mayor-council-committees/mayoral-decisions-directions
The City of Brampton._	https://www.brampton.ca/EN/City-Hall/Council-Office/Mayoral-Decisions
The City of Brantford.	https://www.brantford.ca/en/aligning-strong-mayor-powers-with-the-voices-of-our-community.aspx https://www.brantford.ca/en/your-government/mayoral-decisions.aspx
The City of Burlington.	https://www.burlington.ca/en/council-and-city-administration/mayoral-decisions.aspx
The Town of Caledon.	https://www.caledon.ca/en/government/mayoral-decisions.aspx#Mayoral-Declarations
The City of Cambridge.	https://www.cambridge.ca/en/your-city/strong-mayor-legislation.aspx
The Municipality of Clarington.	https://www.clarington.net/en/town-hall/strong-mayors.aspx#Mayoral-Decisions-and-Directives-2024
The City of Guelph.	https://guelph.ca/city-hall/mayor-and-council/city-council/mayoral-decisions/
The City of Hamilton.	https://www.hamilton.ca/city-council/council-committee/mayoral-decisions
The City of Kingston.	https://opendatakingston.cityofkingston.ca/explore/dataset/mayoral-decision-registry/information/
The City of Kitchener.	https://www.kitchener.ca/en/council-and-city-administration/mayoral-decisions.aspx
The City of London.	https://london.ca/government/council-civic-administration/city-council/mayor-josh-morgan
The City of Markham.	https://pub-markham.escibemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=81158 https://www.markham.ca/about-city-markham/city-hall/mayoral-decisions
The Town of Milton.	https://www.milton.ca/en/town-hall/mayoral-powers-under-the-municipal-act.aspx

The City of Mississauga.	https://www.mississauga.ca/publication/mayoral-decisions-directives-and-declarations/
The City of Niagara Falls.	https://niagarafalls.ca/city-hall/council/strong-mayors-act.aspx
The Town of Oakville.	https://www.oakville.ca/town-hall/mayor-council-administration/mayoral-decisions/
The City of Oshawa.	https://www.oshawa.ca/en/city-hall/mayoral-powers-and-decisions.aspx
The City of Pickering.	https://www.pickering.ca/en/city-hall/mayoral-decisions-pursuant-to-the-municipal-act-2001.aspx
The City of Richmond Hill.	https://www.richmondhill.ca/en/our-services/mayoral-decision.aspx
The City of St. Catharines.	https://www.stcatharines.ca/en/council-and-administration/mayor-and-council.aspx
The City of Vaughan.	https://www.vaughan.ca/council/calendar-agendas-and-meetings/mayoral-decisions
The City of Waterloo.	https://www.waterloo.ca/en/government/mayoral-decisions.aspx
The Town of Whitby.	https://www.whitby.ca/en/town-hall/mayoral-decisions-under-the-municipal-act.aspx
The City of Windsor	https://www.citywindsor.ca/city-hall/municipal-accountability-and-transparency/mayoral-decisions-pursuant-to-the-municipal-act-2001
Granted October 2023	
The Town of East Gwillimbury	https://www.eastgwillimbury.ca/en/government/mayoral-decisions-and-directions .aspx
The Town of Aurora	https://www.aurora.ca/en/your-government/mayoral-powers-and-decisions.aspx
The Town of Georgina	https://www.georgina.ca/municipal-government/council-meetings/mayoral-decisions-and-directions
The City of Thunder Bay_	https://www.thunderbay.ca/en/city-hall/strong-mayor-powers.aspx
The City of Greater Sudbury	https://www.greatersudbury.ca/city-hall/mayor-and-council/meetings-agendas-and-minutes/mayoral-decisions2/
The City of Belleville	https://www.belleville.ca/en/city-hall/strong-mayor-powers-and-duties.aspx
The City of North Bay	https://northbay.ca/StrongMayor
The Town of Bradford West Gwillimbury	https://www.townofbwg.com/en/town-hall/strong-mayor-powers.aspx#Mayoral-decisions-and-directives-made-pursuant-to-the-Municipal-Act-2001
The Town of Halton Hills	https://www.haltonhills.ca/en/your-government/strong-mayor-powers.aspx
The City of Welland	https://www.welland.ca/Council/StrongMayorPowers.asp
The Town of Innisfil	https://innisfil.ca/en/my-government/mayor-decisions.aspx

The Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville	https://townofws.ca/town-hall/council/mayoral-decisions/
The City of Kawartha Lakes	https://www.kawarthalakes.ca/en/municipal-services/strong_mayor_powers_duties_and_decisions.aspx
The City of Peterborough	https://www.peterborough.ca/en/city-hall/strong-mayor-powers.aspx#Mayoral-Decisions-and-Directives
The City of Woodstock	https://www.cityofwoodstock.ca/en/city-governance/mayoral-decisions.aspx#
The Municipality of Chatham-Kent	https://www.chatham-kent.ca/localgovernment/council/Pages/Mayoral-Powers.aspx
The City of Sarnia	https://www.sarnia.ca/city-government/mayoral-powers-and-duties-under-the-municipal-act/
The City of Sault Ste. Marie.	https://saultstemarie.ca/Government/City-Council/Office-of-the-Mayor/Strong-Mayor-Powers.aspx

Sources

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Endnotes

ⁱ Positions that are excluded from this power include:

- the clerk or deputy clerk
- a treasurer or deputy treasurer
- an Integrity Commissioner
- an Ombudsman
- an Auditor General
- a registrar, as described in section [223.11](#) of the Act
- a chief building official, as defined in the [Building Code Act, 1992](#)
- a chief of police, as defined in the [Police Services Act](#)
- a fire chief, as defined in the [Fire Protection and Prevention Act, 1997](#)
- a medical officer of health, as defined in the [Health Protection and Promotion Act](#).
- other officers or heads of divisions required to be appointed under *the* [Municipal Act, 2001](#), the [City of Toronto Act, 2006](#), or any other Act
- any other persons identified in [regulation](#)

ⁱⁱ Appreciation is given to Nicole Busniuk, Research Assistant. Nicole is a 4th Year HBComm student who assisted with analysis of the mayoral decisions.