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Item No. 21.2
Halifax Regional Council
September 9, 2025

TO: Mayor Fillmore and Members of Halifax Regional Council

FROM: Cathie O'Toole, Chief Administrative Officer

DATE: July 23, 2025

SUBJECT: Strong Mayor Powers

INFORMATION REPORT

ORIGIN

July 8, 2025, Regional Council, item 15.4.3 Councillor Austin - Strong Mayor Powers

THAT Halifax Regional Council directs:

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4. The Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) to provide a staff report on how strong mayor powers have been implemented elsewhere in Canada and what lessons can be learned from that experience.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report provides an overview of strong mayor powers, examining U.S. models of municipal governance and offering a detailed overview of the implementation of strong mayor powers in Ontario to date.

BACKGROUND

In the Canadian municipal context, "Strong Mayor Powers" (SMPs) generally refers to a range of expanded executive authorities granted to a mayor under provincial legislation. SMPs typically provide a mayor or head of council with greater authority to direct key aspects of municipal governance, such as budget development, policy implementation, the ability to veto certain Council decisions, and the hiring or dismissal of senior staff, among other powers. SMPs rebalance the roles of council and the municipal administration to empower greater leadership in the mayor; allowing them to function more as a chief executive for municipal government akin to political heads at the federal or provincial levels.

While there is nuance and variation within different models of municipal governance, SMPs are typically contrasted with governance models featuring an institutionally "weak" mayor, in which the mayor serves as the political head of the municipality but holds limited executive authority.

In the Canadian context, the most common system of municipal governance falls into what is often referred to as the “Council–CAO” model.¹ Under this model, the mayor typically serves as a “first among equals” on Council, possessing one vote equal to all other councillors. The mayor presides over meetings, provides political leadership, serves as the chief spokesperson for Council, represents the municipality at official functions, as well as holding other soft authorities emanating from the position of mayor. The formal executive authority of the mayor is limited, with emphasis placed on consensus-based decision-making by council. Responsibility for implementing council’s policy direction falls to a Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) or City Manager. The CAO is a professional, non-partisan public manager appointed by, and accountable to, the full council.

The application of the Council-CAO model can vary across Canada. Provincial legislation may set out or enable varying roles and authorities, with Winnipeg and Montreal being notable examples where mayors are granted some additional powers relative to their councils.² However, despite variances, it is generally agreed that until recently, no Canadian jurisdiction had adopted a legislative framework for municipal governance formalizing SMPs.³

In 2022, Ontario introduced legislative changes to enact SMPs for designated municipalities. The province’s stated objective in introducing SMPs was to streamline municipal governance, accelerate housing development, and to better align local decision-making with provincial priorities (e.g., housing targets and supporting infrastructure). Under Canada’s constitutional division of powers, provinces have jurisdiction over local government. Municipalities are created by and delegated powers under provincial statute. Provinces may alter the structure and powers delegated to municipalities. As of summer 2025, Ontario has extended SMPs to approximately half of the province’s municipalities.⁴ Although Ontario’s SMPs are unique in Canada at the time of writing, they represent a notable shift in Canadian municipal governance.

DISCUSSION

1. U.S. Models

While new in Canada, SMPs are well-established and far more prevalent in the U.S., as well as other jurisdictions.⁵ The Ontario model for SMPs was influenced by U.S. frameworks, where strong mayor systems are frequently used, particularly in larger cities.⁶

Municipal government in the U.S. is most commonly structured under two main models:

- A. Mayor-Council Model; and
- B. Council-Manager Model.

There can be significant variations within each model, but common attributes are discussed below.

A. Mayor-Council Model

In the Mayor–Council model, the mayor is elected at-large and serves as the municipality’s chief executive, mirroring the structure of executive governance authority seen at the state and federal levels.

¹ Helmer, Jesse, Kristin R. Good, and Kate Graham. "Local Leadership and Forms of Municipal Government." In *Canadian Urban Governance in Comparative Perspective*, pg. 224. 2024.

² Graham, Kate. "Leading Canada’s Cities? A Study of Urban Mayors." PhD diss, University of Western Ontario. Pg. 75-79, 2018.

³ Helmer et al., *Local Leadership and Forms of Municipal Government*, pgs. 214, 224 & 228. 2024.

⁴ Government of Ontario. (2025, April 9). Strong mayor powers proposed for 169 additional municipalities:

<https://news.ontario.ca/en/backgrounder/1005753/strong-mayor-powers-proposed-for-169-additional-municipalities>

⁵ Other examples where institutionally strong mayors are more common include France, Spain, Portugal, and Italy - Helmer et al., *Local Leadership and Forms of Municipal Government*, pg. 217. 2024.

⁶ Svava, James H., and Douglas J. Watson, eds. "More than Mayor or Manager: Campaigns to Change Form of Government in America’s Large Cities." Georgetown University Press, pg. 8. 2010.

Following historical governance norms in the U.S., the Mayor-Council model establishes a clear separation between the executive and legislative branches: the mayor is elected at-large, holds executive powers and is not a member of council, while the elected council acts as the legislative and policy-making body representing their constituents.

In the U.S. context, the terms "strong mayor" and "weak mayor" typically refers to variants of the Mayor-Council model, reflecting a continuum of the extent that executive authority is concentrated in the mayor.⁷ This can vary widely among Mayor-Council jurisdictions. At the stronger end of the continuum, mayors possess broad unilateral authority over matters such as budget development, a veto on council decisions, appointing or removing senior staff, and managing the municipality's daily operations. Mayor-Council systems with a strong mayor generally prioritizes political leadership in the mayor.

As you go down the continuum, greater checks and balances are placed on mayoral executive authority, such as council veto overrides, as well as greater fragmentation of decision-making and administrative control over the operation of municipal government. On the "weak" side of the continuum, a mayor may have very limited unilateral executive functions, with the council retaining significant authority.

The Mayor-Council model is more common among larger U.S. cities, with the majority of U.S. cities with populations over 500,000 having a strong mayor under a Mayor-Council model. Examples include New York City, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, Philadelphia, Detroit, and Atlanta.⁸

B. Council-Manager Model

In the Council-Manager model, authority is concentrated in a legislative body (i.e. council), which controls the executive, led by a professional manager appointed by council. The mayor is a voting member of the council, rather than a separate chief executive. The mayor has limited executive authority and cannot unilaterally override the council. While the mayor often chairs meetings, sets agendas, and acts as the public face of the municipality, these additional responsibilities are largely facilitative or ceremonial. The Council-Manager model emphasizes collaborative, consensus-based decision-making with governance authority largely vested with the council.

In this model, the council collectively appoints a non-partisan, professional city manager to oversee day-to-day operations and to implement council's policy direction. The manager, who operates much like a CEO in the private sector, is responsible for overseeing staff, implementing the policy direction set by council, preparing budget and policy recommendations for council, and ensuring the delivery of municipal services. The manager reports directly to the council, serves at the pleasure of council, and has no formal power to check council's governance authority.

The Council-Manager model is most similar to the Council-CAO model in Canada.

In the U.S., the Council-Manager model is more common for medium-sized cities and smaller municipal units. Approximately 92 million Americans live in Council-Manager municipal jurisdictions, with notable examples including Dallas, Phoenix, Charlotte, Oklahoma City, San Antonio, Las Vegas and San Jose.⁹

⁷ Helmer et al., *Local Leadership and Forms of Municipal Government*, pg. 218. 2024.

⁸ Zack Taylor et al., "Strong(er) Mayors in Ontario – What Difference Will They Make?," *IMFG Forum* 13 (2023).

⁹ Grant, J. (2022, February 22). *A Brief Description of Local Government Systems in the United States*. International City/County Management Association. Retrieved from ICMA website.

2. Strong Mayor Powers in Ontario

Background

Prior to 2022, no Canadian province had adopted a strong mayor model comparable to that found in the U.S.. Municipalities across Ontario had operated under the Council–CAO model. This changed in fall 2022 with the introduction of the *Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act* and the *Better Municipal Governance Act*, which granted SMPs to the mayors of Toronto and Ottawa.

Ontario, like many jurisdictions across Canada, has faced acute pressures relating to housing, growth and infrastructure capacity in the aftermath of the pandemic. In response, in November 2022, Ontario's provincial government set an ambitious goal of building 1.5 million new homes by 2031.¹⁰ Part of the plan for actioning this goal included the introduction of SMPs in Toronto and Ottawa. The stated intention of the reforms were to streamline municipal decision-making by providing these mayors with “the tools needed to advance shared provincial–municipal priorities, particularly related to housing, transit, and infrastructure.”¹¹

Following the initial 2022 rollout in Toronto and Ottawa, the province rapidly expanded the strong mayor framework to other municipalities. By mid-2023, SMPs were extended to 26 additional large or fast-growing municipalities that had either accepted provincial housing targets or demonstrated significant growth. Later that year, a further 18 municipalities projected to exceed a population of 50,000 by 2031 were added.¹² Most recently, in May 2025, SMPs were conferred upon an additional 169 municipalities. As of this report, 215 of Ontario's 444 municipalities have been designated under the strong mayor system.¹³ Ontario's SMPs only apply to municipalities designated under provincial regulation.¹⁴

Specific Ontario Powers & Responsibilities

The Ontario legislation defines a suite of special powers and duties for the “head of council” (mayor) under Part VI.1 of the Ontario *Municipal Act*, 2001, as well as regulations under the Act.¹⁵ SMPs under the Ontario statutory framework can be divided into four (4) categories:

- A.** Powers Relating to Provincial Priorities;
- B.** General Powers;
- C.** Municipal Budgets; and
- D.** Miscellaneous Powers & Responsibilities.

It is important to note that Ontario's SMPs include powers that are discretionary, and others that are mandatory (i.e. powers a mayor must exercise). Several of the powers may also be delegated by the mayor to council or in some cases to the CAO, while others may not be delegated.

¹⁰ Government of Ontario, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. (n.d.). *More Homes Built Faster*. <https://www.ontario.ca/page/more-homes-built-faster>

¹¹ Government of Ontario, Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing. (2022, August 10). Ontario empowers mayors to build housing faster [News release]. <https://news.ontario.ca/en/release/1002235/ontario-empowering-mayors-to-build-housing-faster>

¹² The expansion of Strong Mayors Powers was accompanied by the rollout of a \$1.2B [Building Faster Fund](#), which rewards municipalities that reached at least 80% of their annual housing growth targets.

¹³ BLG Law Firm. (2025, May 2). Strong mayor powers and duties are widely expanded in Ontario.

<https://www.blg.com/en/insights/2025/05/strong-mayor-powers-and-duties-are-widely-expanded-in-ontario>

¹⁴ In addition to Toronto, a full list of Ontario municipalities current designated for SMP is available here: [O. Reg. 530/22 – Part VI.1 of the Act](#).

¹⁵ Part VI.1 of the Municipal Act, 2001, S.O. 2001: <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/statute/01m25#BK365>. Also see O. Reg. 530/22: <https://www.ontario.ca/laws/regulation/r22530>

A. Powers Relating to Provincial Priorities

These powers may only be exercised in relation to advancing prescribed provincial priorities. The province is able to set and change these priorities via regulation. The current provincial priorities are prescribed under [O. Reg. 580/22](#), which include:

- a) Building 1.5 million residential units by the end of 2031; and
- b) Constructing and maintaining infrastructure to support housing, including,
 - i. transit,
 - ii. roads,
 - iii. utilities, and;
 - iv. servicing.

➤ **Meetings – 284.10**

- Authority to require council to consider a matter that could, in the Mayor's opinion, advance a provincial priority, which may be exercised notwithstanding requirements in procedural by-laws.

➤ **Veto Power – 284.11**

- The mayor is provided power to veto a by-law enacted under the *Municipal Act*, the *Planning Act* or s. 2 of the *Development Charges Act*. The veto may be exercised if the mayor is of the opinion that the by-law could, in whole or in part, "potentially interfere" with a provincial priority.
- The veto power must be exercised, in writing with reasons provided, within two days of council approval of the by-law. The by-law is deemed not to have been passed if the veto power is exercised.
- The council can override the veto with a 2/3rd vote (which includes the mayor) within 21 days. If the veto is successfully overridden, then the by-law will be deemed to have passed on the day the council voted to override the veto.
- Where the mayor does not use the veto, a by-law does not come into force until the 2-day veto period has passed or the mayor has provided written approval of the by-law.

➤ **By-law Enactment Power – 284.11.1 (added by Bill 39)**

- Authority to propose certain by-laws where the mayor is of the opinion that it "could potentially advance a prescribed provincial priority." The power is limited to by-laws enacted under the *Municipal Act*, the *Planning Act* or s. 2 of the *Development Charges Act*.
 - May be proposed and council will be required to vote notwithstanding procedural by-laws.
 - May be enacted with minority 1/3rd vote from Council.

B. General Powers

The general powers granted to the mayor may be exercised without reference to provincial priorities. Many of these powers may be delegated by the mayor back to council or the CAO.

➤ **Direction to Employees – 284.3**

- Authority to direct staff to undertake research, provide advice and/or to carry out any powers or performance to implement the decisions of the mayor.
- All directions given under this authority must be provided in writing.

➤ **Chief Administrative Officer – s. 284.5**

- Authority to appoint and terminate the municipality's CAO.

- This power can be delegated back to the council.
- **Organizational Structure – 284**
 - Authority to determine the municipality’s organizational structure.
 - This includes authority to hire and dismiss department heads or the head of any other part of the organizational structure, except for certain statutory officers (i.e., clerk, treasurer, chief building official, fire chief, auditor, etc.).¹⁶
 - This power can be delegated back to either council or the CAO.
- **Local Boards & Committees – 284.7 & 284.8**
 - Authority to appoint chairs/vice-chairs to committees & local boards.
 - Authority to establish, dissolve and add functions to committees of council.
 - These authorities may be delegated back to council.

C. Municipal Budgets

- **Budget Duties – 284.16**
 - The Mayor is required to prepare and present a proposed budget for the municipality on or before February 1st of each year. It must be presented to each member of council, the municipal clerk, and made available to the public.
 - If the mayor does not propose a budget by February 1st, council must prepare and adopt a budget.
 - Council may adopt or put forward amendments to the mayor’s proposed budget by passing a resolution within a 30-day review period.
 - The mayor may veto budget amendments within 10 days. Council may override the veto with a 2/3rd vote (which includes the mayor) within 15 days.
 - There are mechanisms in place to enable the mayor and council to shorten their respective review, veto and override periods to expediate the budget process. For instance, the mayor may approve a budget amendment in writing.
- **In-Year Budget Amendments**
 - The mayor has authority to initiate and prepare in-year budget amendments to raise additional amounts from property tax.
 - There is a 21-day review period where Council can propose amendments.
 - The mayor may veto amendments within 5 days. Council can override the veto with a 2/3rd vote (which includes the mayor) within 10 days.

D. Miscellaneous Powers & Responsibilities

- **Immunity – s. 284.14**
 - No decision or other power exercised by the mayor under Part VI.1 of the *Municipal Act* can be quashed or judicially reviewed, in whole or in part, for unreasonableness if exercised legally and in good faith.

¹⁶ See s. 284.6 (3) of [Municipal Act, 2001](#), for full listed of excluded statutory positions.

➤ **Mayor Vacancy – s. 284.12**

- A vacancy of the mayor on council cannot be filled by council by way of appointments. A by-election must be held to fill the vacancy.
 - A deputy mayor cannot step into the shoes of a mayor and be able to exercise the same powers.

➤ **In Writing Requirements – s. 284.4**

- Where the mayor exercises any of the SMPs, they are required to do so in writing.
 - They must produce a written record by next business day to each member of council and the clerk.
 - Subject to freedom of information requirements, they must make the written record of decisions available to the public.
 - When directing staff, the mayor must provide a written record to the clerk and the CAO.

➤ **Amendments to the *Municipal Conflict of Interest Act***

- The Act was amended to address the implementation of the strong mayor system.
- Where the mayor has a pecuniary (monetary) interest in a matter, they are required to disclose such interest and to refrain from using SMPs in relation to that matter.

Ontario Experience & Lessons Learned

Ontario's strong mayor system is relatively new and unique in Canada, with under three years of implementation in Toronto and Ottawa and an even shorter history elsewhere. To date, there have been no comprehensive evaluations on the outcomes resulting from the introduction of SMPs in Ontario. Consequently, it is too early to adequately assess the long-term impacts. However, emerging trends and early case examples offer some insight into how these powers have been interpreted, exercised, and received across the province, as the use of SMPs continues to evolve in Ontario.

It is notable that, in many cases, SMPs were unilaterally conferred upon municipalities by the province, whether they were requested by the mayor or not. Once a municipality is designated, its mayor automatically receives the SMPs; although many of the powers are discretionary. As a result, the reception and use of SMPs by mayors in Ontario to date has been highly variable. While many mayors have welcomed and exercised SMPs, others have approached them more selectively or have chosen not to use them at all to the extent permissible under the legislation.

The Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario (AMCTO) have undertaken the most comprehensive scan of the recorded use of SMPs in Ontario to date.¹⁷ The scan, published in October 2024, records the extent to which SMPs have been exercised by 46 designated municipalities, with data recorded to July 2024.¹⁸ Key findings include:

- Use of Provincial Priorities Powers
 - 24% advanced matters or by-laws in council under the “provincial priority” provisions.
 - 7% exercised their veto power.
- CAO Appointments
 - 54% of mayors retained the authority to appoint or dismiss the CAO, with 46% delegating the authority to council.

¹⁷ AMCTO Strong Mayors Scan: https://www.amcto.com/sites/default/files/2024-10/Strong%20Mayor%20Authorities%20Research%20Report_FINAL.pdf

¹⁸ Staff reached out to AMCTO to determine if data beyond July 2024 is available. AMCTO noted they are in the process of collecting information, but the October 2024 scan is the most current data compiled at the time of writing.

- 15% appointed the CAO.
- Organizational Structure
 - 33% of mayors retained authority over organizational structure, while 67% delegated this authority to the CAO.
 - 7% directly changed the organizational structure.
- Employment Matters
 - 26% of mayors retained authority over staffing and employment matters, while 74% delegated the authority.
 - 15% of mayors made direct staffing changes.
- Committee Governance
 - 65% retained the power to form or assign committees; 26% of them exercised this power.
 - 67% retained the authority to appoint committee chairs/vice-chairs; 26% exercised it.
- Staff Direction
 - 87% issued directions to staff to undertake research, provide advice or carry out duties.
- Transparency Practices
 - 100% of municipalities had a public webpage dedicated to strong mayor powers.
 - 50% posted only decisions, while the other 50% posted both decisions and directives to staff.
- Budget Preparation
 - 76% directed staff to prepare the budget.
 - 13% indicated that the mayor or mayor's office prepared the budget.
 - 2% exercised their budget veto power.

Open Council, an open-government tracker, reports that as of March 7, 2024, there were 637 mayoral decisions made using SMPs by the first 46 municipalities with the powers.¹⁹

A key accountability mechanism in the Ontario SMP legislative framework is the requirement that SMPs be exercised in writing, often with reasons, and with mayoral decisions made available to the public. A practical component of SMPs has thus been determining a process at each municipality for sharing written documentation that considers general accountability and transparency requirements, as well as confidentiality requirements.

All municipalities with SMPs have created dedicated public-facing pages on their municipal websites where mayoral decisions and often directions to staff are posted. While both mayoral decisions as well as directions to staff must be made in writing, only mayoral decisions are required by the legislation to be posted for the public.²⁰ As noted in the AMCTO scan, about half of the designated municipalities covered have elected to post both decisions and directives; reflecting how practices around SMPs can vary. Municipalities have likewise updated or created dedicated pages for declarations of conflicts under the Ontario *Municipal Conflict of Interest Act* to reflect SMPs.

See **Attached A** for links to municipal webpages relating to mayoral decisions and directives.

The format of mayoral decisions and directives vary from one municipality to the next. While they are often in the form of a brief, executive order-style document, the level of detail varies. Some mayors issue descriptive memos, while others provide minimal detail.

¹⁹ Open Council. (2024, March 7). Strong mayor powers and decision tracker: Ontario: <https://opencouncil.ca/strong-mayor-powers-ontario/>

²⁰ City of Markham. (2024). Presentation to Governance Committee on Strong Mayor Powers: Part VI.1 of the Municipal Act, 2001: <https://pub-markham.escribemeetings.com/filestream.ashx?DocumentId=81158>

In reviewing the substance of mayoral decisions and available directives, it is notable that the large majority of recorded SMP actions generated to date relate to matters that are procedural or routine in nature, as required by the legislation. More substantive SMP actions, such as vetoes, are far less common; although this can vary by municipality.

The majority of recorded mayoral decisions relate to approving by-laws passed by Council — in other words, the mayor indicating they will not exercise their veto. Under the legislation, a council-approved by-law that is potentially subject to SMPs is not in force until the veto window closes or written mayoral approval is given; essentially adding a step to the legislative process. It is at the mayor's discretion to determine if a by-law relates to a provincial priority. In practice, this has led to some uncertainty as to which by-laws a mayoral veto (and thus veto review period) could potentially apply. In response, a practice has developed among some municipalities, such as Toronto, where the mayor will issue a decision following each meeting of Council approving all by-laws approved by Council (unless they plan to exercise their veto) to provide clarity and ensure the force and effect of by-laws as of the meeting date.²¹

Another common procedural decision relates to mayors providing direction to prepare municipal budgets, as well as formally waiving the budget veto review period to accelerate the budget process. Many mayors have also issued decisions delegating specific SMPs to Council or the CAO, where permissible to do so.

While routine procedural usage accounts for the majority of SMP actions recorded, there are also many notable examples of more substantive SMPs being exercised since their introduction. These instances have typically related to a mayor exercising their SMPs to fast-track housing related developments, re-shaping budgets, and personnel shake-ups. While not exhaustive, some high-profile examples to date (with mayoral decisions/directives linked) include:

- **Mississauga** – October 2023 - Then-Mayor Bonnie Crombie [invoked strong mayor authority](#) to push through zoning changes for higher-density housing, permitting “fourplexes” (four-unit residential buildings) as of right in more areas.
- **Aurora** – November 2023 - Mayor Tom Mrakas [vetoed](#) a council amendment to the 2024–2026 budget plan, including a proposal to reducing funding for the Aurora Sports Hall of Fame, noting the amendments would “undermine the Town’s ability to succeed and to build the town in a positive manner.”
- **Ajax** – February 2024 – Mayor Shaun Collier [vetoed](#) a council by-law regarding community benefits charges, noting that the proposed 4% levy would add costs to purpose-built rental housing—contrary to provincial housing targets.
- **Hamilton** – March 2024 - Mayor Andrea Horwath [vetoed](#) a council decision so as to clear the way for two municipal parking lots to be used in the development of 67 affordable housing units. In doing so, the Mayor noted that the council decision had failed to “realize on an opportunity to create new affordable housing units in the City.”
- **Caledon** – March 2024 – Mayor Annette Groves [invoked the powers](#) to advance 12 rezoning applications for about 35,000 new homes. The Mayor eventually rescinded her decision and revert to the regular process for the applications after public feedback.
- **St. Catharines** – April 2024 – Mayor Mat Siscoe [issued a directive](#) to staff to accelerate housing approvals to streamline the municipality’s development application processing.
- **Barrie** – August 2024 - Mayor Alex Nuttall [paused approval](#) of a multi-use waterfront sports field development using his SMPs. The project initially aimed to serve sea cadet and sports groups, but

²¹ Ibid, City of Markham (2024).

after commissioning a report recommending a park, the mayor intervened directly to halt the project to allow for additional consultation.

- **Windsor** – February 2025 - Mayor Drew Dilkens [vetoed](#) a council budget amendment to keep a Windsor–Detroit cross-border bus service running, citing U.S. tariff action and uneven economic benefits for city residents.
- **Aurora** – February 2025 – Mayor Tom Mrakas [vetoed](#) a council decision relating to the designation of a men’s emergency shelter at a specific property, which the mayor noted was required for current and future infrastructure needs.
- **Guelph** – July 2025 – Mayor Cam Guthrie [directed staff](#) to prepare zoning and official plan amendments to allow a fire-damaged structure to be turned into a four-storey, mixed-use building to be brought forward for consideration by Council on an expedited basis.

On the administrative side, the introduction of SMPs has often required municipalities to make significant adjustments to governance processes and procedures. Staff have noted the additional resourcing needed to interpret and implement the legislation, including updating procedural policies, providing training, and managing public communications. Some examples noted above include the evolving practices around signing by-laws, as well as making written mayoral decisions available for the public. Given the recent and novel nature of Ontario’s strong mayor system, many of these adjustments have been approached on a case-by-case basis with limited precedent to guide them. As a result, there is considerable variation across designated municipalities in how SMPs are interpreted and applied, with practices continuing to evolve.²²

Conclusion / Key Takeaways

Ontario’s SMPs enable mayors to exercise greater executive authority over municipal governance and operations, including the ability to shape budgets, override certain council decisions, and direct administrative actions, often in support of provincial priorities. While the uptake and use of SMPs among designated Ontario municipalities has varied, the experience to date suggests many mayors have adopted a measured approach during the initial rollout and evolution of the new powers.

A key takeaway from Ontario’s experience to date is that the practical impact of SMPs on municipal decision-making and operations largely depends on the approach adopted by the individual mayor, as many of the powers are discretionary. Although harder to quantify, it has been suggested that even when seldom used, SMPs by design introduce a new dynamic in city/town halls, with enhanced bargaining power shifting to mayors. Mayors, councils, and municipal staff have all had to adapt to new and evolving procedural and decision-making dynamics.

The recency of the introduction of SMPs in Ontario and the ongoing evolution of their use make it too early to accurately assess the long-term impacts of the legislative changes. However, while anecdotal, there are notable examples from Ontario of SMPs being utilized to clear the way and expedite decision-making on matters such as budgets, housing and infrastructure. It is important to keep in mind that Ontario’s experience with SMPs reflects the province’s specific legislative framework. While Ontario’s strong mayor model is novel in Canada, the provincial government’s rapid expansion of SMPs to nearly half of Ontario’s municipal units as of 2025 suggests the province is committed to the approach.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

N/A.

²² AMCTO Strong Mayors Scan: https://www.amcto.com/sites/default/files/2024-10/Strong%20Mayor%20Authorities%20Research%20Report_FINAL.pdf

COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT

No community engagement was undertaken for this report.

LEGISLATIVE AUTHORITY

N/A.

ATTACHMENTS

Attachment A – Links to Ontario Mayor Decisions & Directive Pages

Report Prepared by: David Perusse, Intergovernmental Affairs Advisor, GREA 902.430.3143

Report Approved by: Cathie O'Toole, CAO 902.497.2575

Ontario Mayor Decision / Directive Webpages

Jurisdiction	Population	Link to Mayoral Decision/Directive Page
1. Toronto	3,025,647	https://www.toronto.ca/city-government/council/council-committee-meetings/mayoral-decisions/
2. Ottawa	1,097,760	https://ottawa.ca/en/city-hall/open-transparent-and-accountable-government/public-disclosure/mayoral-decisions-pursuant-municipal-act-2001#section-6a982fc7-1e27-4242-8c5e-29c81a2d97f2
3. Mississauga	717,961	https://www.mississauga.ca/publication/mayoral-decisions-directives-and-declarations/
4. Brampton	656,480	https://www.brampton.ca/EN/City-Hall/Council-Office/Mayoral-Decisions
5. Hamilton	569,353	https://www.hamilton.ca/city-council/council-committee/mayoral-decisions
6. London	422,324	https://london.ca/government/council-civic-administration/city-council/mayor-josh-morgan
7. Markham	338,503	https://www.markham.ca/about-the-city-of-markham/city-hall/mayoral-decisions
8. Vaughan	323,103	https://www.vaughan.ca/council/calendar-agendas-and-meetings/mayoral-decisions
9. Kitchener	256,885	https://www.kitchener.ca/en/council-and-city-administration/mayoral-decisions.aspx
10. Windsor	229,660	https://www.citywindsor.ca/city-hall/municipal-accountability-and-transparency/mayoral-decisions-pursuant-to-the-municipal-act-2001
11. Oakville	213,759	https://www.oakville.ca/town-hall/mayor-council-administration/mayoral-decisions/
12. Richmond Hill	202,022	https://www.richmondhill.ca/en/living-here/mayoral-decision.aspx
13. Burlington	186,948	https://www.burlington.ca/en/council-and-city-administration/mayoral-decisions.aspx
14. Oshawa	175,383	https://www.oshawa.ca/en/city-hall/mayoral-powers-and-decisions.aspx
15. Greater Sudbury	166,004	https://www.greatersudbury.ca/city-hall/mayor-and-council/meetings-agendas-and-minutes/mayoral-decisions2/
16. Barrie	147,829	https://www.barrie.ca/government-news/mayor-council-committees/mayoral-decisions-directions
17. Guelph	143,740	https://guelph.ca/city-hall/mayor-and-council/city-council/mayoral-decisions/
18. Whitby	138,501	https://www.whitby.ca/en/town-hall/mayoral-decisions-under-the-municipal-act.aspx

19. Cambridge	138,479	https://www.cambridge.ca/en/your-city/strong-mayor-legislation.aspx
20. St. Catharines	136,803	https://www.stcatharines.ca/en/council-and-administration/mayor-and-council.aspx#Mayoral-Decisions
21. Milton	132,979	https://www.milton.ca/en/town-hall/mayoral_powers_under_the_municipal_act.aspx
22. Kingston	132,485	https://opendatakingston.cityofkingston.ca/datasets/cityofkingston::mayoral-decision-registry/about
23. Peterborough	128,624	https://www.peterborough.ca/council-city-hall/mayor-and-council/mayors-office/strong-mayor-powers/
24. Ajax	126,666	https://www.ajax.ca/en/inside-townhall/mayoral-decisions.aspx
25. Waterloo	121,436	https://www.waterloo.ca/en/government/mayoral-decisions.aspx#Decisions-about-the-organizational-structure-of-the-city
26. Belleville	111,184	https://www.belleville.ca/en/city-hall/strong-mayor-powers-and-duties.aspx
27. Chatham-Kent	103,988	https://www.chatham-kent.ca/localgovernment/council/Pages/Mayoral-Powers.aspx
28. Clarington	101,427	https://www.clarington.net/en/town-hall/strong-mayors.aspx
29. Pickering	99,186	https://www.pickering.ca/council-city-administration/accountability-and-transparency/strong-mayors-powers/
30. Welland	81,160	https://www.welland.ca/council/StrongMayorPowers.asp
31. Sault Ste Marie	78,441	https://saultstemarie.ca/Government/City-Council/Office-of-the-Mayor/Strong-Mayor-Powers.aspx
32. Caledon	76,581	https://www.caledon.ca/en/government/mayoral-decisions.aspx
33. Niagara Falls	74,589	https://niagarafalls.ca/city-hall/council/strong-mayors-act.aspx
34. Sarnia	73,777	https://sarnia.civicweb.net/filepro/documents/179139/
35. Kawartha Lakes	69,413	https://www.kawarthalakes.ca/en/municipal-services/strong_mayor_powers_duties_and_decisions.aspx
36. Aurora	62,057	https://www.aurora.ca/your-government/office-of-the-mayor/mayoral-powers-and-decisions/
37. North Bay	57,645	https://northbay.ca/city-government/mayor-council/office-of-the-mayor/strong-mayor-powers/
38. Whitchurch-Stouffville	49,864	https://www.townofws.ca/town-hall/council/mayoral-decisions/

Attachment A

39. Georgina	47,642	https://www.georgina.ca/municipal-government/council-meetings/mayoral-decisions-and-directions
40. Woodstock	46,705	https://www.cityofwoodstock.ca/en/city-governance/mayoral-decisions.aspx