

**From:** [Barbara Anderson](#)  
**To:** [Councillors & Mayor](#)  
**Cc:** [Clerks](#)  
**Subject:** Strong Mayor Powers Are Undemocratic  
**Date:** Thursday, June 22, 2023 4:58:57 PM

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Dear Mayor and Councillors,

I am sending a copy of this letter to you, written by Kevin Bowman, Chair of Democracy Guelph. It expresses my own outrage at the undemocratic nature of Strong Mayor Powers and also how you, Mayor Guthrie, have gone back on his word around this issue.

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The Ontario Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing has announced the extension of Strong Mayor Powers to 26 municipalities including Guelph effective July 1st 2023.

Previously only Toronto and Ottawa mayors had these powers.

These new Strong Mayor [Powers](#) are:

- Hiring and firing the chief administrative officer (CAO)
  - Currently done cooperatively by by Council as a whole
- Hiring and firing of department heads, establishing and reorganizing departments
  - Currently done by the CAO under direction from Council as a whole
- Creating committees of council, assigning their functions and appointing the chairs and vice-chairs of committees of council
  - Currently done cooperatively by by Council as a whole
- Proposing the municipal budget, which would be subject to council amendments and a separate [mayoral] veto and council override process
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Currently done cooperatively by Council as a whole

- Vetoing 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
  - Never been done before - the province already has the power to veto bylaws
- Bringing forward matters for council consideration if the [mayor] is of the opinion that considering the matter could potentially advance a provincial priority
  - Mayor already has this power

The Provincial Government claims these powers are necessary to “cut red tape.” None of these powers cut red tape. What is being cut is the input of Council, Committees and Public Service managers in order to give the mayor more power with less accountability. In short, the province is cutting local democracy.

Our [MPP Mike Schreiner said](#) “Concentrating power in the mayor’s office and ushering in minority rule will not solve the housing crisis.” Our CAO said “I am deeply concerned about maintaining the neutrality of the public service.” In September 2022 Guelph City Council (including Mayor Guthrie) unanimously [passed a motion](#) rejecting Strong Mayor Powers. Mayor [Guthrie himself said](#):

“It’s not a power I believe we need. City council has always been one of collaboration. To allege that a mayor knows everything about every single issue in every single corner of the city is completely unfounded.” “I could not imagine disrespecting [my Council Colleagues] in such a fashion...” “A strong mayor initiative depletes the value of a councillor and as a former councillor I know first hand the importance of being recognized, raising my opinion and the ability to cast my vote. To think that in the end it may have all been an imaginary display of democracy would have crushed the very thing inside of me that drove me to even want to be mayor. A strong mayor initiative assumes that voters are unaware participants in a democracy and that the mayor should be able to just overrule the opinions of the people who voted for him. We do not strengthen democracy by silencing more people and we do not strengthen democracy by limiting debate. At the end of the day there is no educational, financial, spiritual, psychological or health requirement to be a mayor and giving one person the authority to solely guide the direction of an entire municipality may seem like a fantastic idea when you are that person or may be aligned with that person but political lives are fleeting. Tomorrow it could be someone entirely different in the centre chair. When I ran for

this position I was fully aware that the mayor is simply the chair of the meeting. That it is my responsibility to guide the debate and make sure every person at the horseshoe has an opportunity to speak, ask questions and be provided with answers.” “...stronger arguments, greater debate and increased collaboration is what is needed.” “...I do not believe this makes the political process easier or democracy stronger and I absolutely support the motion as presented.”

Mayor Guthrie has apparently [changed his mind](#). Now he claims he doesn't want to use the strong mayor powers but he does want them as a “tool in the tool box”. This is unacceptable.

Guelph City Council should reaffirm the September motion rejecting the Strong Mayor Powers in no uncertain terms. In fact, the City Council should go further and refuse to cooperate with the Provincial Government on their Housing Pledge until the Strong Mayor Powers are abolished and local democracy is restored.

The Strong Mayor Powers are an explicit and [intentional attack on local democracy](#) that opens the door to [minority rule](#), and any elected official who has endorsed it should resign. Anything less than a complete rejection of these powers is unacceptable. It gives mayors far too much power while simultaneously making mayors the lapdogs of the Provincial Government. It makes Councillors nearly irrelevant. It also severely compromises the public service as any CAO or department heads that are brave enough to challenge a mayor can simply be replaced. Committees will similarly feel pressure to be servile to the mayor instead of the broader public good.

What is worse is that even if these powers were used it would do **nothing** to help solve the affordable housing crisis which is supposedly the goal and intent. The Provincial Government's own [task force](#) did not recommend giving mayors these powers. Experts in urban planning and housing [have not recommended these powers](#). In fact many have said this will make the situation worse. No municipalities have publicly asked for these powers. The Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) did not ask for these powers. On the contrary, [AMO](#) “...express[ed] concerns with some aspects of the legislation - in particular, those affecting public administration - and recommended public consultation...” (These consultations never happened.) AMO also expressed concern with a “provision eliminating the need for majority council support for certain decisions related to provincial priorities”. (Perhaps because it is undemocratic?) Every single non-government MPP voted against these powers.

Sincerely,

Barb Andersoon



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