



Strong Mayor Budgets “Power” or “Duty”?

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Disclaimer

These comments are not intended to be, nor should they be construed as, legal advice. Please consult a legal professional on the particular issues that concern you.

This presentation may contain general comments on legal issues of concern to organizations and individuals.



Ford Nation: Two Brothers, One Vision
(HarperCollins Publishers, 2016)

“If I ever get to the provincial level of politics, municipal affairs is the first thing I would want to change. I think mayors across the province deserve stronger powers. One person in charge, with veto power.”

Legislative History of Strong Mayor Powers

- Historically, “weak mayor” system of municipal government in Ontario, predominated in Canada
 - Head of Council was “first among equals”
 - very minimal executive or administrative authority
 - largely ceremonial function
- Municipal decisions made by council, by by-law (*Municipal Act, 2001*, ss. 5(1), (3))

Legislative History of Strong Mayor Powers

Housing Affordability Task Force, *Report of the Ontario Housing Affordability Task Force* (February 2022)

- “Ontario is in a housing crisis.” (p. 6)
- Identified reasons:
 - development restrictions
 - development charges, fees, levies
 - delays in planning approvals

Legislative History of Strong Mayor Powers

Housing Affordability Task Force, *Report of the Ontario Housing Affordability Task Force* (February 2022)

Recommendation 1:

- Set a goal of building 1.5 million new homes in 10 years

Legislative History of Strong Mayor Powers

“Today, I think we can agree: Priority projects simply take too long to get through municipal councils and through committees. To be truly effective for their communities, **mayors need our support**. They need to be empowered. That’s why, Speaker, I am so very proud that we’re leading off second-reading debate on the proposed Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act. The changes would, if passed, give the mayors of the cities of Toronto and Ottawa the ability to drive policy changes, select municipal department heads and bring forward budgets, and it would **help our municipal partners deliver on our shared priorities, including housing.**”

Ontario Legislative Assembly, Official Report of Debates (Hansard), 43rd Parl., 1st Sess., August 11, 2022, at 1320 (Hon. Steve Clark)

Legislative History of Strong Mayor Powers

- Bill 3, *Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act, 2022*
 - Introduced so-called “Strong Mayor Powers” – Part VI.1 of the *Municipal Act, 2001*
 - Given to the Cities of Toronto, Ottawa, ostensibly as pilot project
- Bill 39, *Better Municipal Governance Act, 2022*
 - Added s. 284.11.1 to the *Municipal Act, 2001*

Legislative History of Strong Mayor Powers

- Three additional expansions of Strong Mayor powers
 - June 16, 2023 – 26 additional municipalities
 - October 31, 2023 – 18 more municipalities
 - May 1, 2025 – expanded to 169 additional municipalities
- 216 municipalities in Ontario are now “Strong Mayor” municipalities

Strong Mayor Budget “Powers”

- Relevant Legislation:
 - *Municipal Act, 2001*, s. 284.16
 - O. Reg. 530/22 “Part VI.1 of the Act,” ss. 7-9
 - O. Reg. 580/22 “Provincial Priorities” is not relevant

Strong Mayor Budget “Powers”

“Municipal budgets help **define priorities** for their communities when they deliver services and prioritize projects each year. If passed, this legislation would make a mayor responsible for proposing the municipal budget for council consideration.”

Ontario Legislative Assembly, Official Report of Debates (Hansard), 43rd Parl., 1st Sess., August 17, 2022, at 1320 (Goldie Ghamari)

Strong Mayor Budget “Powers”

- *Municipal Act, 2001*, s. 284.16 “Powers and Duties re Budget”
 - Strong Mayor shall prepare the budget for the municipality on or before February 1
 - failing which, council shall prepare and adopt the budget
 - Upon receipt, council may, by resolution, amend the budget
 - within 30 days of receipt of budget
 - if not amended, deemed adopted
 - Strong Mayor may veto amendments to budget
 - within 10 days of expiry of timeline to make amendments
 - if not vetoed, deemed adopted, as amended

Strong Mayor Budget “Powers”

- *Municipal Act, 2001*, s. 284.16 “Powers and Duties re Budget”
 - Council may override veto by two-thirds vote
 - within 15 days of expiry of timeline to veto
 - if veto not overridden, deemed adopted, subject to veto

Strong Mayor Budget “Powers”

- In-Year Budget Amendments – O. Reg. 530/22, s. 9
 - may only be used for “raising an additional...general local municipal levy or special local municipal levy”
 - indication that where additional spending is contemplated, so long as additional levies are not needed, council can initiate the process
 - similar decision-making process applies, with truncated timelines

Important Considerations

- Not a “new” power, but a redistribution of existing authority:
“...the powers and duties of a municipality with respect to proposing and adopting a budget are assigned to the head of council...” (s. 284.16(1))
- Strong Mayor is subject to the same statutory constraints re form, content of budget
- Strong Mayor cannot delegate powers and duties re budget (s. 284.13)

Important Considerations

- *Municipal Conflict of Interest Act* amended to deal with Strong Mayor powers:
 - **s. 5.3:** where Strong Mayor had a pecuniary interest in a matter under Part VI.1 (except delegating authority), the Strong Mayor shall:
 - (a) upon becoming aware, disclose interest via written statement to the clerk
 - (b) not use the power or exercise the duty “with respect to the matter”
 - (c) not use their office in any way to influence recommendation or decision
- Encourage your Strong Mayor to be proactive; seek advice from the Integrity Commissioner

Important Considerations

- Municipality often required to approve budget estimates from local boards, other bodies:
 - *Community Safety and Policing Act, 2019*, s. 50: “Upon reviewing the estimates, the municipality shall establish an overall budget for the municipal board...”
 - *Public Libraries Act*, s. 24: “The amount of the board’s estimates that is approved or amended and approved by the council shall be adopted by the board...”

Important Considerations

Solicitor General

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234-2025-5952

132-2025-4900

By email

January 12, 2026

To Mayors and Chairs of Police Service Boards in Strong Mayor Power Municipalities,

We are writing to provide information on the powers and roles of municipalities, mayors, and police service boards in establishing a police service board budget, particularly in municipalities with Strong Mayor Powers.

Important Considerations

This municipal budget includes estimates of amounts required during the year, including any amounts required for boards, such as the police service boards budget established in accordance with the *Community Safety and Policing Act, 2019* (CSPA). **The Head of Council's strong mayor budget powers do not include the power to limit police service board budget increases or veto estimates submitted by police service boards.**

Important Considerations

- Estimates for other bodies, local boards often included in budget process
- MMAH suggests where another statute contemplates approval by municipality of estimates, Strong Mayor powers cannot override those estimates
 - still subject to the discrete statutory framework

Important Considerations

- Although delegation not permitted, Strong Mayor may direct staff to assist with preparation of the budget (s. 284.3):
 - undertake research and provide advice on the budget
 - carry out duties related to the exercise of the budget power
- Outside of legislative requirements, what the budget process looks like in practice is ultimately at the discretion of the Strong Mayor

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Strong Mayor Budgeting in Guelph

Evolving Together: Collaboration, Flexibility, and Trust

Shanna O'Dwyer, CPA, CA, MA

General Manager, Finance – City Treasurer and Chief Financial Officer

March 27, 2026

About Guelph

- ~150,000 people – growing to 208,000 by 2051
- Urban, Single-tier/Separated City
- 12 Councillors (2 per ward) + Mayor
- 2 wholly owned subsidiaries, 7 local boards and shared service providers
- 2026 operating budget: \$648 million
- 2026 capital budget: \$366 million



Aerial shot of Westminster Woods



Strong mayor budgeting in Guelph

Strong Mayor Budget Experience:

- Strong Mayor powers granted in mid-2023
- 2024 – 2027 MYB adopted under first Strong Mayor budget process
- 2025 and 2026 budget re-adoption processes under Strong Mayor

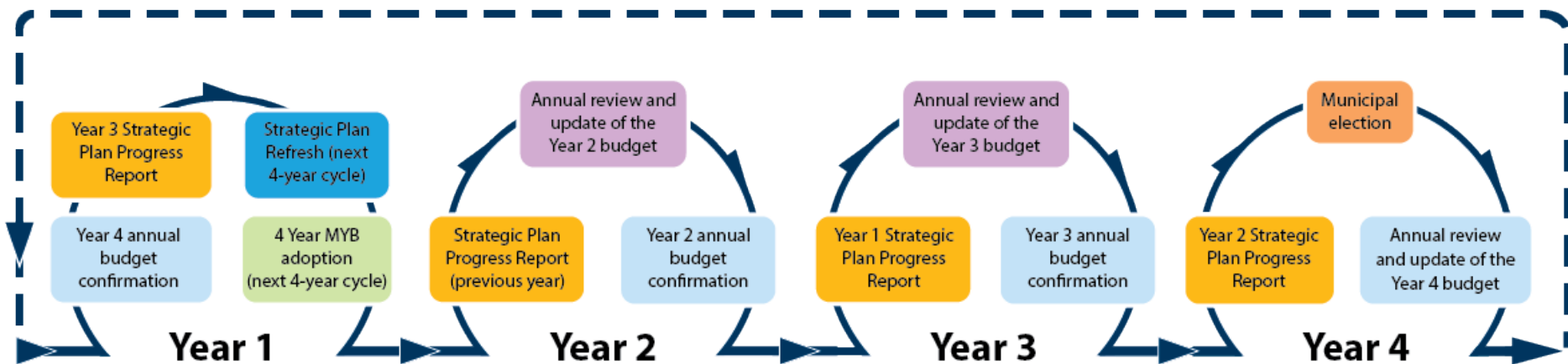
Multi-year Budget Experience:

- 2022-23 – First attempted a two-year budget
- 2024-27 – Four-year budget aligned with Strategic Plan term



Aerial shot of Westminster Woods

Guelph's strategic planning and multi-year budget cycle



Pre-strong mayor budget process

Council approves Strategic Plan, setting priorities for term of Council

Staff build MYB to implement Council priorities

Staff present MYB to Mayor and Council

Council amends budget through Council resolutions (majority vote)

Council approves the budget through Council resolution (majority vote)

Mayor is one member of Council, vote carries same weight as all Councillors

Strong mayor budget process



Mayor: prepares a **proposed** budget and provides to Council for consideration by February 1



Council: may **amend** the proposed budget (majority vote) within 30 days



Mayor: may **veto** amendments within 10 days



Council: may **override** vetoes (2/3 majority) within 15 days



Deemed adoption of budget

Multi-year budgeting objectives

Resources

Ensure financial resources in place to implement Council's strategic plan

Stability

Provide stability and certainty for the community

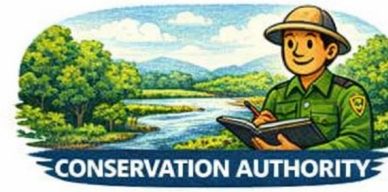
Capacity

Reduce staff time spent budgeting to build capacity to implement

A different path: implementing multi-year budgeting in a changing environment



Local boards and strong mayor budget powers



Amending a strong mayor budget

No budget reconsideration process

In-Year Budget Amendments Process: O.Reg 530/22, sub-section 9

- Mayor can prepare a proposed amendment - provide to Council and the public
- Council has 21 days to amend the amendment (majority resolution)
- Mayor has 5 days to veto Council amendments
- Council has 10 days to override veto (2/3 majority resolution)

Practical implications of strong mayor legislation

“With great power comes great responsibility” (Voltaire, Spiderman)

- Differing community perspectives: added pressure on the Mayor

An effective plan needs financing – otherwise it’s just a dream

- Erosion of Council power / ability to make change



Lessons learned



Get comfortable with change



Get clarity on the priorities



Build a plan for collaborating with the Mayor

Looking ahead: where to next?

Re-establishing a stable and consistent budget process

- To the extent possible within the strong mayor legislative framework and ongoing externally imposed change

Continued evolution of the budget and strategy relationship

- Moving from *strategy drives budget*
 - TO**
 - Strategy drives budget **AND** budget limits strategic priorities*

A different approach to service level changes

- Removing service level policy setting from the budget process

Strong mayor budgeting in an election year