AMCTO
THE MUNICIPAL EXPERTS

Strong Mayor Authorities Scan

How Mayors are Using their Powers

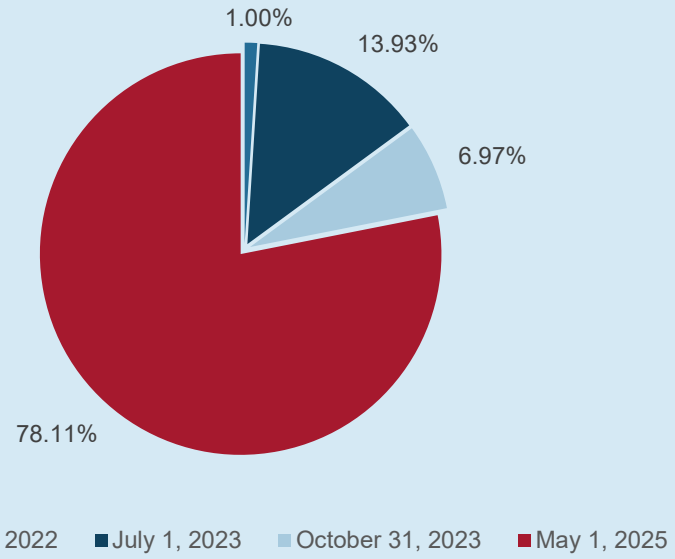
July 2026

Introduction

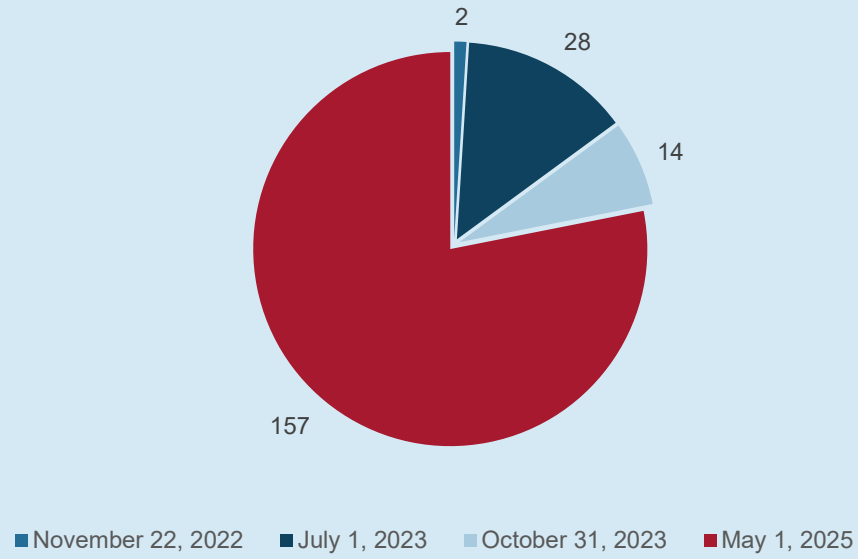
- In 2022, through changes to the ***Municipal Act*** and **O. Reg. 530/22**, the Province first gave strong mayor powers to the 'head of council' in Toronto and Ottawa, followed by the mayors of 48 additional municipalities in 2023.
- In May 2025, these powers were extended to an additional 169 municipalities
- Strong mayor powers include the ability to:
  - Appoint municipal chief administrative officers (CAOs) and other non-statutory department heads and restructure departments;
  - Exercise powers of a municipality under section 229 of the *Municipal Act* with respect to the CAO;
  - Create new committees and appoint chairs and vice-chairs;
  - Direct items to council that could potentially advance a provincial priority and direct staff to develop proposals to be brought forward for council consideration;
  - Propose the municipal budget and veto changes proposed by council; and
  - Veto council's passing of a bylaw if all or part of the bylaw could interfere with a provincial priority.
- The use of powers vary between mandatory (i.e., budget) vs. optional (i.e., establishing committees).
- The head of council may choose to delegate powers with respect to the CAO, organizational structure (including employment matters), local boards; and/or committees.
- Generally intended to streamline municipal governance and decision-making, for the additional municipalities, expansion of powers was tied to the municipality signing the Province's housing pledge. Four municipalities declined the pledge and therefore the powers.

Strong Mayor Municipalities by Effective Date

Date Municipality Received Strong Mayor Powers (N=201)
Percentage



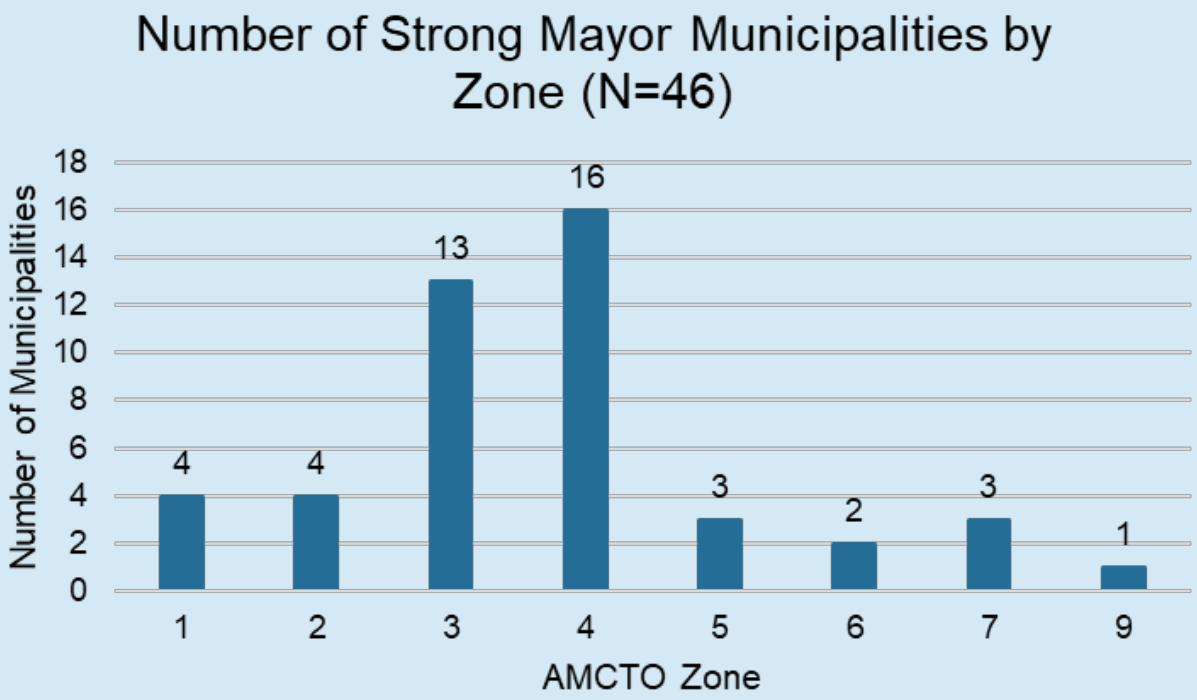
Date Municipality Received Strong Mayor Powers (N=201)
Number



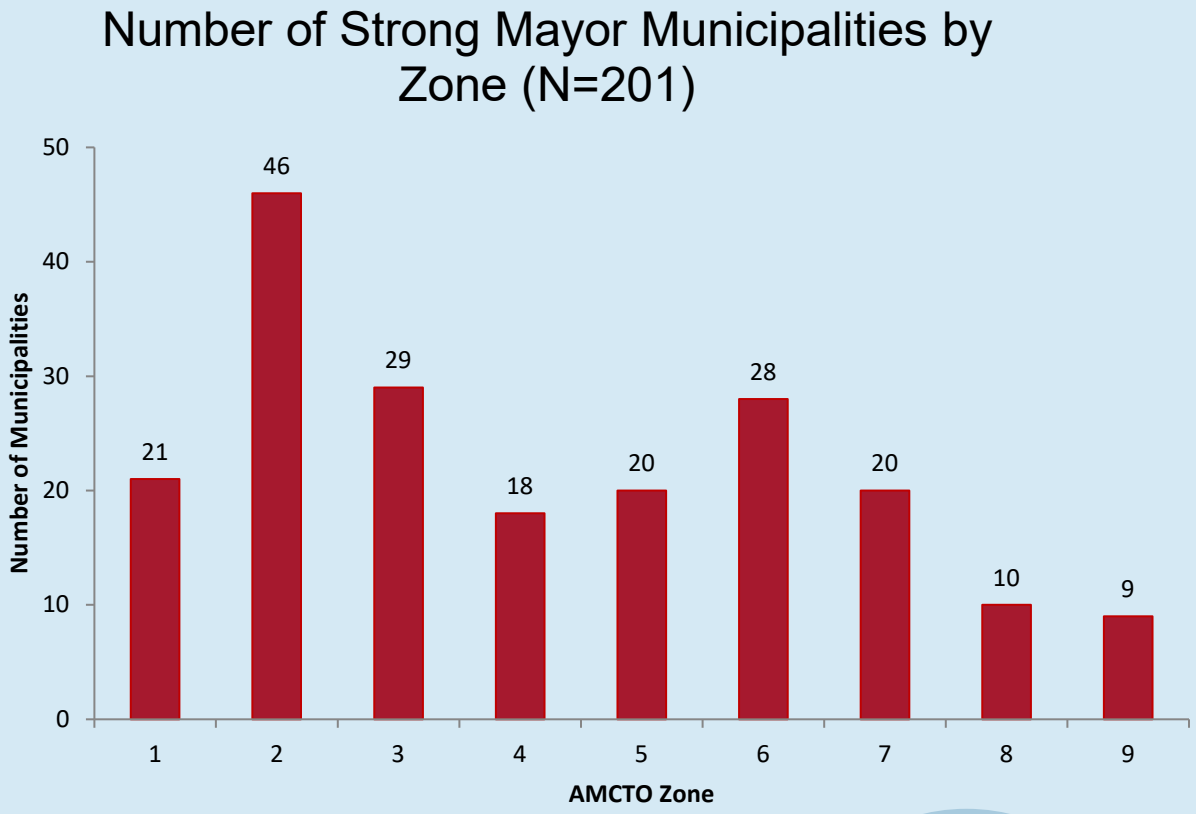
The "N" refers to the total number of survey responses received.

Strong Mayor Municipalities by Effective Date and AMCTO Zone

2024 vs. 2025



Note: There was no 'Strong Mayor' municipality in Zone 8.



The "N" refers to the total number of survey responses received.

Context

- AMCTO supports municipal administrators by providing training, networking, and supporting continued advocacy efforts for improving accountability and transparency frameworks to operate effectively and manage local relationships.
- AMCTO raised concerns with the new legislation such as:
  - Effective removal of non-partisan local government leaders;
  - Potential for the politicization of senior and other local government officials; and
  - The additional administrative burden it would create for our members and other municipal staff.
- In our **submissions**, we also put forward several recommendations for consideration.
- AMCTO tracks how strong mayor powers have been used across the province, collecting administration and operational information to support our members and municipal professionals.
- We asked our members to review the scan for accuracy and updated data as required. The data collected was cleansed, reviewed and analyzed for key findings.
- This deck was prepared to provide AMCTO members with key information to:
  - Compare strong mayor power use and practice across the province;
  - Better understand the impacts to municipal governance structures and staff;
  - Continue to support municipalities as they transition to a strong mayor framework; and
  - Encourage discussion of better legislative solutions that meet government objectives.
- In response to member inquiries about power uses, the 2025 scan builds on the **2024 edition** to include several additional data points.

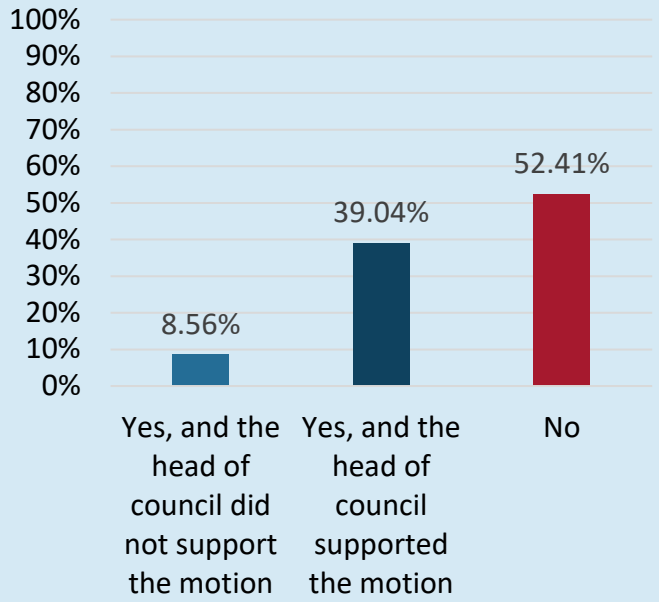
Research Notes

- AMCTO circulated a survey to the clerks of the 215* municipalities identified in O.Reg. 530/22 and the City of Toronto.
  - 201 municipalities completed the survey, providing a 93% overall response rate.
  - AMCTO received a total of 201 complete and unique responses.
- The survey was open from November 26, 2025 – February 13, 2026. Responses are indicative of a snapshot in time, as decisions may be amended, rescinded, etc. at any time.
- The report compares data based on when municipalities received strong mayor powers, and across AMCTO Zones.
- In each chart, the “N” refers to the total number of responses received for each question.
- Where applicable we have included examples of power use that AMCTO has tracked through media as well as ongoing monitoring of mayoral decisions and directives.
- For further clarification or questions regarding this report or AMCTO resources, please contact advocacy@amcto.com.

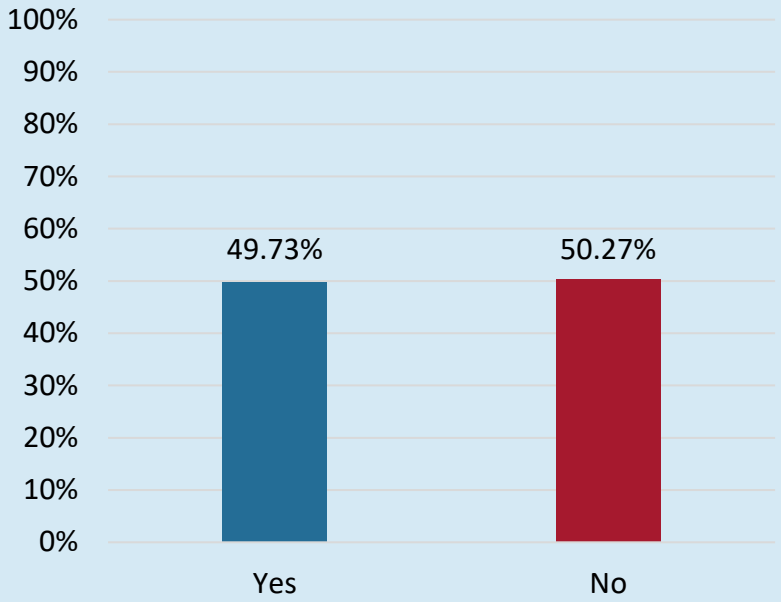
** In the second expansion group, four municipalities did not sign a housing pledge required to receive the powers. Since the May 2025 expansion, one municipality reduced the size of its council to five and was removed from the regulation.*

Support / Opposition to Powers

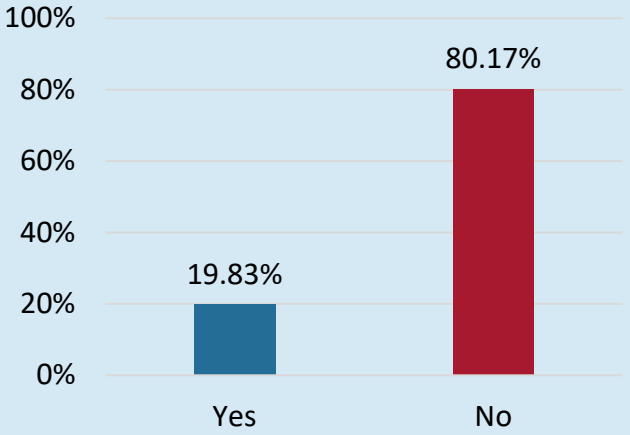
Did your council pass a resolution opposing strong mayor powers? (N=187)



Did your head of council make a statement saying they would not use strong mayor powers? (N=187)



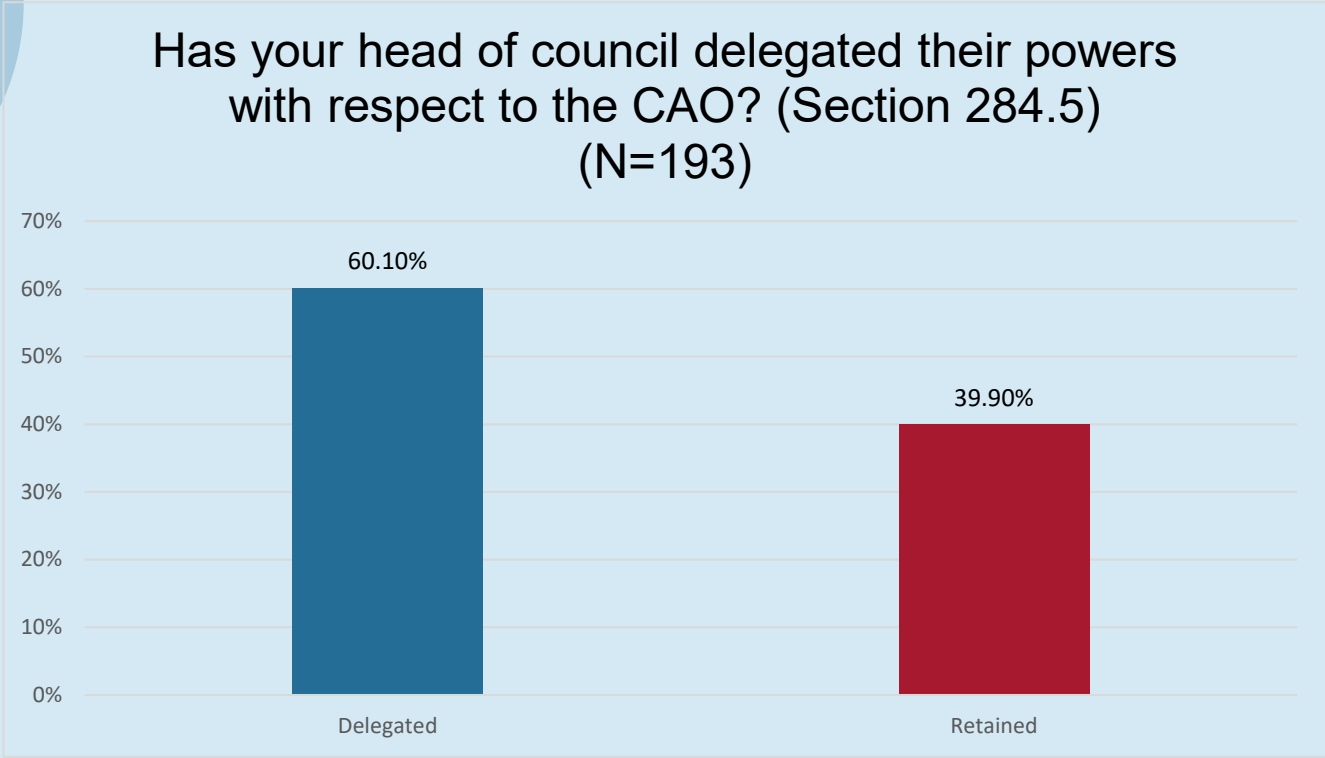
If yes, has your head of council used their powers? (Not including delegations, decisions to provide notice of approval of by-laws, etc.) (N=116)



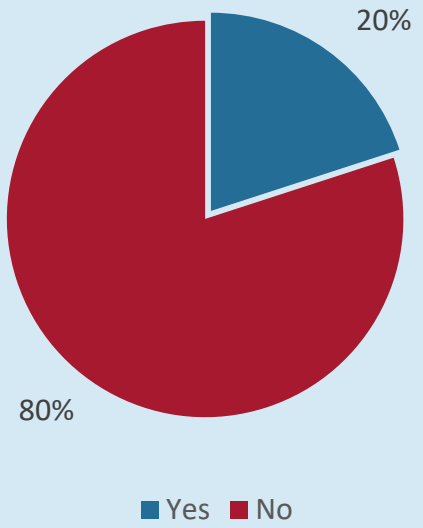
Administrative Powers

This section contains data related to use of powers over organization and staffing, specifically chief administrative officers, organizational structure, and general employment matters

Appoint/Dismiss CAOs



If retained, has your head of council used their power to appoint/dismiss the CAO? (N=105)*



*Of the 39.9% who retained this power, 20% used their powers to appoint or dismiss the CAO.

Comparing Delegation/Retention Across Municipalities

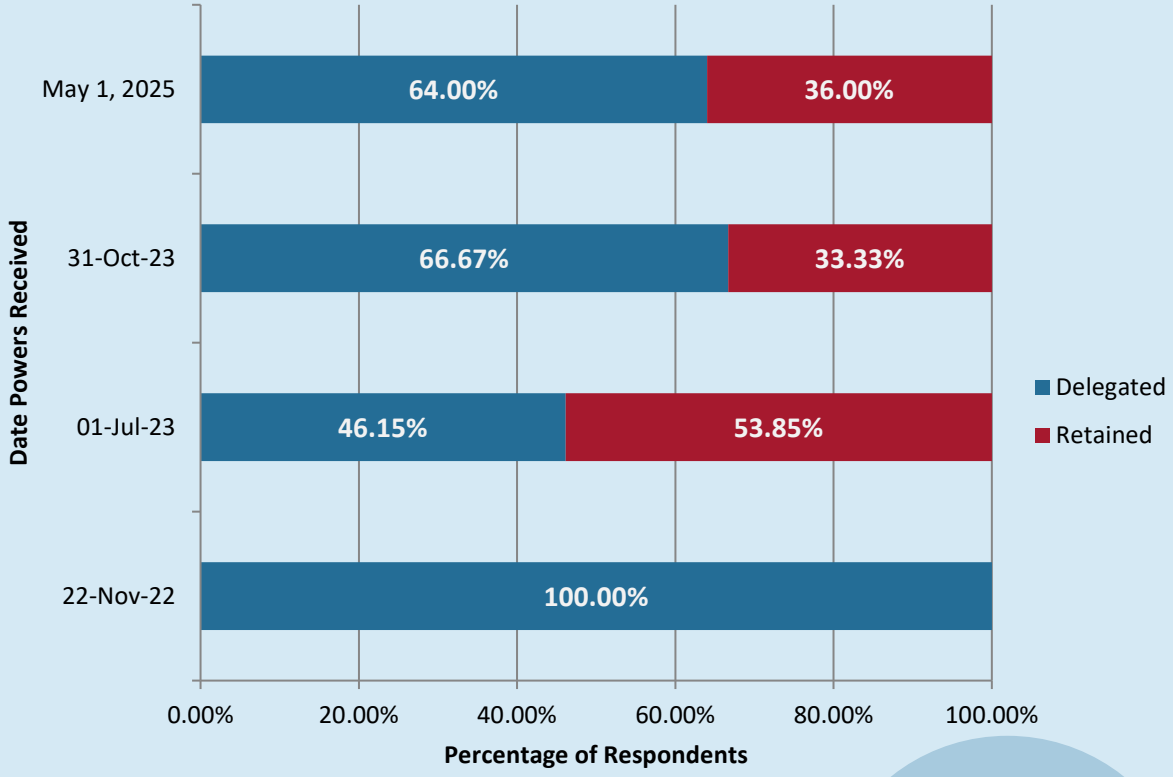
An analysis of responses regarding delegation or retention of powers was made to compare across municipalities. Municipalities authorized with strong mayor powers in 2022 and July 2023 were municipalities with populations over 100,000 and include Toronto and Ottawa.

Municipalities that received the powers in the fall of 2023 were municipalities generally with populations over 50,000.

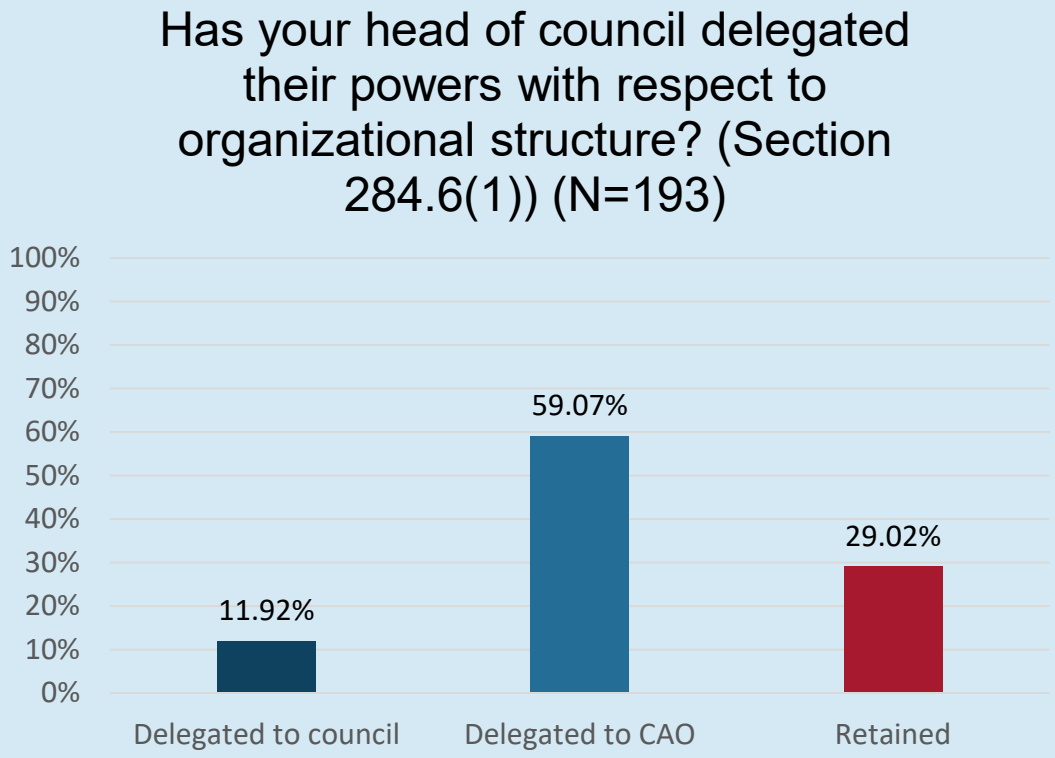
Municipalities that received the powers in May 2025 were those with councils of six people or more, with population sizes ranging from under 400 people to 50,000 for the most part with a few exceptions.

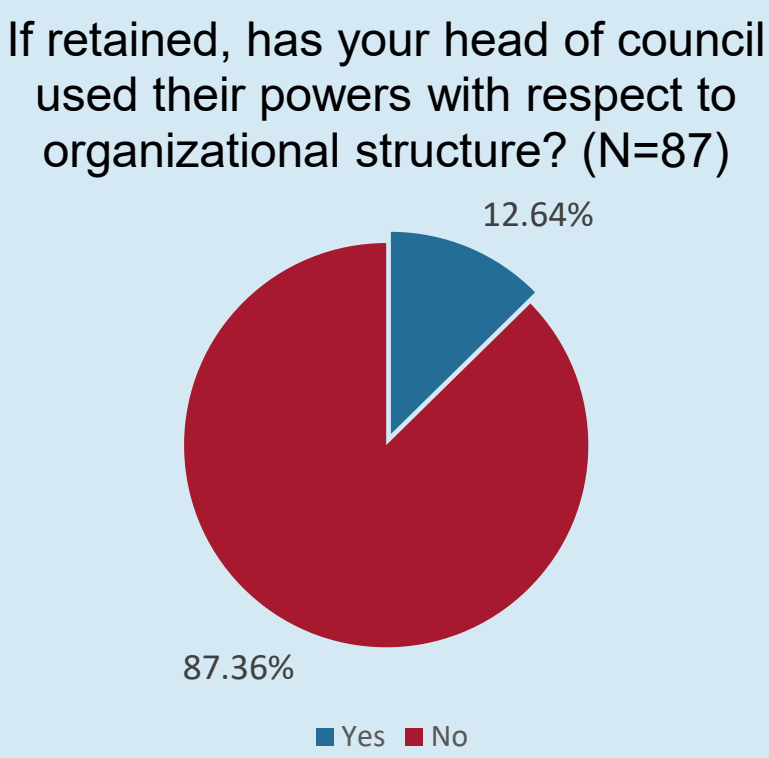
While the data across categories is comparable, mayors from smaller municipalities were more likely to delegate available powers than retain them.

Has your head of council delegated their powers with respect to the CAO? (Section 284.5) (N = 190)



Organizational Structure



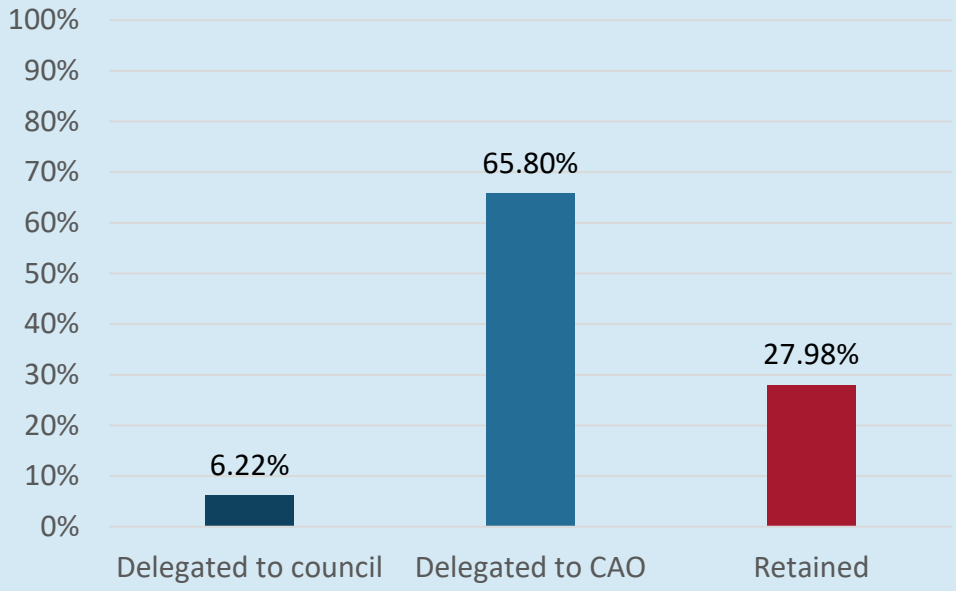


114 respondents had mayors delegate organizational structure powers back to the CAO, only 56 retained these powers. 23 delegated the power to council.

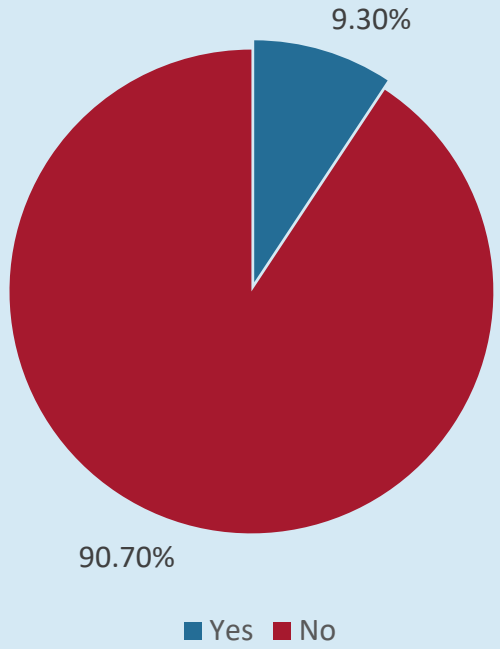
Where the power was retained, 11 mayors used their powers with respect to organizational structure.

Employment Matters

Has your head of council delegated their powers with respect to employment matters? (Section 284.6(2)) (N=193)



If retained, has your head of council used their powers with respect to employment matters? (N= 86)

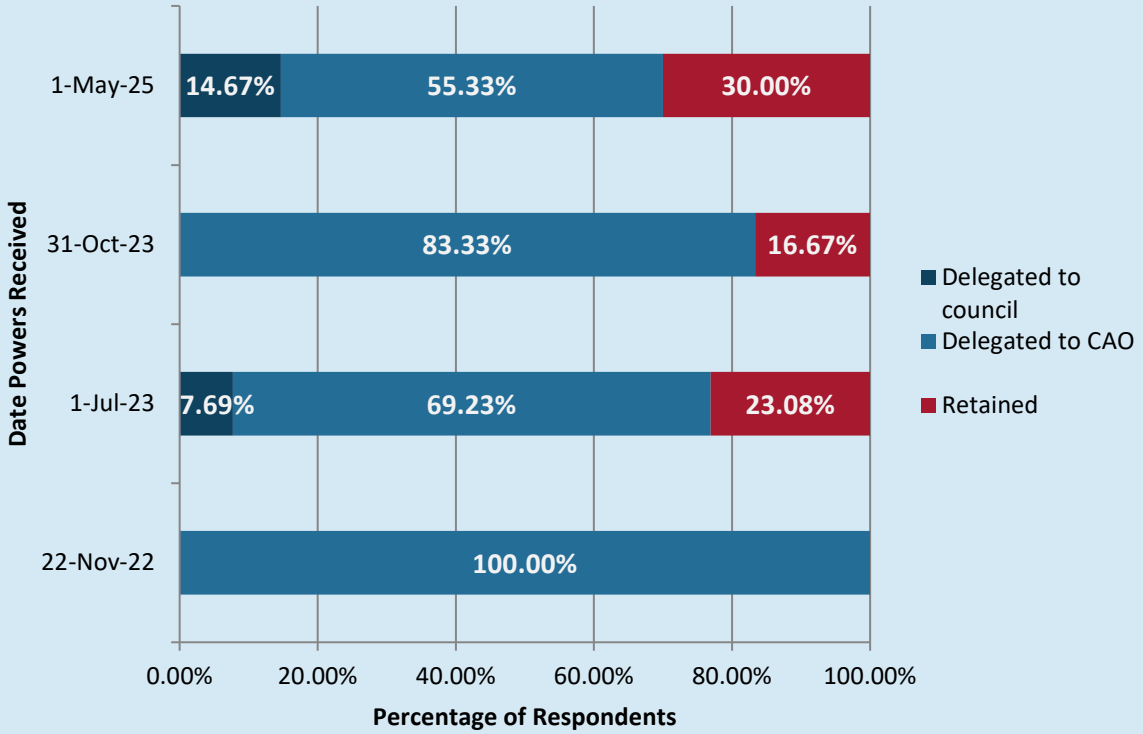


Where respondents (127) had mayors delegate employment matter powers back to the CAO, only 54 retained these powers. 12 delegated the power to council.

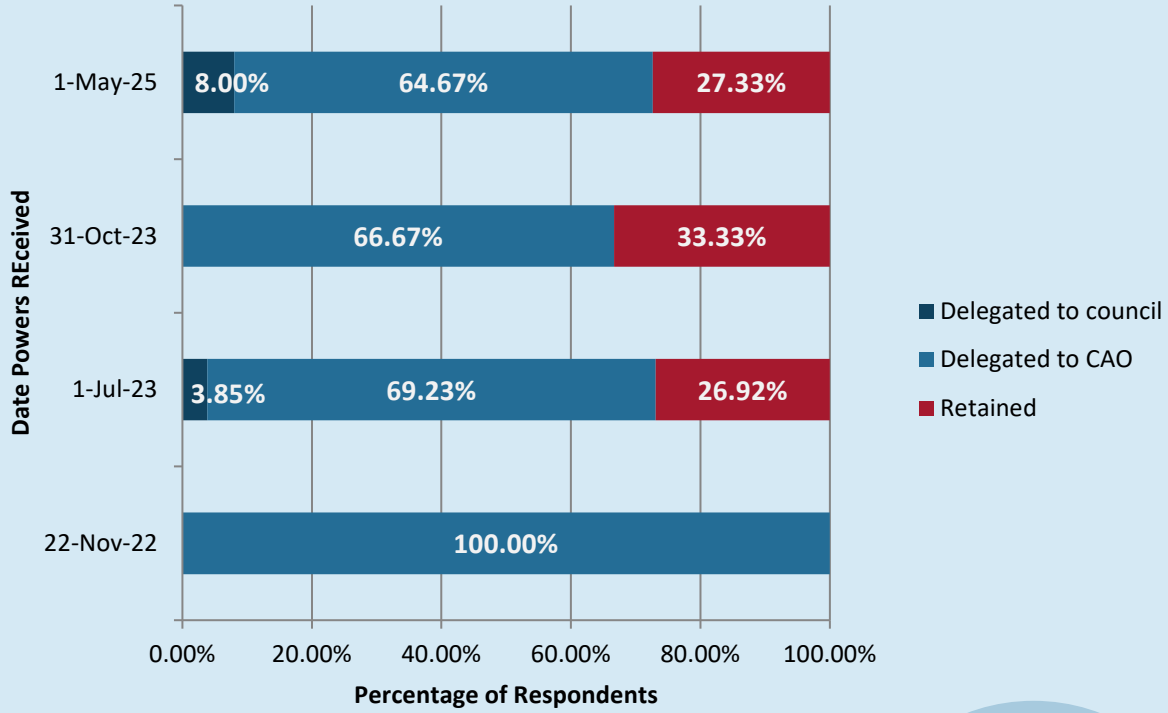
Where the power was retained, eight mayors used their powers with respect to employment matters.

Other Comparators - Delegation/Retention

Has your head of council delegated their powers with respect to organizational structure? (Section 284.6(1)) (N= 190)



Has your head of council delegated their powers with respect to employment matters? (Section 284.6(2)) (N=190)



Administrative Powers

Key Findings:

Appoint/Dismiss the CAO

- 60% of mayors delegated the power to appoint/dismiss the CAO to council, while 39.90% of mayors retained it.
  - While 80% did not exercise the power, 20% used it to hire or remove the CAO.
  - This represents approximately 50 CAOs across Ontario.

Organizational Structure/Employment Matters

- 71% of mayors delegated their power regarding organizational structure, all to the CAO, while 29% retained it.
  - 12% delegated these powers to council while 59% delegated to the CAO.
  - Of those who retained the power, 13% exercised the power.
- 72% of mayors delegated power over employment matters, while 28% of mayors retained the power.
  - 6% delegated to council while 66% delegated to the CAO.
  - 9% directly made staffing changes.

Administrative Powers

Municipal Examples:

- **Owen Sound:** mayor rescinded an offer of employment to an incoming CAO who was recruited by council and hired someone else.
- **Springwater:** mayor hired a CAO in August 2025 and then released them in late June 2026.
- **Haldimand County:** A CAO who was investigating possible improper release of confidential documents was released.
- **Killaloe, Hagarty and Richards (KHR):** instituted a hiring freeze including for the position of chief building official.
- **Brantford:** acting on external legal advice, appointed a deputy mayor under the rationale of council being part of the organizational structure of the municipality.
- **Grimsby:** reorganized the administrative structure specifying objectives and directing the CAO to take steps to enact and communicate, but not specifying the structure.

Legislative and Political Powers

This section relates to how mayors are using their legislative and political powers including advancing provincial priorities, and powers over committees.

Provincial Priorities

Recall that the mayor has been given the powers to advance or protect certain "prescribed provincial priorities".

The prescribed provincial priorities are:

- Building 1.5 million new residential units by December 31, 2031.
- Constructing and maintaining infrastructure to support housing including:
  - Transit
  - Roads
  - Utilities
  - Servicing

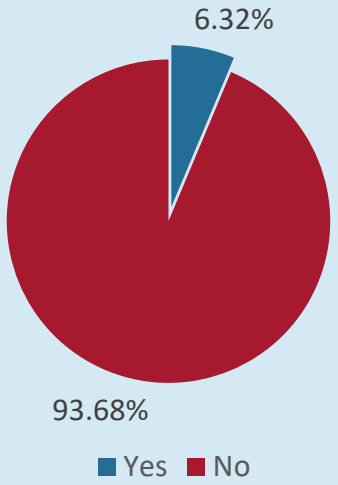
To action these priorities, the head of council may:

1. Require council to **"consider a matter"** at a meeting. However, it is a power to consider....not a power to vote (as there is with a bylaw). When voting on such a matter to pass, it requires a majority vote (50% +1) OR
2. Require council to **"consider and vote on a bylaw".** This applies specifically to decisions under the *Municipal Act*, *Planning Act*, their regulations + prescribed Acts (currently none are prescribed). It only requires "more than 1/3 vote".

Procedurally, to get something actioned, option 2 is the easiest option. As can be seen from the following slide, both options have been used evenly to date.

Provincial Priorities, Matters and Bylaws

Has your head of council brought forward a matter(s) for council consideration to advance a provincial priority? (Section 284.10(1)) (N=190)

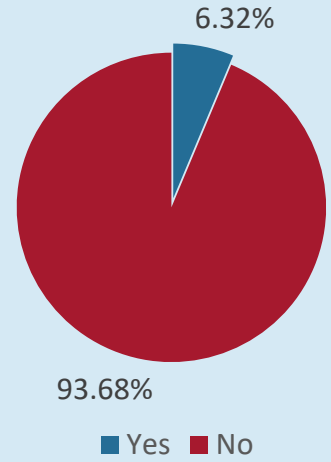


Examples of matters and bylaws*:

- Planning matters to address housing
- Zoning Bylaw Amendment and Site Plan Control
- Interim Control Bylaw added to council agenda
- Planning matter, related to the use of a parking lot for affordable housing.
- Amalgamation
- Ability to enter into individual agreements with property owners/developers for DC referrals until take of occupancy prior to the regulations being put into place.
- Development charges, zoning, conservation trust.
- Allowance for four-plexes
- Property acquisition
- Consider an affordable housing project
- Removal of a property from Cultural Heritage Register to facilitate residential development
- Bylaws to allow for specific developments

**Note: not all respondents provided responses with respect to matters or bylaws brought forward by head of council.*

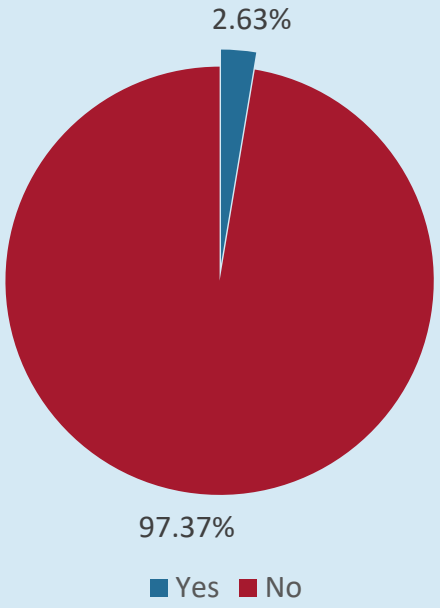
Has your head of council proposed a by-law(s) to council and required council to vote on the by-law to advance a provincial priority? (Section 284.11.1(2)) (N=190)



Vetoing Bylaws

Mayors have the power to veto bylaws that they believe may interfere with provincial priorities.

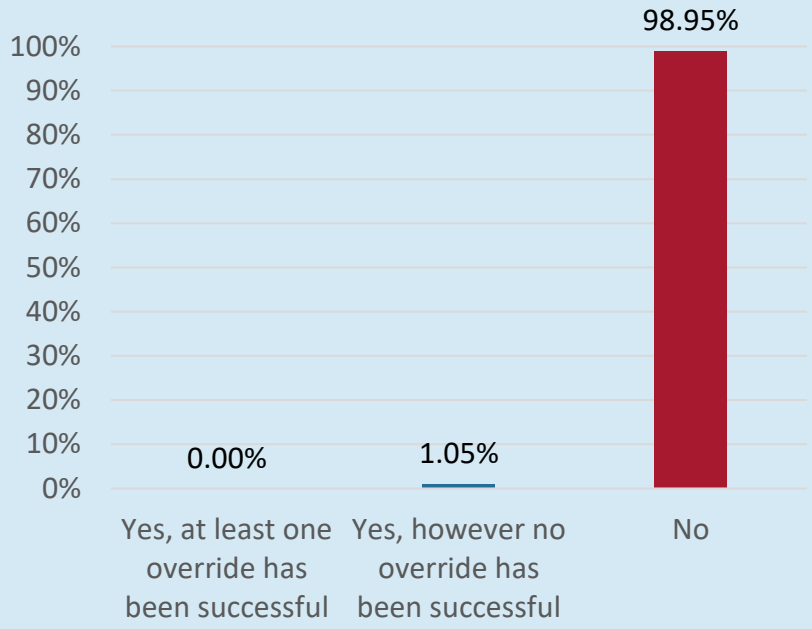
Has your head of council vetoed all or a part of a by-law? (Section 284.11(5)) (N=190)



What was the bylaw(s)?

- Confirming Bylaw - specifically regarding a staff report where council defeated a recommendation to apply for the 2026-2027 Intake 11 MTO Connecting Link Program
- Portion of the Confirming Bylaw respecting recommendations on City Property Review and Property Disposition Strategies
- Various including budget
- Confirmatory bylaw to remove the resolution to revoke support of MZO's Community Benefits Charge Bylaw

Has your council brought forward a vote to override a veto? (Section 284.11(9)) (N=190)



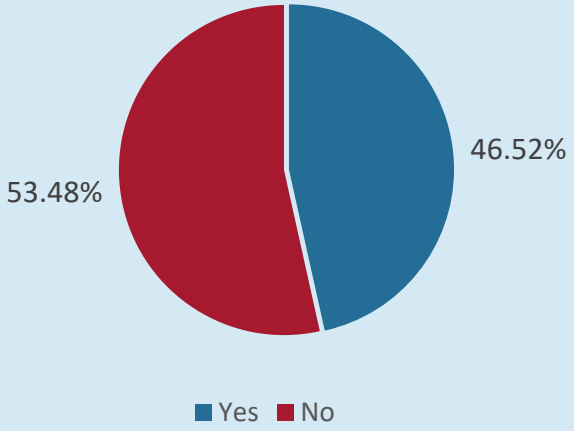
Note: since the collection of this data, AMCTO is aware of at least one successful vote to override a mayoral veto.

Powers Regarding Committees

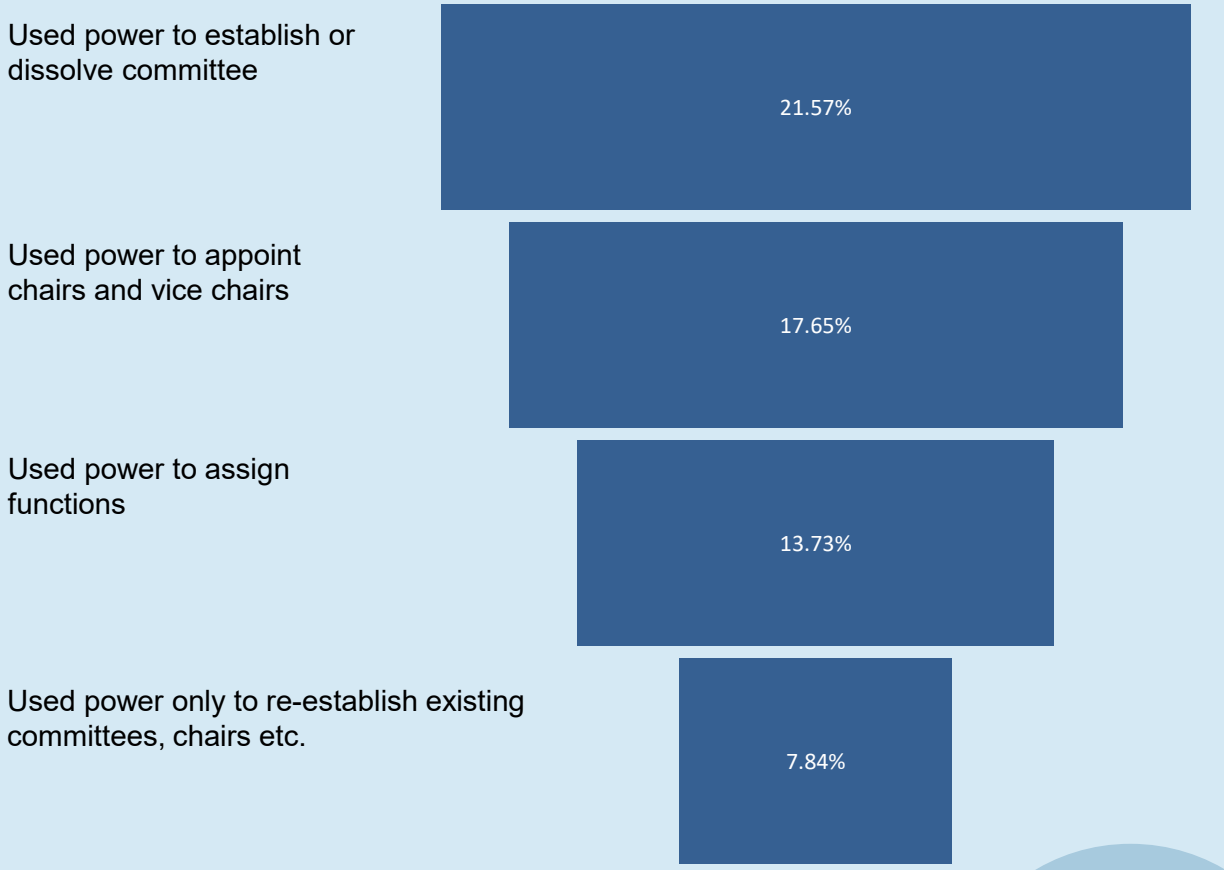
Powers with respect to committees are:

- Establish or dissolve committees
- Appoint Chairs and Vice Chairs
- Assign Functions

Has your head of council delegated their powers with respect to prescribed committees



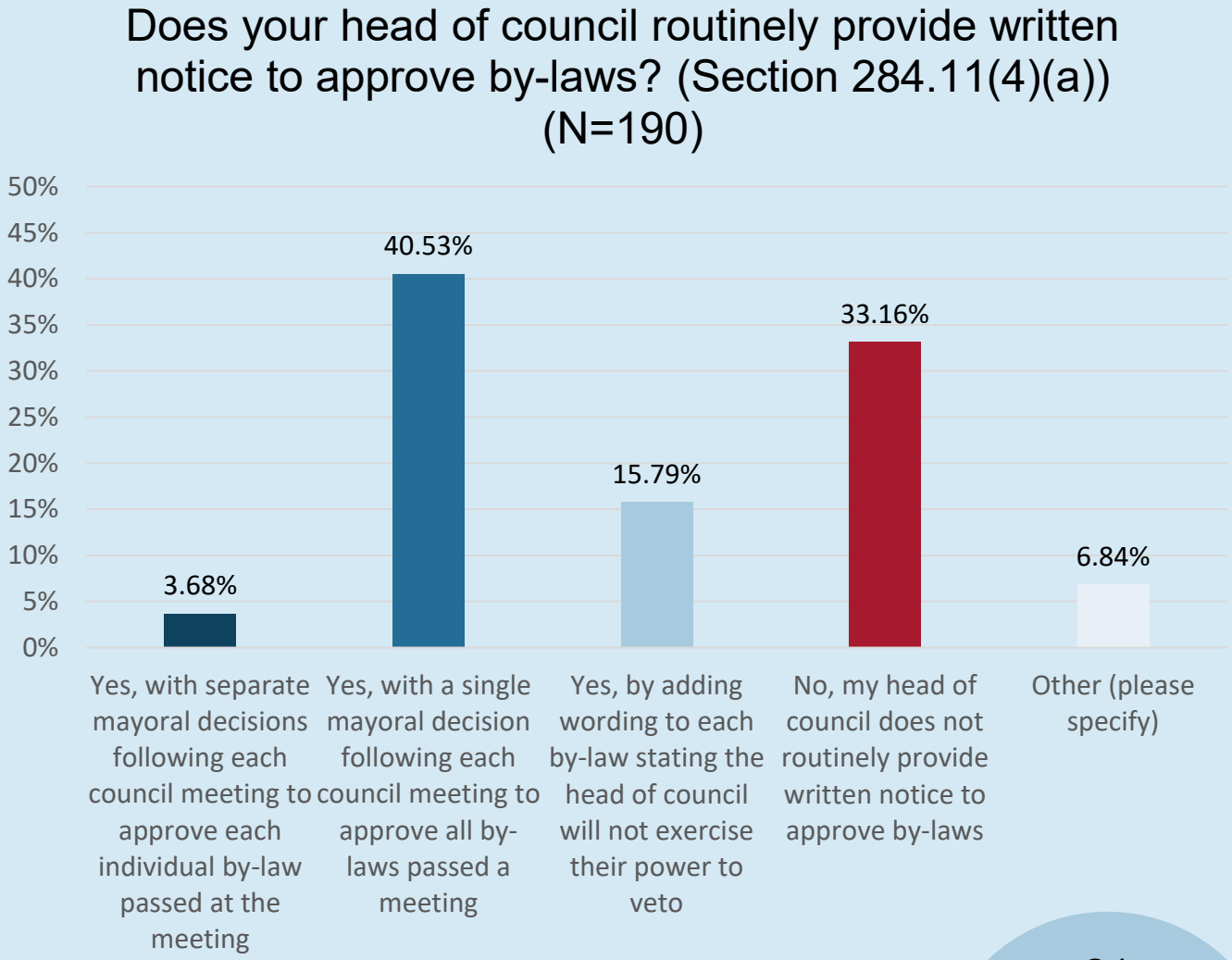
Trends in how powers were used:



Providing Written Notice to Approve Bylaws

Some respondent municipalities replied to the other option with nuanced options including:

- One-time written declaration that upon signing of a bylaw, it is deemed approved.
- Confirmatory Bylaw includes language that by signing the mayor will not exercise the power to veto.
- Bylaws held for two days following approval by council and once lapsed, it is deemed passed.
- Email to clerk following each council meeting.



Legislative and Political Powers

Key Findings:

- 12% of mayors brought forward matters or bylaws under 'provincial priorities' for council consideration.
  - Of matters or bylaws identified, some of these relate to potential building of housing (site plans, zoning bylaw amendments, etc).
- Just under 3% of mayors vetoed a decision of council which they believed would interfere with provincial priorities.

Committees

- 53% of mayors retained the power with respect to prescribed committees. With 47% having delegated the powers.

Municipal Examples:

- **Cochrane:** established an Indigenous Relations Committee, an Operations Committee and a Policy Review Working Committee.
- **Rideau Lakes:** dissolved a Municipal Services Committee for General Governance and Public Works and established a new Committee of the Whole to assume responsibilities.
- **Grimsby:** dissolved the Budget Committee of the Whole.
- **Oakville & Kawartha Lakes:** established a Budget Committee
- **Lambton Shores:** established a Finance Committee.
- **Barrie:** established an Executive Committee that reports to the General Committee.

Budget Duties

This section identifies key findings related to how strong mayors handled the 2025-2026 budget preparation and process. Under strong mayor authority, it is the mayor's responsibility to propose the budget.

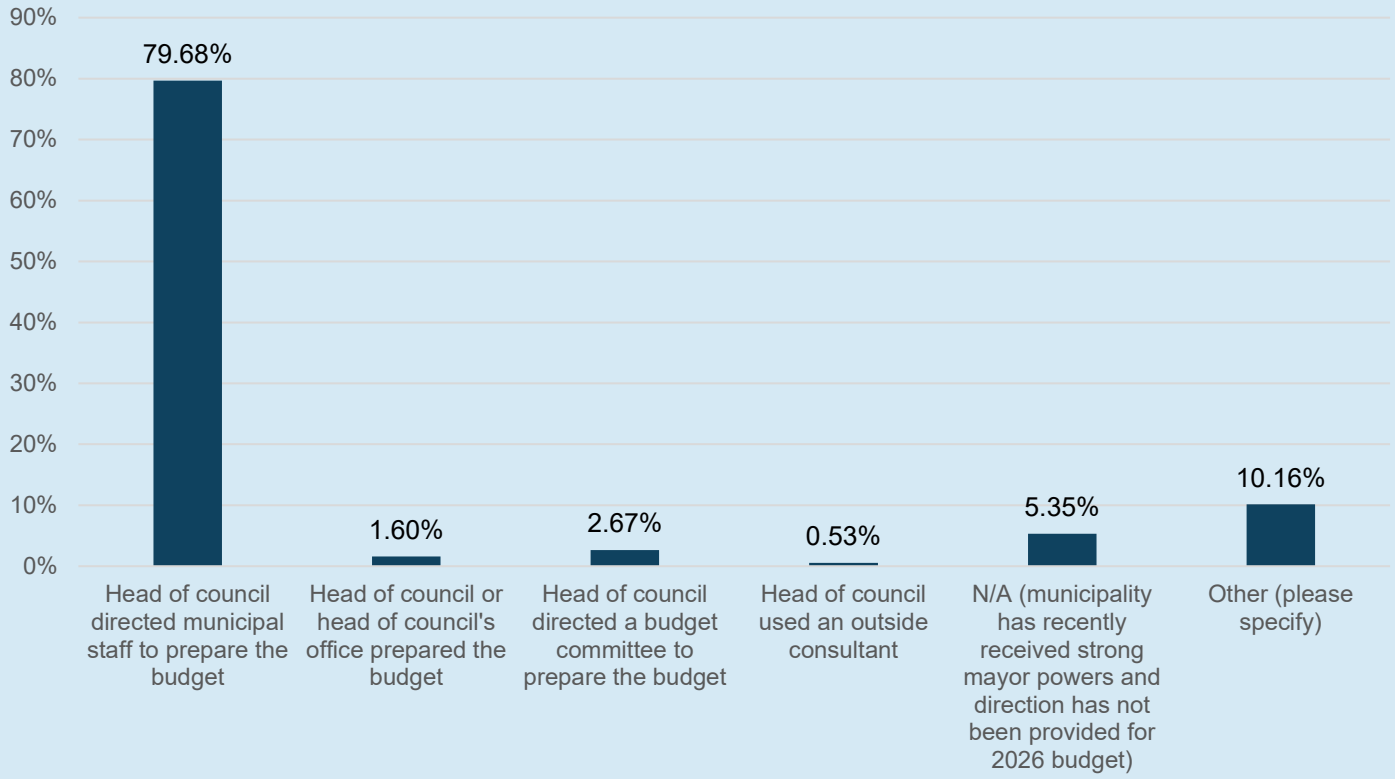
Budget Duties

- Councils do not approve municipal budgets – it is now the mayor's budget that must be proposed and adopted.
- The mayor is **required** to provide a proposed budget to council, the clerk and the public by February 1 of each year. The mayor cannot delegate this authority.
  - Council can propose amendments to the budget and mayor could propose changes that need to contemplate the early approvals.
- If the mayor does not propose a budget to council by February 1, it defaults to a council budget (the traditional budget process)
- If the mayor provided a budget prior to February 1:
  - Council has 30 days, after receipt of budget, to amend the proposed budget.
  - Mayor has 10 days, after council amendment, to veto a council budget amendment.
  - Council has 15 days, after notification of veto, to override the veto with 2/3rds vote.

Preparation of Budget

The following question asked how the mayor was preparing for the budget.

How is the budget prepared in your municipality? (N=187)



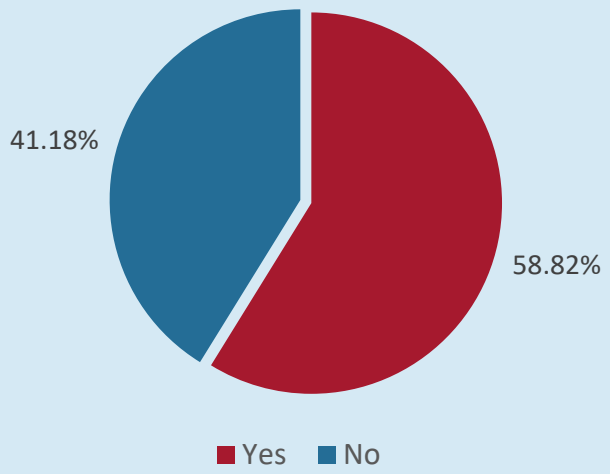
Note: Open-ended responses for 'other' are variations of the other options provided.

Key Finding:

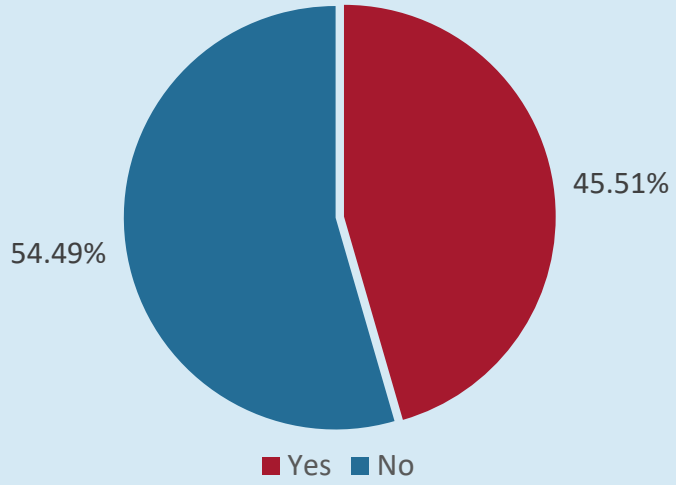
Overwhelmingly, almost 80% of mayors directed staff to prepare the budget. Variations included either directing staff to use the traditional budget process, or providing specific content, policy or outcome specifics as to how staff should develop the budget (see next slide).

Proposing a Budget

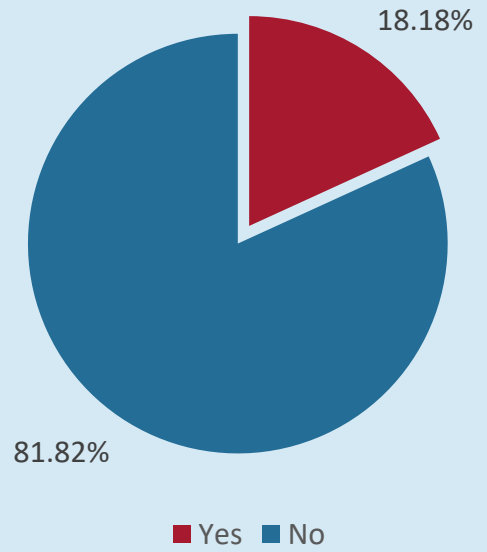
Has your head of council proposed a budget? (Section 284.16(2))? (N=187)



If the head of council directed municipal staff or the budget committee to prepare the budget, did they outline content, policy or outcome specifics? (N=167)



Does your municipality use a budget committee to advise the head of council? (N=187)



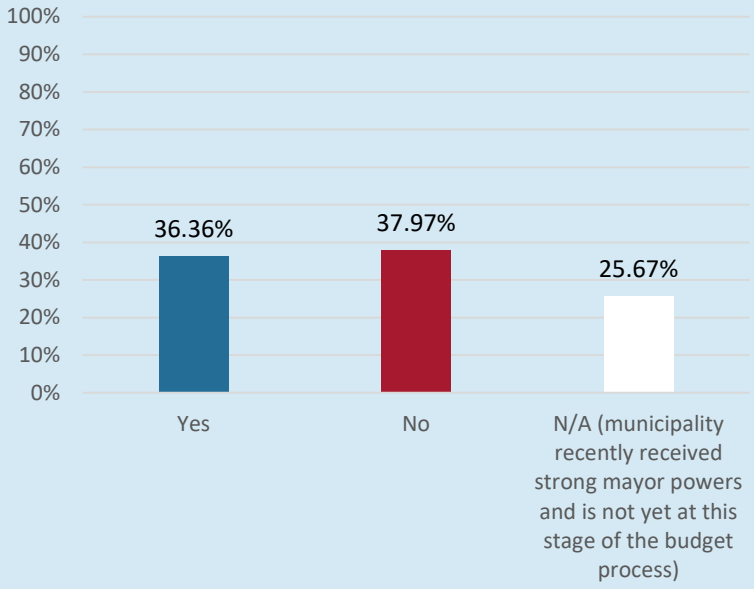
Preparation of Budget – Estimates/Budgets for Agencies, Boards, and Commissions

The ways in which ABC budgets are managed in strong mayor budget differs municipality to municipality.

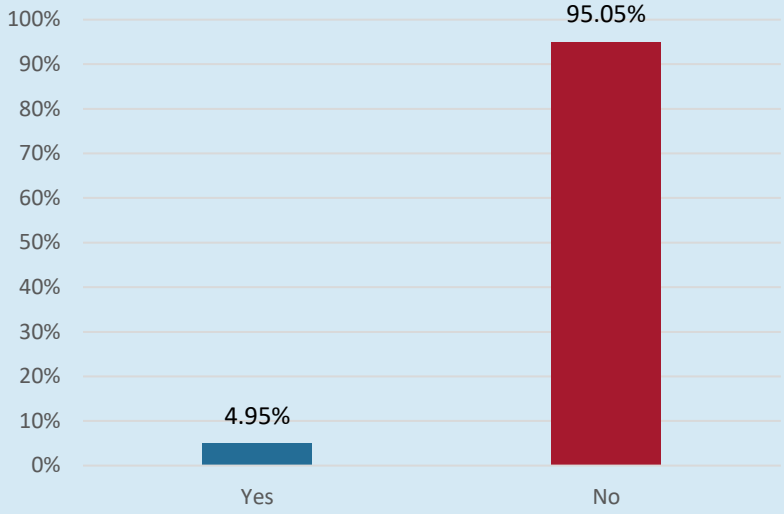
- Submitted budget to treasurer and came to public meeting of council to present their budget.
- Reviewed and inputted for approval by council directly or through budget committee; status quo
- Info provided by staff and inserted by staff into the mayor's budget
- Presentations to council, staff included as directed by mayor
- Included in the municipality's operating budget
- Library board representative (chief librarian) presents the draft library budget to council for consideration.
- Conservation authorities, police service boards and other boards provide presentations of their budgets to council and a budget amount is approved.
- The public library presented its budget for council's discussion, and it is included within the municipality's overall budget.
- Spending envelopes are provided to all agencies, boards and commissions and it is requested they stay within those thresholds, their budgets are submitted to the treasurer and included in the budget submission for council consideration.

Council Amendments

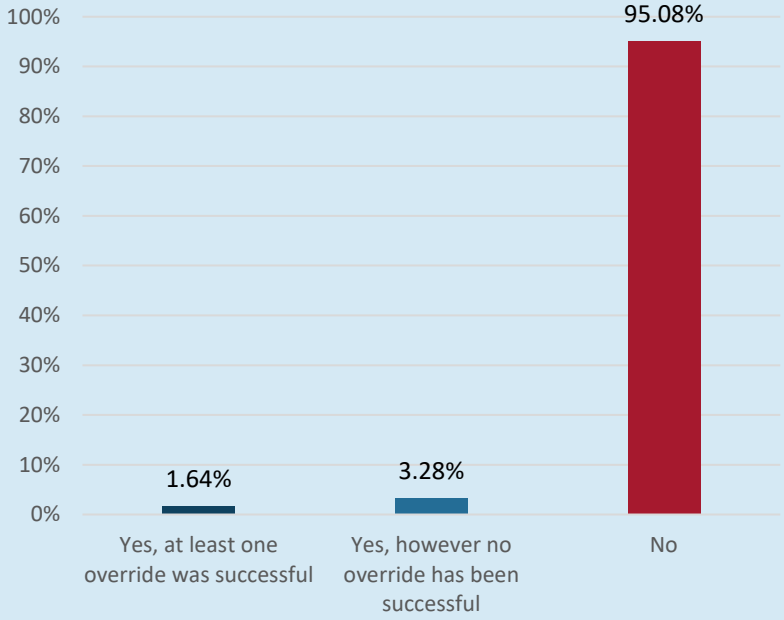
Has your council passed a resolution making an amendment to the proposed budget? (Section 284.16(3)) (N=187)



If yes, has your head of council vetoed a council resolution to make an amendment to the proposed budget? (Section 284.16(4)) (N=101)



If yes, has your council attempted to override the veto? (Section 284.16(5)) (N=61)



Budget

Key Findings

- 84% of mayors directed staff to prepare the budget. Of those, 54% provided specific direction or policy outcomes and 46% did not.
- As this duty cannot be delegated, it would be brought forward as the mayor's budget regardless of direction. In 1.6% of cases, the head of council or their office prepared the budget, 2.7% directed a budget committee to prepare the budget, 0.5% used an outside consultant.
- Of those municipalities who were in the middle or had passed their budget at the time of the survey, respondents were relatively even between having council amendments or not.
- Almost 5% of mayors who received amendments to their budget vetoed a council amendment demonstrating that there remains a collaborative spirit within budget deliberations.
- Of those who vetoed, just under 5% of those were challenged by an override vote by council. Less than 2% of those override challenges were successful.
    - While there has been an increase in vetoes by mayors and override attempts by councils, which is the only tool to hold mayors to account, council members are mostly unsuccessful.
- Based on responses to how agency, board and commission estimates or budgets were managed, there are inconsistent approaches across municipalities with some being folded in mayors' drafts while others are managed traditionally through operating budget or public consultation processes.

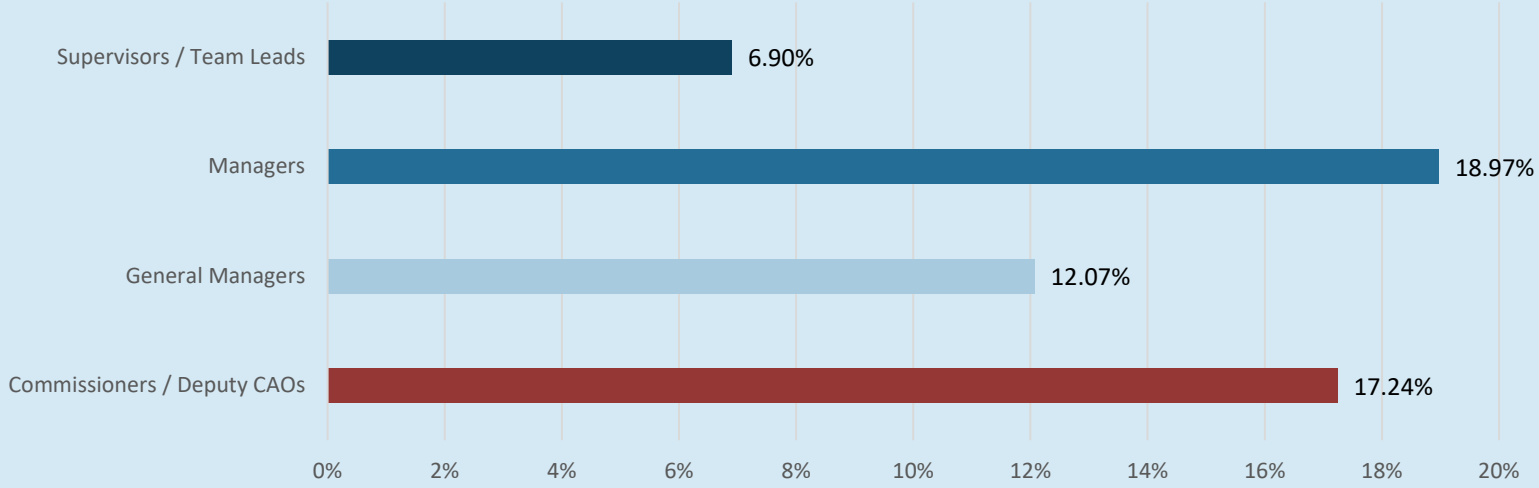
Accountability and Transparency

This section highlights areas of decision-making that deal with measures of accountability, transparency and depth of organizational reach where there are differing interpretations of the use of powers.

Employment Matters

In the *Municipal Act,* under section 284.6(2), the mayor has control over employment matters. This includes the ability to hire, dismiss or exercise any other prescribed employment powers with respect to the head of division (an undefined term) or head of any other part of the organizational structure (an undefined term).

If retained, how far into the organizational structure do your head of council's employment powers regarding division heads go? (N=58)



Key Finding:

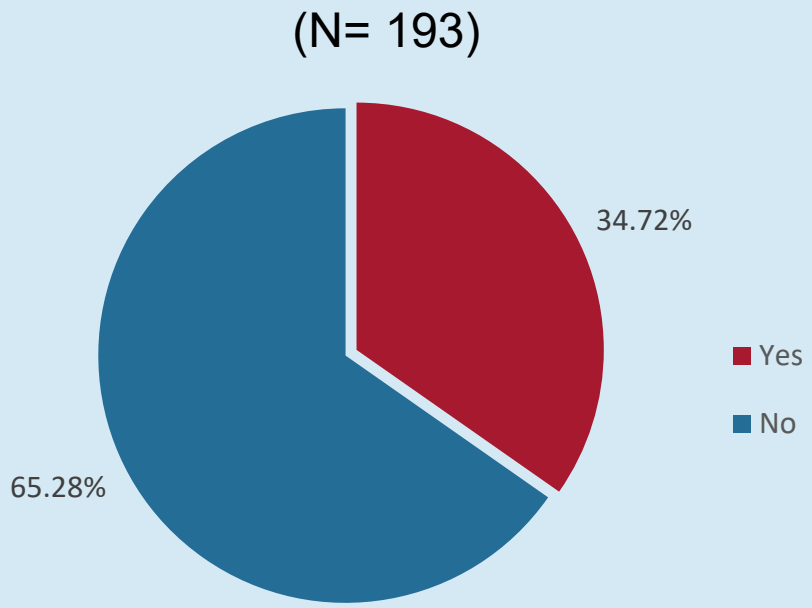
Where powers were not delegated to the CAO, almost 26% of mayors' employment powers reached beyond senior leadership teams to the director level or below.

Mayoral Decisions vs. Directives

Section 284.3 of the *Municipal Act* allows the head of council to direct municipal staff to undertake research or provide advice to council on policies and programs of the municipality and/or carry out duties related to the exercise of their powers including implementing their decisions.

Key Finding:

34% or 67 mayors have used this authority. This power can have significant impact to staff workload given the broad and non-specific nature of this power.

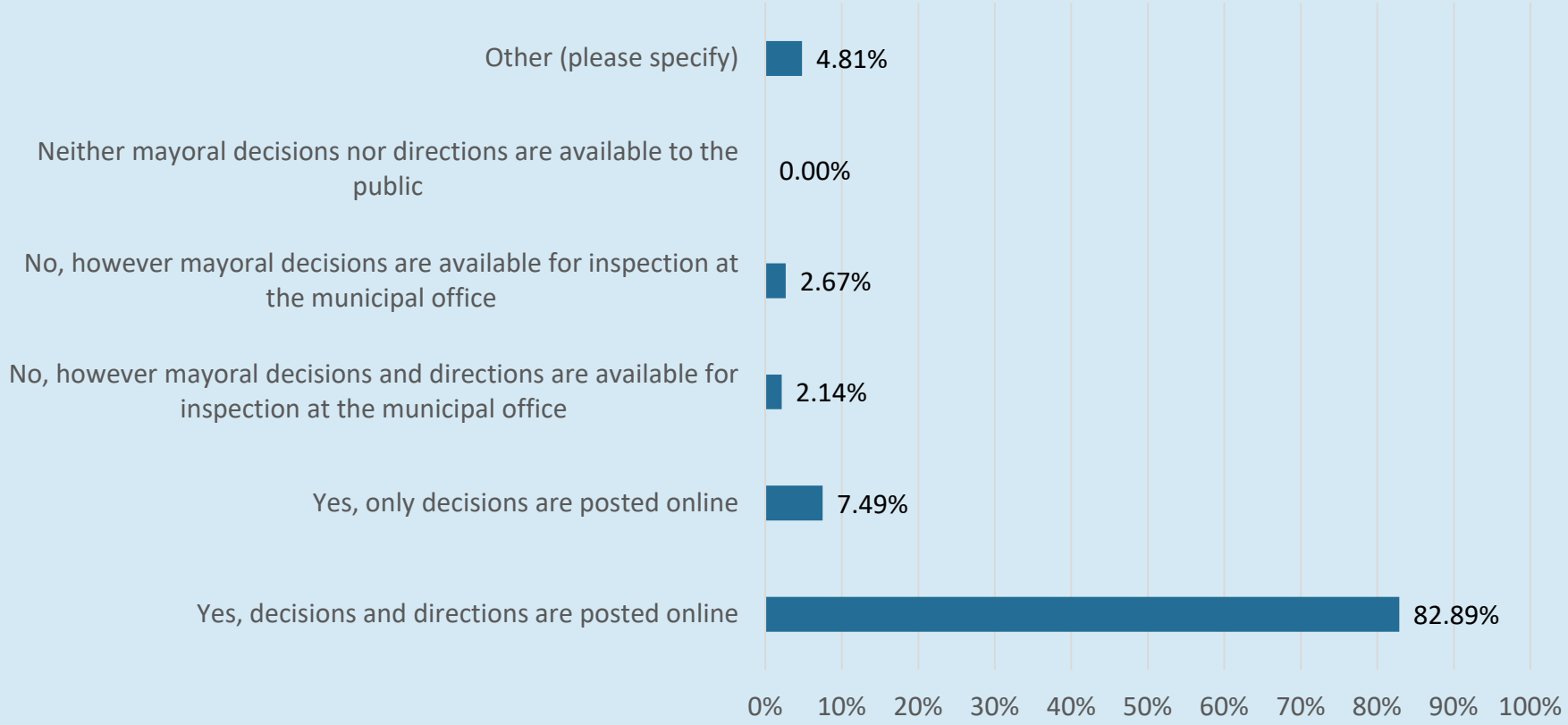


Making Information Available

Key Findings:

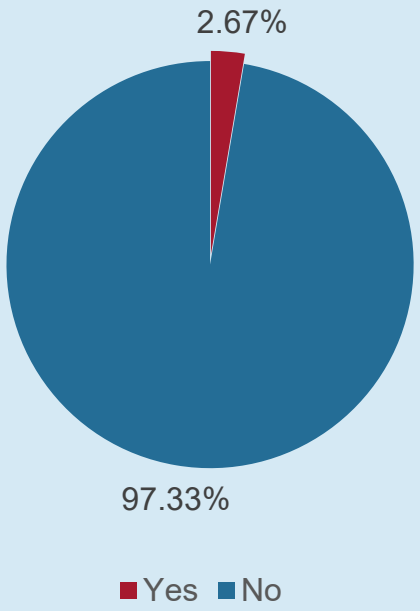
- 90.38% of municipalities have webpages dedicated to strong mayor powers and documents.
- 83% of those post both mayoral decisions and directives.
- Just under 8% or 14 of those municipalities post only mayoral decisions.
- Other municipalities have one or both documents available for inspection at the municipal office.

Does your municipality have a public webpage or section of a webpage dedicated to strong mayor authorities? (N=187)

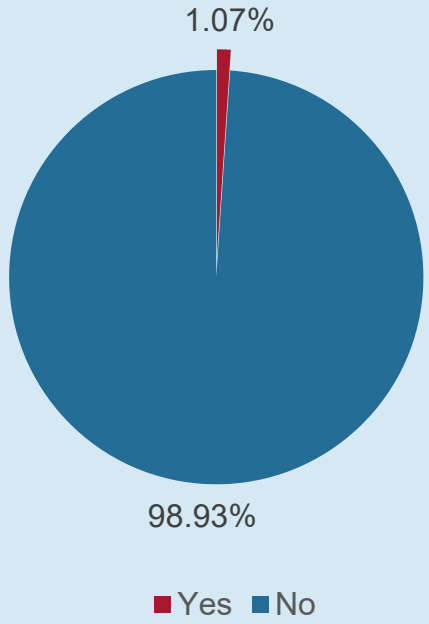


Policies and Procedures

Has your head of council directed changes to municipal policies? (e.g. investment, hiring of employees, sale an disposition of land, etc.) (N=187)



Has your head of council directed changes to standard operating procedures or other organizational procedures? (N=187)



What Respondents are Saying About the Strong Mayor Powers Framework

"Council and staff feel they've had to go through a lot 'red tape' just to keep things progressing as usual with collective decision making and the preparation of the budget."

"Strong mayor powers have been no benefit to the [municipality] to assist with building houses or anything else. What they have done is created an administrative burden."

"Strong mayor authorities have made governance more complicated rather than more effective."

"Our municipality has had to engage with legal counsel on a number of strong mayor power matters. Council distrust on the process is high."

"[The powers] have created confusion for council, staff, and the public about roles, decision-making, and accountability that were previously clear under the traditional council-manager model."

"There are concerns among staff that a different council and a different mayor than the current, could/would result in dramatically different answers to these survey questions."

Accountability and Transparency

Key Findings:

Directing Changes to Policies and SOPs

Few mayors have directed changes to municipal policies of the corporate variety (2.67%) within the date range of the survey despite authority to do so. This is one area to watch in the next term of council, especially if the direction document or specificity within a posted mayoral direction is not available.

Posting Decisions and Directives

- 93% of municipalities have a public webpage or section of a webpage dedicated to strong mayor authority and documents.
    - 83% of those municipalities post both mayoral decisions and mayoral directives to a public website.
    - Just under 8% of those municipalities post only mayoral decisions.
- Other municipalities have one or both documents available for inspection at the municipal office.

Employment Matters

- While 48% indicate that such decisions were limited to senior leaders such as CAOs and general managers, almost 19% indicated that decisions went down to the manager level, and almost 7% to supervisors and team leads.

Accountability and Transparency

Municipal Examples:

- **Windsor:** Mayoral decision to hire the manager of aquatics, manager of cyber security, project manager in Economic Development, referencing a 2023 decision that delegates all employment matters related to employees below the level of manager to the CAO.
- **Springwater:** Mayoral direction to municipal staff to terminate engagement with municipality's external legal counsel and retain external legal counsel without delay, to advise and continue to represent the municipality with respect to boundary adjustment.
- **Clarence-Rockland:** mayoral direction to the treasurer to adjust the proposed budget with a list of specific dollar adjustments.
- **Chatham-Kent:** mayoral direction to CAO and CFO to prepare an update to the adopted 2026 annual operating and capital budget based on a total property tax impact in the 3% range with assistance from upper-level government, a tax impact no greater than 4.95% for the 2026 budget update, a figure less than the 7.70% approved by council for 2026 in the 2024 to 2027 multi-year budget.
- **Halton Hills:** Mayoral decision to direct CAO, commissioner of corporate services and treasurer to prepare a budget with maximum property tax increase of 3.5% for Town services and a capital budget of no more than $23 million.
- Of municipalities added in 2025, some municipalities such as **Bluewater** separated decisions and directives by year and type, while others such as **Grimsby** consolidate both but separate by year. Some municipalities do not post directives such as **West Grey, Town of Renfrew**, and **Petrolia.**

Impacts and Next Steps

Observations and Trends Beyond the Data

Operations and Administration

- As in 2024, a variety of municipalities had staff provide presentations to their councils and the public regarding strong mayor legislation and powers, though legal interpretation of such powers differs.
- Several municipalities changed their procedural bylaw to consider procedures related to the use of strong mayor powers as well as updated processes for signing bylaws.
- While municipal staff are adapting to the new legislation and powers, updating various policies and processes, there remains significant inconsistency in interpretation and administration of powers.
- Legislation continues to be too specific in some areas and not specific enough in others. Municipality to municipality there are differences in how staff are reading and interpreting the legislation, making implementation challenging and resulting in inconsistency in how it is applied and documented.
- Though powers are afforded to the mayor, there continues to be reliance or burden on staff, especially where mayor's office staff is limited, to support the interpretation and implementation of powers especially for smaller communities.
- There continues to be vocal opposition to strong mayor powers in communities, and increasingly amongst municipal councillors with many pushing back against their diminishing roles.
    - 47.6% of responding municipalities had councils that passed resolutions opposing strong mayor powers.

Organizational Structure/Employment Matters

- The most frequently delegated power in 2025 was power over prescribed committees **(47%).**
  - Most mayors have delegated their powers regarding the hiring/removal of the CAO, the organizational structure and employment matters, suggesting that most these areas are still generally considered to be within the purview of the CAO, the powers that were retained and used in 2025 are as follows:
    - Authority to hire/remove the CAO: **40% retained, 20% used**
    - Authority over organizational structure: **30% retained, 13% used**
    - Authority over employment: **28% retained, 9% used.**
- Compared across cohorts, more mayors in the **2025** cohort retained authority over employment matters **(27%),** organizational structure **(30%),** and over the CAO **(36%)** which means that more smaller communities are retaining these administrative powers.
  - However, where mayors retain powers over the organization and employment matters, these extend deep into the organization, which likely increases uncertainty for a number of staff with respect to who they report to and what their futures might be at the municipality.
  - This is because as others have noted, terminology such as organizational structure, employment matters, head of division are non-specific and do not appear to be defined in employment-related statutes. This has led to some mayors exercising this power deep into the organization down to managers and supervisors/team leads.
  - This exposes an increased risk of politicization deeper into the organization with more staff beholden to the mayor for their positions and creating two-blocks of employees: those appointed by the mayor and those who are not.

Legislative and Political Powers

- Overall, the most delegated power was with respect to committees (54%), however, 71% of municipalities indicated that the powers have not been used.
- Interestingly, the trend of use of powers with respect to committees is for the mayor to retain the power without using them, followed by establishing or dissolving committees and appointing chairs and vice chairs.
- The powers to bring forward a matter or bylaw remain at low use with just over 6% respectively, which could indicate that mayors are not using their powers to move forward provincial priorities or that they see no need to use the powers to do so.
- When compared to the data on the previous slide, these powers are the most underutilized. The most used powers overall relate to matters relating to administrative matters which had been under the purview of the CAO.

Hiring/Removal of CAOs

- There are increasing high profile examples of removal or change over in CAO.
- Mayors have also used their powers to remove the municipality's legal counsel creating uncertainty and instability. This is one area that AMCTO highlighted as a risk regarding who legal counsels are serving, the mayor or the municipality.
- This leaves staff employment, well-being and effectiveness subject to the discretion of the mayor who may decide at any time to use the powers or change a process.
- Where there is higher tendency for use of powers, especially where there are changes to the senior staff, there tends to be broader turnover in general staff.
- 20% of mayors used their powers to hire or remove the CAO. This represents approximately 50 CAOs across Ontario.
- Frequent changes to leadership can lead to organizational instability which may negatively impact corporate culture and therefore recruitment and retention efforts. It can also lead to shifting priorities, loss of institutional knowledge, increased costs to taxpayers to meet contractual obligations, affect organizational culture and resilience, impact performance and therefore service delivery.

Accountability and Transparency

- Inconsistency in interpretation and administration affects the level of accountability and transparency in decision-making as well as results in varying details provided in publicly available decisions or directives, outcomes of which could result in negative perceptions of municipal staff.
- For example:
  - In some instances, the mayor may be making more politically motivated policy decisions rather than seeking or considering the advice of staff.
  - Staff as non-partisan local government management professionals, typically provide recommendations that are subject to research, collaboration and consultation, brought through an open forum to be discussed or debated.
  - There may be instances where via decision or directive, staff are being asked to supersede or waive policy. Mayors may be afforded immunity (s. 284.14 of the *Municipal Act*) regarding use of powers, but the legislation is unclear on what liability staff may face for abiding by mayoral decisions.

Accountability and Transparency

- While the legislation states that mayors may make direction in writing and regulations may require the mayor to provide a written record of that direction, not all mayors make their directions easily available to the public. This can lead to decreased transparency of actions and decision-making with respect to changes to policies impacting programs, services or other operation.

- Staff are tasked with implementing mayoral decisions and in some cases directives, including examples like those mentioned earlier, that can reduce openness and transparency. Even though it is a decision by the mayor, if the outcome of the decision is not as desired, without a record of the direction, these powers may leave staff exposed to responsibility for potentially poor outcomes.

Budgets and Other Matters

- A separate exploration of mayoral decisions/directives with respect to budget shows that in 2025 for 2026 budgets, the final budget before municipal elections, there were mayors who directed staff to limit budget or levy increases.
- While some of this direction may have been worked out in collaboration with staff, the long-term impact of these decisions on a municipality's fiscal health will remain to be seen.
- While strong mayors are responsible for bringing forward their budget, the Province has indicated that there is limited ability of mayors to constrain certain types of spending, such as policing which limits the ability of the municipality to control increasing costs.
- Since the close of this survey, the Province has introduced 'strong chair' powers for provincially appointed upper-tier heads of council. Not only will this have impacts on a wider group of municipal leaders, staff and operations, but it could also have ripple effects to local strong mayor powers and municipal operations.

Conclusions

- When the legislation was introduced, AMCTO clearly articulated, on behalf of our membership, concerns about the effective removal of non-partisan local government management professionals, especially the CAO, and the impact this could have on the politicization of senior and other local government officials.
- We also emphasized the additional undue administrative burden this change could have on our members and other municipal staff. We are seeing however, that there is also additional red tape for mayors and councillors as well within the council-oversight process.
- Concerningly, the most used powers are those that fall under administration.
- We remain concerned that this will continue to be an issue and impact a greater number of staff positions than originally considered given the expansion of the legislation.
- Our research indicates mayors' retention, use and implementation of the powers results in:
  - Continued creation of operational and administrative burdens when it comes to supporting the interpretation and implementation of the legislation;
  - Continued blurred lines of political and administrative authority, particularly between the mayor and CAO and when used, go deep into the organization.
  - Inconsistent application, accountability and transparency in decision-making, leaving staff employment, well-being and effectiveness at the discretion of the mayor.

Conclusions

- Furthermore, the lack of definition of employment matters, heads of division and organizational structure means that it is up to the mayor's discretion how to apply these powers which has led to inconsistent application of powers across municipalities.
- Taken together, the use of powers can and have changed the dynamic between staff and decision-making authorities with some disruption to municipal timelines, policies, procedures and resources, which is contrary to the stated intent of the powers.
- At times, the powers appear to have streamlined governance and decision-making in some cases, while in other cases, have added more red tape with uncertainty and changes to organizational structure and staffing putting municipal service and administration at risk.
- Only time will tell what kind of outcome mayoral decisions will have on municipal financial sustainability, whether budget decisions or changes to organizational structure and staffing will have a cascading effect.
- As municipal elections are upcoming, there is increasing concern among staff that changes on council or to heads of council may dramatically change approach and use of strong mayor powers.

Conclusions

- AMCTO has long held the position that there remain opportunities to strengthen municipal administration through clarifying the roles and responsibilities between the CAO and mayor (or head of council) to distinguish between administrative and political responsibilities.
- It is with this in mind and the impacts of strong mayor powers, specifically the politicization of local government leadership, that we reaffirm our opposition to strong mayor powers related to the CAO and staff.
- Municipalities need further clarity in legislation and regulation that will:
    - improve accountability and transparency frameworks;
    - strengthen local relationships;
    - support effective municipal operations; and
    - reduce impacts to municipal leaders and staff.
- It is important to consider opportunities to leverage benefits of the strong mayor model while mitigating the risks.
- Read our full recommendations to the province regarding strong mayor powers, our ongoing advocacy on this topic, and strong chair powers. For more information, please contact us at advocacy@amcto.com.

Next Steps



As a leader in monitoring the impacts of strong mayor powers on municipal operations and staff well-being, AMCTO will continue to review and study these powers.



This work is critical given the operational and administrative challenges these powers present.



It is likely that after the 2026 municipal elections, in which candidates know that they must work within the strong mayor power framework, that there will be significant changes to how mayors use their powers. AMCTO will be tracking these changes to the best of our ability.

What's Next?



Moreover, Bill 100, *Stronger Regional Governance Act, 2026* introduced 'strong chair' powers to heads of council of select upper-tier municipalities. This included more authority for the Province to appoint the heads of council in these municipalities.



AMCTO expects that a new crop of issues and challenges will arise in the coming year, including significant change over in senior leaders and staff.



Future surveys on use of these authorities are anticipated.