



Administration Office
Mailing address
Email
Phone

1024 Hurlwood Lane, Severn
PO Box 159, Orillia, Ontario L3V 6J3
info@severn.ca
705-325-2315

May 8, 2025

Premier Doug Ford

Via email – Premier@ontario.ca

Dear Premier Ford:

Re: Strong Mayor Powers

The Township of Severn is concerned about the recent announcement to extend Strong Mayor Powers (SMPs) to 169 additional Ontario municipalities. The announcement was unexpected, and no consultation was undertaken. The Township of Severn is deeply concerned about the centralization of power, erosion of local democracy, reduced accountability, and the potential for the abuse of power. However, we recognize that the expansion of strong mayor powers is a priority for this government and are committed to offering our cautious support to this endeavour. We would though respectfully ask that the government consider the following concerns and suggestions to assist the Province in achieving their goals with respect to building homes and infrastructure:

1. Set Clear Limits on the use of SMPs tied to Provincial Priorities

Lack of more specific guidelines on when SMPs can be used may undermine the public trust in municipal government, and either deter future candidates from running for office, or attract candidates who wish to use SMPs for personal reasons not tied to provincial priorities. Please consider stronger guidelines on when SMPs can and should be used.

2. Consider and mitigate potential unintended consequences

Municipalities hire competent, professional staff to manage the operations of the Municipality and to provide Council with non-partisan policy advice. SMPs may have several unanticipated consequences that the legislation as written has not contemplated.

- Staff may find it difficult to provide apolitical advice to Council when their employment depends solely on pleasing the Mayor, resulting in decisions made without the benefit of full background information and advice.
- Recruitment of qualified senior professional staff is an ongoing challenge for many smaller and more rural communities. Concentrating the powers to hire and fire into one position (the strong Mayor) may further limit the candidate pool, particularly for non-statuary positions such as the Chief Administrative Officer, the Director of Planning, Public Works, etc.
- With administrative powers being given to the Mayor, who may not have appropriate knowledge, training or experience, he or she may then held liable for ensuring Health and Safety regulations are met or ensuring union contracts are not violated or other staff management matters.

Please consider either removing administrative powers from the legislation and recognizing the critical role of the CAO in Legislation, or, updating Regulation 530/22 to clarify the division of roles and responsibilities to mitigate the potential unintended consequences.

3. **Ensure municipalities have access to a stable, predictable infrastructure funding**

Our Council is committed to supporting the Province in building more homes for Ontarians. Collaborative and democratic decisions made at our Council table is **not** slowing down those efforts, what is slowing down growth in our municipality is the lack of infrastructure, particularly water and wastewater capacity. While the Province has made some funding available, time after time Severn Township has been unsuccessful in our grant applications. The complexity and time consumed by municipalities continually applying for grants is not compatible with the Province's stated goals of reducing 'red tape'. Previously SMPs were conditional on signing a housing pledge and that opened the doors to more Provincial funding. Please consider the same criteria as SMPs are granted to more municipalities.

4. Consider and mitigate the effect on public civility

Elected officials and municipal staff are increasingly subject to rising public incivility, which may further deter candidates from running for public office, or for job seekers to consider joining the public service. The addition SMPs may further exacerbate that incivility, with the public (or private sector) encouraging the Mayor to use their SMPs for decisions not related to Provincial priorities or being confused or frustrated that their local representative is not able to represent their interests.

Please consider strengthening protections for municipalities dealing with public incivility.

Thank you for taking the time to consider the Township of Severn's suggestions for improvement to the expansion of SMPs. We are committed to being a productive partner to the Province of Ontario's goals to provide much needed increases to housing supply, and with improvements to the proposed legislation, feel that we will be able to contribute to that outcome in a meaningful way.

Sincerely,



Mayor Mike Burkett

cc. Hon. Rob Flack - rob.flack@pc.ola.org / minister.mah@ontario.ca
Hon. Andrea Khanjin - minister.mrtr@ontario.ca
Hon. Jill Dunlop - jill.dunlop@pc.ola.org
County of Simcoe Municipalities