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Shelburne council passes motion rejecting strong mayor powers, requests repeal

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Shelburne Town Council has passed a motion requesting the provincial government remove them as one of the municipalities granted strong mayor powers.

During their meeting on Monday (May 12), Coun. Lindsay Wegener brought forward a motion regarding the recently granted ?strong mayor powers.?

Wegener's motion reads that Shelburne Town Council rejects the strong mayor powers granted and requests that the province repeal the legislation or offer an option and ability to opt out of the legislation.

?This doesn't have anything to do with your leadership. We know that you're not planning on using these and you've reiterated that? said Coun. Wegner to Shelburne Mayor Wade Mills. ?As mentioned, we don't know who's going to sit in that seat over the next one, two, three terms from now and I feel that this is a slippery slope with regards to the democratic process that Canada itself is built on.?

?I almost feel like what's the point of us as council as a whole, if we're giving all these individual powers to one person,? she added.

The Town of Shelburne was one of 169 additional municipalities granted strong mayor powers from the provincial government, which went into effect on May 1.

The move allows mayors to appoint the municipality's chief administrative officer, hire and fire certain municipal department heads, create committees of council, and appoint committee chairs as well as vice-chairs. It also allows heads of council to veto bylaws, present budgets and approve them with only one-third of council's support.

The expansion of the strong mayor powers went into effect in the 169 municipalities as of May 1.

During the Monday meeting, Shelburne Town Council also received a report from its director of legislative services Jennifer Willoughby on the implications of the expansion strong mayor powers to the Town of Shelburne.

?The expansion of the strong mayor powers framework to the Town of Shelburne represents a major change to the Town's administrative political dichotomy that will permanently alter approaches to policy development, recruitment, budgeting, and procedures undermining governance in the Town and eroding the independence of public administration,? said Willoughby.

Following the report, Mills informed Council of his intentions to delegate the power of appointing the chief administrative officer (CAO) back to council. He is also delegating the power to determine the corporation's organizational structure to the CAO.

Mills added that he has not found a way to delegate himself out of the budgeting process, but noted he will direct staff to prepare the future draft budgets.

Since the announcement, Mills has been adamant about his plan not to use the new powers allotted to his position on council.

?As I said from day one, I certainly don't plan on having any kind of marked departure from the way we've operated for the last three years, but that's not to say that whoever fills the seat next may not take a completely different view of things,? said Mills.

Coun. Walter Benotto expressed his support of the motion brought forward by Coun. Wegener.

?If I was running in another election, I would feel that my job as a councillor, representing the people that have elected me, is sort of taken away from me and given to the mayor,? said Benotto.

Shelburne Town Council voted unanimously in support of the motion from Coun. Wegener.