

Strong Mayor Powers

by BRIAN LOCKHART

The province has now extended the 'Strong Mayor Powers' to more municipalities across the province, giving the leaders of municipalities more control of what happens in their jurisdiction ? sort of.

I'm not sure we need a 'strong mayor' policy in place. It seems a lot of mayors aren't so sure about it either.

There hasn't been any rallying cry of change, or any mayor going nuts with power ? at least not yet.

Most of the mayors that have made a statement on the issue seem pretty cautious and reserved with regards to how they are going to proceed- and rightly so.

I'm not sure anyone in any town wants a mayor doing what he or she, alone wants. That's why there is a town council.

Even when Kings and Queens ruled Europe with impunity, they didn't do it alone. There was always a King's / Queen's council filled with advisors who were more educated or experienced on some matters.

A wise ruler would make a decision on what the majority of a council was suggesting to be the proper course of action.

A King or Queen who thought they could truly call all the shots may find themselves with their head on a chopping block.

Running a municipality is fairly straightforward.

You have to make sure there is clean water, treatment for wastewater, garbage pickup, the town streets are clean and potholes filled.

Council creates parks, and takes care of things like recreation centres. They make by-laws to avoid common nuisances like people who park junked cars on their front lawn or street, or place unsightly commercial signs in inappropriate areas.

Most municipalities across the country are well-run and organized. Tax money is spent appropriately, even though not everyone always agrees when a council decides to create a new project.

However, if you want a new swimming pool or recreation centre in your town, it costs money, and sometimes a council will go ahead vote to build one, even though there's always that one group who will oppose it.

The truth is, a town is maintained by people behind the scenes. There is a department of parks and recreation, a department of infrastructure, a department of planning, and a department that takes care of the streets and roads.

All those departments are run by competent people and staffed by crews who do a very good job at maintaining the town.

One of the new powers is that of a veto given to the mayor for certain bylaws that go against provincial priorities. This is not a good thing. Who wants a mayor to veto a bylaw that is good for the town, in favour of a provincial priority that is not good for the town?

The 'strong mayor powers' are fueled by the province's quest to build 1.5 million homes across the province.

This is a major concern for a lot of people, especially those who care about the environment and the current structure of their town.

The province is pushing municipalities to build ? anywhere ? with little concern for environmentally sensitive areas, farmland, or the

existing aesthetics of a town.

According to the province, strong mayor powers are 'related to provincial priorities to support housing', including 'transit, roads, utilities, servicing'.

Of course, a lot of mayors are not embracing this ideology of being a strong mayor. They know very well the tide of public opinion will quickly turn against them when someone makes a decision to build a new housing development on a public park or environmentally sensitive wetland to satisfy the province's insistence that a municipality meet a home-building quota.

Due to the rising cost of houses in the province, many younger people have resigned themselves to believing they will never own a home. They have been priced out of the market.

Do you think most people really want to live with their parents until they are 50?

Building 1.5 million new homes doesn't mean they will be affordable homes. There will just be 1.5 million homes being sold at the current inflated price, which many people can't afford.

You will never see a developer build a subdivision and sell the homes at a lower price than the developer down the street. Real estate prices never go down.

Strong mayor powers won't solve anything. Most mayors won't take advantage of them because they know that will be a sure-fire way to get on the wrong side of the public.

A mayor's job is to run the town along with the duly elected town council.

If the province wants to build on environmentally sensitive wetlands, then let your MPP take the heat for that, not the town council.