

### ***From the office of the Mayor***

Today's reality is that we have access to an overwhelming amount of information, making it difficult to decipher what's important and, even more importantly, what's accurate. When issues arise in our hometowns, there's often a lot of noise and uncertainty surrounding the specific details. This is particularly true regarding Strong Mayor Powers, a new and polarizing development, adding both confusion and discontent to the mix.

Regardless of the topic, it's crucial to take an open-minded approach toward information and ask questions that verify its authenticity. Misinformation can quickly lead to misunderstanding. However, by fact-checking information that seems doubtful, we can prevent spreading inaccurate information.

Ultimately, we are responsible for the information we consume and share, and it's up to us to approach this responsibility with a level head and commitment to accuracy and truthfulness.

So, as we embark on new times, when the City of Welland and I, as the Mayor, receive Strong Mayor Powers, it's essential we start on the same page and clear the air of misconceptions and inaccuracies.

#### **Myth #1: The Mayor submitted a housing pledge on the premise he would receive Strong Mayor Powers without Council knowing.**

On June 16, 2023, the Ontario Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing issued the City of Welland a requirement to demonstrate its commitment to accelerate its housing supply by:

- Identifying a locally appropriate Housing Target (i.e., new housing units) to meet current and future housing needs in your municipality to 2031.
- Developing a Municipal Housing Pledge to increase and accelerate housing supply.

In a [report](#) on June 27, staff recommended an achievable housing target of 12,257 new dwelling units by 2031, along with recommendations on a range of existing and proposed initiatives which will assist the City in reaching this target.

#### **The report, and therefore the housing pledge, was approved by Council at the June 27 meeting.**

During the Association of Municipalities of Ontario conference on August 21, 2023, it was announced that the provincial government would implement a third phase of Strong Mayor Powers. These powers would be granted to municipalities with populations exceeding 50,000 and that had committed to the housing pledge.

The housing pledge signed two months prior was mutually exclusive to the City of Welland being chosen as a municipality to receive Strong Mayor Powers.

#### **Myth #2: The Mayor has total authority over all Council decisions.**

There are a limited number of areas that the Mayor has sole authority in decision-making, and, in certain cases, Council, with a two-thirds majority can veto the Mayor's decision. Safeguards to ensure complete authority over wide-ranging areas of decision-making are in place through the legislation.

Strong Mayor Powers are limited to these four areas:

1. Council committees
2. City administration, including hiring and dismissing the CAO and division heads
3. Introducing the City's annual budget for Council consideration
4. Progressing provincial priorities

You can learn more about these areas and what types of authorities they entail by visiting [insert website link]

Beyond the jurisdiction of the four areas above, the Mayor remains a single vote among the entirety of Council on all other matters.

**Myth #3: Strong Mayor Powers are undemocratic.**

The issue of Strong Mayor Powers is divisive, with supporters and opponents on either side. However, it's important to acknowledge that both sides have valid points, and we should respect each other's opinions. Regardless of whether a municipality with Strong Mayor Powers uses them, its Council is responsible for representing, debating, and advocating for their constituents. Democracy remains the foundation of local government. Municipalities are creatures of the province by legal definition and, as with any other provincial requirement, the City of Welland continues to work with the province to achieve local and provincial needs.

Keep in mind, there are times when local government needs do not match provincial priorities, and local Councils work to ensure their municipality is positioned to meet their needs first and foremost.

**Myth #4: Welland didn't *need* to sign a housing pledge, it would have reached the targets regardless.**

Welland can meet its housing targets even without signing the pledge. However, if a municipality signs the pledge and achieves 80 per cent of its yearly provincial housing targets, it will receive a portion of the \$1.2 billion Building Faster Fund. If the City exceeds 100 per cent of its targets, it will receive bonuses. By signing the pledge, Welland will have access to these funds, which will help offset the changes and subsequent decreases in development charges. This is important for the municipality as it relies on these charges to fund future growth.

Additionally, the housing pledge made by the City of Welland is directly connected to our application to the federal government regarding the Housing Accelerator Fund, a multi-billion-dollar program that provides funding to create a greater supply of affordable housing.