Strong Mayor Powers - An Idea Too Important to Keep Quiet

Brought Forward Together

This idea is being brought forward by Ward 4 candidates **Glenn Hughes and Ben Clement**.

We are individual candidates. We will not agree on every issue, and this document is not an endorsement of one candidate by another.

But some ideas are bigger than one candidate, one campaign and one election. When an idea affects how our entire Council represents the people who elected it, it should not be kept quiet. It should be put on the table, discussed openly and challenged publicly.

This proposal is also inspired by what is happening in Stratford, Ontario. Stratford City Council has taken its concerns about Ontario's strong-mayor framework to court. Its May 11, 2026 application raises constitutional arguments concerning effective representation, democracy and the rule of law. Those arguments have not yet been decided by the court, but Stratford's action shows that concerns about the structure of strong-mayor powers are being seriously tested through the legal process.

The Principle

Every member of County Council is elected to represent the people of their ward. They should be free to hear the evidence, debate openly and cast an independent vote. Strong mayor powers create a different hierarchy by assigning additional authority to one member of Council - the head of council - in specified areas.

This proposal does not claim that a mayoral candidate can legally erase powers or duties created by Ontario law. It is a public commitment about how a candidate intends to exercise discretion where the law gives the Mayor a choice.

Let Council debate. Let Council vote. Respect the result.

Why This Commitment Matters

Ontario's strong-mayor framework gives the head of council additional powers and duties beyond the traditional role of Mayor. In designated municipalities, these include specified authority concerning the Chief Administrative Officer, municipal organization, certain committees, written directions to municipal employees, certain matters connected to prescribed provincial priorities, veto powers and the municipal budget.

The issue raised by this commitment is not who occupies the Mayor's chair. It is whether discretionary authority concentrated in that office should be used to override or circumvent the ordinary decision-making of elected Council.

Council should not depend on either extraordinary statutory powers or a dependable voting bloc to determine outcomes. Each councillor should remain an independent representative of the community that elected them.

The Budget - What the Law Actually Requires

Section 284.16 of Ontario's *Municipal Act, 2001* establishes a special budget process for designated strong-mayor municipalities. The head of council is required to propose the annual municipal budget within the statutory framework. Council has an opportunity to amend the proposed budget. The head of council may veto Council amendments, and Council has a statutory override process.

That distinction matters. This commitment does not ask a Mayor to ignore a legal duty. It asks a Mayor to exercise restraint where Ontario law gives the Mayor discretion.

Budgets affect every taxpayer. If Council believes something in a proposed budget should be changed, councillors should be able to debate it openly, propose lawful amendments and vote. The existence of discretionary mayoral veto authority should not make councillors or residents wonder whether the independent decision of Council will ultimately be respected.

Transparency matters. Professional staff, the CAO, the Mayor and elected Council all have lawful roles in municipal governance. The purpose of this commitment is to preserve meaningful debate and independent Council decision-making

within the legal framework Ontario has created.

Inspired by Stratford - Proactive in Brant

Stratford's court challenge does not determine what the law will ultimately be, and the County of Brant is not a party to that case. But Brant does not have to wait for a final court judgment before having its own public conversation about how these powers should be approached.

Being proactive means asking the question before the next Mayor takes office: when the law gives the Mayor a choice, what kind of restraint, transparency and respect for independent Council decision-making should residents expect?

This is an idea worth discussing now - openly, publicly and before Election Day.

A Challenge to Every Candidate for Mayor

Glenn Hughes and Ben Clement are asking every candidate for Mayor of the County of Brant to publicly state how they intend to approach the discretionary strong-mayor powers attached to the office and to consider signing the commitment below.

This is not an attempt to legally bind the next Mayor or remove authority created by the Province. It is a question of governance, transparency and principle.

The Commitment

> **If elected Mayor of the County of Brant, I will fulfill the duties Ontario law requires of the head of council. Where Ontario law gives me discretion whether to exercise a strong-mayor power, I commit to respecting the independent democratic role of County Council and not using that discretionary authority for the purpose of overriding or circumventing Council's ordinary decision-making.**
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> **I will support open debate, transparent decision-making and the independent vote of every councillor. Where the law permits delegation of a strong-mayor power, I will consider delegation where doing so supports transparent and accountable Council governance.**
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> **For the municipal budget, I will fulfill the statutory responsibility assigned to the head of council. Council will have its lawful opportunity to review and amend the proposed budget. Where Ontario law gives the Mayor discretion to veto a Council amendment, I commit to approaching that discretion according to the principle that the independent votes of elected Council members should matter.**

Let Council debate. Let Council vote. Respect the result.

Candidate for Mayor: _____

Signature: _____

Date: _____

Legal Note

This is a voluntary political and governance commitment, not a legal instrument that removes statutory powers or duties. Part VI.1 of the *Municipal Act, 2001* establishes special powers and duties of the head of council. The precise exercise, delegation and limits of those powers remain subject to the *Municipal Act*, applicable regulations and other law.

The City of Stratford announced on May 11, 2026 that it had filed a court application challenging Ontario's strong-mayor legislation. The constitutional arguments described above are allegations advanced in that pending proceeding and are not findings of a court.

Brought forward by Glenn Hughes and Ben Clement, Ward 4 candidates. Inspired in part by the public governance questions raised by the City of Stratford's legal challenge.