

## Code of Conduct changes would give Province power to dismiss Councillors

New measures proposed by the Province of Ontario could have a significant impact on the way municipal Councils govern themselves.

Paul Calandra, Ontario's Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing, proposed a series of changes to the Municipal Accountability Act last week, which, if passed, will standardize a Municipal Code of Conduct province-wide, as well as implement a process for municipalities to dismiss an elected member for serious violations of the code.

“Ontario is proposing changes through the Municipal Accountability Act, 2024 that, if passed, would enable the creation of a new, standardized municipal Code of Conduct, an Integrity Commissioner inquiry process that would be consistent throughout the province, and mandatory Code of Conduct training for members of Council and certain local boards,” said the Province in a statement.

“If passed, the changes would include a penalty of removing and disqualifying a member from office if they are in serious violation of the proposed code. Removal and disqualification could only occur upon the recommendation of the municipal Integrity Commissioner, a concurring report from the Integrity Commissioner of Ontario and a unanimous vote of Council, with the exception of the member who is the subject of the report, members whose absence is approved by Council, or members who have a financial conflict of interest under the Municipal Conflict of Interest Act.”

Calandra said the changes will “support consistent accountability across our municipalities.”

In our municipality, Mayor Tom Mrakas applauded the move, stating that it would enhance “oversight” and “establish clearer consequences for violations.”

“This legislation ensures transparency, accountability and reinforces public trust in local government,” he said in a statement. “Stronger ethical standards and a consistent approach to integrity will benefit all municipalities, and I support the implementation of these measures across the Province.”

Speaking to The Auroran, he added the move will “bring everyone on all Councils right across the Province” an understanding of what their requirements are from a conduct perspective.”

“Right now [the Codes] are all different, every municipality has slightly different things within their Code of Conduct. It's not standardized and that's a bit of a problem,” he said. “I am very happy the Province has decided to do this and that they're going to implement certain things into the Code of Conduct that might not exist in certain Codes of Conduct.”

“I think that the biggest news out of the legislation is not necessarily that a Code of Conduct is going to be standardized; it is more about the possibility of being removed from office if the conduct warrants it.”

“Honestly, I think it is a great piece of legislation. I know that mayors across the Province are welcoming this, I know AMO (the Association of Municipalities of Ontario) is welcoming this, the Ontario Big City Mayors is welcoming it, everyone has put out statements saying this is a good thing and it's about time this is happening and we're all looking forward to seeing what that standardized Code of Conduct will look like come 2026.”

**By Brock Weir**