

Councillors question bringing Procedural Bylaw in line with Strong Mayor Powers

A recommendation for Council to adopt an updated Procedural Bylaw governing how meetings are run, bringing it in line with Strong Mayor powers, sparked a debate at last week's Committee of the Whole meeting.

Supporters of the recommended changes before lawmakers last week stated Council does not currently have a Procedural Bylaw in line with the most recent changes to Ontario's Municipal Act, including the introduction of Strong Mayor powers. Those opposing the changes, however, argued that next year's municipal elections might bring a change in how these powers are used locally.

The recommendations in front of Council ? and rejected by the majority of members at the Committee level ? outline the Mayor's ability to create and dissolve committees comprised only of Council members, the Mayor's responsibility to appoint Chairs to Council-comprised committees, processes related to the Mayor's veto power and how it relates to specific bylaws, and how the Mayor can introduce an item for Council's consideration without needing another member to move and second the motion in question.

Outside of changes related to Strong Mayor powers, recommendations include fleshing out the role of the Deputy Mayor when the Mayor is absent, meeting schedules, and other ?housekeeping? items.

?The proposed revisions ensure the Procedure Bylaw is clear and easily accessible for staff, the public, and Council,? said Staff in their report. ?It presents relevant information in a concise format and ensures accurate information is presented publicly. Guided by the principles of openness, transparency, and accountability to the public, the proposed revisions to the Procedure Bylaw provide clarity in the decision-making process, provide access to information and opportunities for input by the public, and exercises and respects individual and collective roles and responsibilities provided for in the Procedure Bylaw and applicable legislation.?.

Few of the ?housekeeping? items generated discussion at last week's meeting; instead, focus remained squarely on Strong Mayor powers and whether they should be enshrined into the Bylaw.

?I want to be very clear why I cannot support making changes to our Procedural Bylaw at this time,? said Ward 5 Councillor John Gallo. ?The governance environment is unstable and could change completely next year. Procedural Bylaws are meant to provide long-term stability for how a Council functions. Right now, Aurora is operating under a governance structure that was not chosen by Council and may not exist after the next election.

?This Council voted against accepting Strong Mayor powers. Despite that, the majority decision, the current Mayor unilaterally accepted those powers. In less than a year, Aurora will have a new Mayor and we have no idea whether the next Mayor will accept or decline those powers. It makes no sense to rewrite the rules of procedure based on a system that may disappear in a matter of months.?.

Making the recommended changes at this point, he continued, ?risks locking in? rules tied to Strong Mayor powers which may conflict if these powers are off the table in the years ahead.

?It is irresponsible to reshape our long-term procedural framework based on a temporary and contested governance model,? said Gallo. ?The majority of council opposed strong mayor powers from the beginning. That matters. This Council, democratically elected, voted not to adopt Strong Mayor powers because members believed it undermines majority rule, collaboration, transparency, and balanced decision-making. Those concerns haven't changed, and until the people of Aurora choose their next mayor, we cannot assume these powers will continue.

?Making major changes to how Council works, when we know the governance structure is likely to change, does not build trust. It creates confusion, instability, and unnecessary political tension?. Good governance requires predictability, majority rule, and clear, stable rules. We do not have that right now.?.

Mayor Tom Mrakas said he agreed there was confusion, but it was not for the above reasons ? instead, he said, residents were ?confused about the fact that our procedural bylaw does not align with legislation.?

?I will agree with, yeah, some people sitting at this table won't be here next term, but I can guarantee you one thing: until the Provincial government changes Strong Mayor powers, Strong Mayor powers are here to stay, they are permanent. We can't decide whether we want to change that or not. You can decide whether you want to use them as a tool, but they're here. I'll remind everyone, as I've reminded the last two times we've dealt with this, for over two years, we've had a Procedural Bylaw that is in conflict with legislation by the Provincial government and within the Municipal Act. By not changing it, you're just saying is, ?well, I'm going to ignore the Municipal Act, and I don't care what the Municipal Act says, because we're just going to do it this way?. That's not transparent. That leads to confusion. And that leads to unstable rules. If we want to have stable rules, we make the rules that follow the Municipal Act and the legislation that's put forward and enacted by the provincial government that we need to adhere to.?

The next Municipal Election is slated for October 2026.

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