

Motion memo Improving Local Democracy by Strengthening City Decision-Making (ADM-05-24)

Good morning to you: Chair, Members of Committee, Committee Clerk, Staff and Fellow Residents.

I delegate today as a 42 year resident of Burlington, with I think most of you know, an abiding love of this city and deeply held interest in its social and political fabric, in support of Motion ADM-05-24.

It should be fairly common knowledge that I am, by and large, a supporter of our current Mayor and the directions this council has moved our city under her leadership.

I have also been generally supportive of the direction council and staff have moved the city forward since 2018 when all of you were elected to your current positions.

As an observer of city politics over the years I firmly believe that the success of our current slate of councilors is not due to any particular "**power**" held by one or other elected official, one particularly powerful department or staff member or one particularly powerful lobby or interest group, but by the interaction of elected officials in concert with staff and residents in the cumbersome, frustrating, discourse and debate in this sometimes messy process we call local democracy.

Democracy is not threatened by this discourse, debate or even deep disagreements. Democracy is in fact enhanced and strengthened by these very aspects of its nature.

It can, however, be threatened by the corruptive influence of absolutes of power. By the power of one.

I won't go into Lord Acton's quote about absolute power corrupting absolutely because I don't believe there is any hint of corruption involved here, but I would draw your attention to the sources of power bestowed upon you as elected officials and ask you to consider the moral authority of each source of that power.

Strong Mayoral Powers are devolved from a current provincial government that planned to pave over the greenbelt, that drastically reduced the time allowed for this council and our planners to consider major amendment applications to our democratically adopted official city plans, A government that reduced development charges paid to the city forcing Burlington taxpayers to subsidize developers' infrastructure costs. A government that does not seem to understand what a fourplex is in a city like Burlington where they are being considered to help in a housing crisis. A government that divides more than it unifies by actions such as theses Strong Mayoral Powers, while threatening to introduce political bias into our judicial system.

Is that the source of single person power and authority Burlington should cleave to? The governance model Burlington should aspire to emulate. I hope not.

Prior to recent changes to Section 284.6 of the Municipal Act, Burlington's Mayoral Powers devolved from the electorate. From the people of Burlington. From the ability of

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six elected Councilors and an elected Mayor to sometimes collegially, sometimes dialectically, sometimes split but often unanimously arrive at decisions they genuinely felt were best for our city.

Along with that elected power comes an implied moral authority to govern our city. A moral authority of which this Strong Mayoral Power is utterly bereft.

So I am asking council to think not so much about undemocratic “Strong Powers” to govern, the Municipal Act already lays out the power bestowed upon you to govern our city.

Instead I ask you to reflect on the moral authority to govern, which this motion aims to restore to its rightful place, here in this chamber with seven democratically elected equals representing our city to the best of your ability and your insight on behalf of the people you represent.

Thank you all for the opportunity to delegate in support of Motion ADM-05-24 and for your commitment to our city.

Respectfully Submitted.
Jim Young. Burlington.