EDITORIAL

Little St. Marys stands up to the provincial giant, refusing Strong Mayor Powers now and hopefully in the future

GALEN SIMMONS

Editor

Whether it will have an impact is yet to be seen, but the little town of St. Marys is standing up against the political giants at Queen's Park to protect the democratically elected rights of councillors so they can continue effectively representing the interests of their constituents.

As reported in this edition of the Independent, St. Marys council has officially turned down the Ford government's offer of Strong Mayor Powers and asked the province to remove the town from its list of municipalities that have been granted them. These powers would have granted Mayor Al Strathdee and future mayors of St. Marys the power to make unilateral decisions around the hiring and firing of key staff, the annual budget and anything related to a "provincial priority," often with only one-third of council's support.

For a council the size of St. Marys', that means a mayor would need just one or two other councillors on their side to advance their own political machinations, as long as they align with the province's.

While the current St. Marys council and Mayor Al Strathdee have refused to use these powers – a strong, symbolic move against the erosion of democracy in local government – council's request to the province to have St. Marys removed from the list of municipalities with Strong Mayor Powers could fall on deaf ears, leaving the powers available for future mayors to use and abuse.

But St. Marys doesn't appear to be alone in sounding the alarm and refusing to use Strong Mayor Powers. Other small municipalities across Ontario, including nearby Stratford, have likewise rejected these powers, and some are making requests similar to St. Marys' to get rid of them on a local level altogether.

But when you look at it from the province's perspective, these powers aren't simply about giving municipal councils the tools they need to address the housing crisis locally, as suggested by the province. If the Ford government wanted to do that, it would focus more money and resources around helping smaller municipalities address the missing, bottom rung of the housing ladder – social and non-profit housing.

Instead, this move is intended to feed into the Ford government's continued push to remove all obstacles in the way of private development. Apparently, a fulsome debate around the council table and the public process that follows is too much red tape for Ford and his cronies, so the government is inviting likeminded mayors or mayoral hopefuls to drink the Kool-Aid and help push that agenda forward.

As residents of this province and as residents of communities where Strong Mayor Powers may continue to be a reality, or may rear their ugly heads in the future, we need to stay vigilant against the abuse of these powers.

St. Marys and other Ontario municipalities will hold elections next year. For my part as a newspaper editor, I promise to ask all candidates about their intentions for these powers, should they remain. As voters, we have to ensure we only support candidates who state outright they will not use these powers, and then we need to hold them accountable to that promise.

The future of our local democracies depends on our vigilance.

Overheard at the Coffee Shop

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Have you heard something humorous around town that you think might be of interest to others? Either email them to us at info@stmarysindependent.com with the title "Overheard at The Coffee Shop", call 519-284-0041 or drop by the office to let us know!

Bravo

We have 1 Bravo this week.

1) A huge bravo to Doug, Kaitlynn, Cory, Alex and the entire PRC team who helped set up and take down the gala this past Saturday.

*Please note all Boos and Bravos must be signed in order to be considered.

Boo

We have 4 Boos this week.

1) Boo to the private Facebook group trying to start a petition to remove Pride flags. It's 2025. Let's focus on inclusion, not exclusion.

2) Boo to the person who scratched a car of a visitor in town on Saturday on Cain Street. You could have left a note. This young man worked so hard to maintain his car. Shame on you.

3) Boo to people who give drive thru employees a hard time. These young kids do not deserve your loud obscenities while they are working hard.

4) Boo to the state of the Canada flag above the town hall roof. This past weekend, we had visitors from around the world and our flag was laying on the town hall roof instead of flying proudly.

Bravos and Boos are submitted by community members and do not necessarily reflect the opinions of the St. Marys Independent.

Quote of the Week

"This is an unmistakable step toward authoritarianism that threatens the foundation of our republic. We cannot let it stand."

- California Gov. Gavin Newsom on June 9, in response to President Trump's order to mobilize troops to respond to protests in Los Angeles.

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The St. Marys Independent THOUGHTS OF THE WEEK
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A good education is a foundation of a better future.

Life is like riding a bicycle. To keep your balance you must keep moving.

Stop saying "I wish" and start saying "I will"

Don't be afraid of being a beginner.