



Town of Amherst  
Committee of the Whole  
Agenda

Date: **Monday, September 22, 2025**  
Time: **4:00 pm**  
Location: **Council Chambers, Town Hall**

Pages

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1. **Call to Order**
    - 1.1 **Territorial Acknowledgement**

"I would like to acknowledge that our gathering today is taking place in Mi'kma'ki (MEEG-MA-GEE), the traditional, unceded and ancestral territory of the Mi'kmaw people. I would also like to acknowledge that Nova Scotia has another unique people, the people of African descent whose legacy and contributions date back over 400 years predating confederation of this land. We are all treaty people."
    - 1.2 **Acceptance of Minutes - June 16, 2025** 1 - 1
  2. **Information Items**
    - 2.1 **Nova Scotia Strong Mayor Powers - MacDonald** 2 - 6
    - 2.2 **NSFM Bylaw - MacDonald** 7 - 8
  3. **Closed Session**
    - 3.1 **Acceptance of Closed Session Minutes**
    - 3.2 **MGA 22(2)(e) – contract negotiations**
    - 3.3 **MGA 22(2)(c) – contract negotiations**
  4. **Adjournment**
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**Amherst Town Council  
Committee of the Whole  
Minutes**

**Date:** June 16, 2025  
**Time:** 12:00 pm  
**Location:** Council Chambers, Town Hall

**Members Present** Mayor Rob Small  
Councillor Charlie Chambers  
Deputy Mayor Hal Davidson  
Councillor Nic Furlong  
Councillor Terry McManaman  
Councillor Dwayne Ripley  
Councillor Kathy Wells (Zoom)

**Staff Present** Jason MacDonald, Chief Administrative Officer  
Aaron Bourgeois, Director, Operations  
Andrew Fisher, Director, Planning & Economic Development  
Dwayne Pike, Chief, Police Services  
Greg Jones, Director, Fire Services  
Kim Jones, Deputy Chief Administrative Officer  
Krista Crossman, Director, Human Resources  
Sarah Wilson, Director, Finance  
Sharon Bristol, Director, Community Living  
Sean Payne, Marketing & Communications Officer  
Cindy Brown, Administrative Assistant  
Jeff Bacon, Business Development Officer

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**1. Call to Order**  
Mayor Small called the meeting to order at 12:00 p.m.

**1.1 Territorial Acknowledgement**  
Mayor Small gave the Territorial Acknowledgement.

**2. Closed Session**  
**Moved By Councillor Furlong**  
**Seconded By Councillor Ripley**  
**That the Committee move to a Closed Session.**

**MOTION CARRIED**

**3. Adjournment**  
There being no further business, Mayor Small adjourned the meeting.

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Kim Jones  
Deputy Chief Administrative Officer

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Rob Small  
Mayor

# MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor Small and Members of Amherst Town Council  
From: Jason MacDonald, CAO  
Date: September 15, 2025  
**Subject: Strong Mayor Powers**

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As Council is aware, the Province is considering granting some or all municipalities in Nova Scotia strong mayor powers. These changes would fundamentally change how municipalities operate and could have a negative impact on municipal units granted such powers.

Attached is a memo from the Association of Municipal Administrators of Nova Scotia regarding this issue. I will not repeat the information in this memo.

Yesterday the Municipality of the County of Cumberland decided to send correspondence to the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities expressing the lack of support for strong mayor powers and encouraging them to take a position on their behalf with copies to all municipal units.

I recommend that our Council follow suit and send a letter to the Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities expressing the lack of support for strong mayor powers and encouraging them to take a position on our behalf with copies to all municipal units.

**Overview:**

The Mayor as a leader among equals and having a single vote at council, remains as the form of local government in place across Canada, with the only exception now being in Ontario. Although Strong Mayor Powers (SMP) in Ontario focus on three main elements (Administrative, Provincial Priorities, Municipal Budgets), the Association of Municipal Administrators (AMANS) takes a position on only Administrative and Budgeting powers. Provincial Priority powers, as legislated in Ontario, deal with the power balance of Council and Committees, which is a political matter.

Based on Ontario's Housing Supply Tracker<sup>1</sup>, there is no evidence that SMP in Ontario is helping to build housing. Of the 46 municipalities who have had SMPs, only 37% were at a rate of pace of 80% or more to achieve their 10-year housing targets and 24% were on track or exceeded (80 per cent or more starts) in 2024.<sup>2</sup>

As advocates of excellence in local government, management and leadership, in consideration of the implementation of SMP in Nova Scotia, AMANS offers the following:

**Administrative Powers**

- The politicization of the CAO and senior management roles will set Nova Scotia municipalities back decades. The independence of municipal administrators, such as the CAO, is vital for non-partisan, expert-driven decision-making. Removing or weakening this independence risks politicizing municipal administration.
- Local government needs functional foundations, administrations with consistent and stable leadership, proper succession planning and proactive long-term planning of infrastructure and building communities.
- The CAO and leadership team manage these complex organizations with multimillion-dollar budgets, infrastructure systems, regulatory frameworks, legal compliance, economic development, and public safety.
- Running the day-to-day operations of a municipality is a difficult role, one that must balance the needs of the community, the execution of Council's strategic plans and keeping the public safe from harm. Disruption in this balance, created through execution of Administrative SMP, will be detrimental to Nova Scotians.
- Council as a whole body should maintain the ability to hire, and fire, the CAO. The CAO should remain the only employee of Council.
  - When a Council decision is made, which under the Ontario SMP could be through a veto used by the Mayor, Council provides instructions to the CAO, their

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● <sup>1</sup> Alana Del Grego, AMP, OCT, Dipl.M.A. "Strong Mayor Powers" Municipal Monitor, Q2 2025, pp. 15-19. Reference to <https://www.ontario.ca/page/tracking-housing-supply-progress>

<sup>2</sup> Alana Del Grego, AMP, OCT, Dipl.M.A.. "Strong Mayor Powers" Municipal Monitor, Q2 2025, pp. 15-19.

one employee. Council expects that he or she will carry out its instructions as the CAO's job is to ensure that the public service carries out the will of Council. The CAO is the accountability link between council and the public service.

- The CAO must remain accountable to Council and not be beholden to a Strong Mayor.
  - Administrative SMP will result in a significant cultural shift in how municipalities operate – resulting from structural changes, staffing changes, loss of institutional knowledge and leadership.
  - If a Mayor's actions trigger politically embarrassing severance packages or human rights challenges, administrative SMP could result in significant legal and financial costs for Municipalities as well as reputational harm.
    - Council will have no say into or control over these expenses or the impact these decisions have on qualified individuals applying for jobs with the Municipality.
  - The public sector needs strong management professionals. Municipal culture will erode, as it is in Ontario, to where people will not step forward to take the volatile roles of CAO or that of a senior leader.
- The CAO's role as a neutral, professional administrator is vital for effective governance, transparency, and accountability. Maintaining the integrity of the CAO's position is essential to uphold public trust and ethical standards.

### **Budget Powers**

- The Municipal Budget is a complex tool that takes into consideration complex capital and operational planning, debt policies and formulas, long term reserve planning and tax burdens for local citizens, businesses and developers.
- Any legislation that shifts the powers and responsibilities for the preparation and presentation of the municipal budget to one person, a Strong Mayor, is not taking into consideration the legal or financial framework under which Municipal budgets are prepared.
- In the current system, a mayor who runs on a mandate to keep the tax rates flat must work with their Council to adjust the level of service delivery to keep rates flat. Unless the CAO is given this as a mandate of Council, the budget is prepared based on business planning, Council policy and service level standards. The Council then has a choice to cut projects or services based on their priorities. A strong mayor would make those cuts before the budget gets to Council, potentially altering capital planning, service level standards, long-term planning, etc.
- Often, the professional advice of a CAO, Director of Finance or Municipal Engineer is overridden by a Council, voting in favour of one direction over another. This is part of the public process and record. The ability to give this objective advice without fear or favour maintains the professional integrity of staff preparing recommendations to Council. Advice that consistently contradicts the will of Council becomes a performance issue between Council and the CAO.
- 'Strong mayor' powers risk compromising administrative neutrality. In areas like budgeting and land-use planning advice, recommendations to council that are filtered

through or developed by the mayor's office make it more difficult to rely upon the information that council receives and for council to perform its oversight and policymaking functions.<sup>3</sup>

In Ontario, of the 46 municipalities granted strong mayor powers, about 76% of mayors directed staff to prepare the budget. For 13%, the Mayor or Mayor's Office prepared the budget, 4% directed their Budget Committee to prepare the budget, and the remainder are unclear. Where staff or the Budget Committee prepared the draft budget, about 17% of mayors outlined content, policy or outcome specifics as to how staff should develop the budget. 2% (or one municipality) experienced the mayor using the budget veto.<sup>4</sup>

## Delegation of Authority

Although the powers in Ontario can be delegated to the CAO or Council, or both, this delegation is only good for so long as the Mayor maintains it. The delegation of powers rests solely with the Mayor and can be withdrawn. The delegation does not transfer to the next Mayor.

## The Ontario Legislation

AMANS understands that Nova Scotia is not considering a cut and paste of the Ontario model, it is the only Canadian model that currently exists and it is not, by most accounts, meeting the objectives of the *Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act, 2022*.

### Key Changes Introduced by the Legislation:

The 'strong mayor' legislation enacted in Ontario can be summarized as follows<sup>5</sup>:

- The mayor's ability to initiate or stop municipal activity has been formally enhanced by giving the mayor control over committee structure and committee leadership appointments, as well as more control over the 'municipal purse';
- The ultimate responsibility for preparing and presenting the city's annual operating and capital budgets and for proposing annual tax rates has been transferred from the city manager and treasurer to the mayor. The ability of the council to change the mayor's budget proposals has also been cut back, as it now requires a 2/3rd vote to approve any amendment;
- Although the CAO position may be maintained, the staff organization now effectively reports to the mayor, rather than to the council through the CAO. The mayor has direct hire/fire/direct authority over the city manager and a range of senior officials (chief

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<sup>3</sup> The Role and Significance of the Chief Administrative Officer Position in Canadian Municipal Government: A CAMA "White Paper" on Ontario's Strong Mayor Legislation and the Pivotal Role of the CAO in Providing Good Governance, p.14

<sup>4</sup> Strong Mayor Authorities Scan: How Mayors are Using their Powers; October 2024, AMCTO

<sup>5</sup> The Role and Significance of the Chief Administrative Officer Position in Canadian Municipal Government: A CAMA "White Paper" on Ontario's Strong Mayor Legislation and the Pivotal Role of the CAO in Providing Good Governance, p.8

planner, city engineer, heads of human resources, IT, parks and recreation, etc.), although with some key exceptions (clerk, treasurer, chief building official, police chief, fire chief, municipal integrity commissioner or ombudsman, etc.). (For a large municipality such as Toronto, the mayor's personnel authority descends well into the professional civil service.)

- Most controversially, for designated 'provincial priorities' (as the mayor interprets them locally), the mayor can veto council measures - subject to a 2/3rd override by council. More remarkably, the mayor can force through a legislative proposal related to provincial priorities, provided it enjoys the minimum support of 1/3rd of council.

## Summary

In summary, adopting "Strong Mayor" legislation in Nova Scotia or elsewhere threatens to undermine the foundational democratic principles that ensure accountable, transparent, and effective municipal governance. It risks politicizing local government, weakening the role of the municipal senior management and members of Council, and reducing public confidence in municipal institutions, all of which are crucial for healthy democracy.

# MEMORANDUM

To: Mayor Small and Members of Amherst Town Council  
From: Jason MacDonald, CAO  
Date: September 15, 2025  
Subject: **Nova Scotia Federation of Municipalities Proposed Bylaw Changes**

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**(This document was written by the Association of Municipal Administrators of Nova Scotia President Kim Ramsay (CAO of East Hants) and provided to all CAOs to use for presentation to their councils).**

The NSFM is proposing several bylaw changes at the Fall 2025 Conference, at its AGM. There are two amendments that I would like to bring to your attention, amendments which relate to the role/relationship between NSFM and CAO's and the Association of Municipal Administrators (AMANS).

- I. **Motion #3 to remove the right for elected officials to have staff present at "Member Meetings", defined as the AGM or Special Meetings (per Section 6.3 – meetings called throughout the year)**

#### **ARTICLE 3 – MEMBERSHIP - 3.6 Rights of Members**

**Delete 3.6 c) "A Member Unit may send municipal staff to Members' Meetings as advisors to Elected Municipal Officials. Staff advisors shall not have voting rights but shall be entitled to speak at such meetings."**

#### **Discussion:**

The NSFM did not bring this change to light in their introduction email on August 19, 2025. It is included in the list of 16 motions to amend the bylaws.

In 2022, the NSFM bylaw changes attempted to give the CEO and the President the power to exclude staff advisors and other elected officials from certain Special Meetings. Amendments were made (and passed by the membership) to strike these powers from the bylaw. Elected officials were vocal in 2022 that they rely on their staff advisors to help them work through complex municipal issues and support them at NSFM meetings and in their discussions about these issues at the Council table. Municipal staff play a key role in disseminating information for Council.

Although generally the "staff" at these meetings is the CAO, Councillors/Mayors/Wardens may want to have the Municipal Solicitor, their Director of Transportation, the Fire Chief, a Building Official or their Director of Planning at topical meetings (a few examples). Imagine having a meeting to discuss Fiscal Review where your Director of Finance was not permitted in the room or on the call.

A member's right to have municipal staff attend these meetings in an advisory capacity will be removed with this proposed amendment. The discretion of whether staff can be present will rest with the Board (who I assume will delegate this to the CEO or a member of the Executive).

The NSFMs Act of Incorporation recitals (attached) read in S4.a, "...to represent the interests of local governments in the Province, and to act as the advocate for member units on all such matters as are properly within the jurisdiction of the government of the Province;". Few, if any, NSFMs staff have worked in municipal government. The practical day-to-day application of local government issues facing Councils isn't available from the staff team at the NSFMs. Having staff advisors in your NSFMs meetings is key to ensuring this advocacy is accurate and representative of our units' best interest.

There is no context provided in the NSFMs package explaining why staff would be excluded from member meetings.

**As elected officials you rely heavily on our staff to provide advice on a variety of issues. If you believe that you are better served when NSFMs information shared with elected officials is available to your staff advisors, you may want to make or support a motion that votes down Motion #3 amendments or vote against the motion if/when put on the floor at the NSFMs AGM.**

## **II. Motion #5 to Amend the Composition of the Board**

### **ARTICLE 5 - BOARD OF DIRECTORS - 5.2 Composition – Delete 5.2 a) xi. A representative appointed by the Association of Municipal Administrators**

#### **Discussion:**

For many years, the Boards of the NSFMs and the Association of Municipal Administrators (AMANS) included one seat from each other's Board, typically the Past President of each organization. The NSFMs Board is recommending to its members that they move away from this. This move follows decisions of the NSFMs Board to sever office space with AMANS after a 30+ year relationship and to move away from billing and receiving administration fees on behalf of AMANS in 2026.

Although they respect the NSFMs decision to bring this amendment forward, AMANS has taken the position that the move to sever the Board relationship is not in the best interest of either organization or municipal government as a whole. AMANS will NOT be amending its By-laws to remove the NSFMs seat on their Board. A letter from the President of AMANS, Kim Ramsay, is attached for your reference.

This move comes as we need more than ever to have a united front of all member units when dealing with downloading, power erosion and improving our fiscal realities in our collective work with the Province. The presence of a municipal administrator at NSFMs Board meetings can enhance the Federation's decision making, and subsequent representation of municipal interests, by the NSFMs Board.

**As elected officials you rely heavily on the NSFMs Board to represent the interest of our municipal unit. If you believe that the presence of an experienced municipal administrator on the NSFMs Board supports our municipal unit's interest, you may want to make or support a motion that votes down Motion #5 amendments or vote against the motion if/when put on the floor at the NSFMs AGM.**

## **III. Conclusion**

Please review the full slate of proposed by-law changes (attached) and make an informed decision when it comes time for you to vote at the NSFMs Annual General Meeting this fall. There are 16 changes in total, I have provided background on two. If you want a more fulsome discussion on the other amendments, please let me know.