

Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act

The mayors of Toronto and Ottawa will be granted sweeping new powers, which will give them sole responsibility for preparing the municipal budget for council approval, the ability to hire and fire department heads as they see fit and veto some decisions made by councillors.

This week, the '[Strong Mayors, Building Homes Act](#)' will be taken to the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy. The legislation is likely to be extended to municipalities with over 100,000 residents.

The proposed changes outlined in the legislation would allow the mayors of Toronto and Ottawa to override council approval of a bylaw when they believe that using the veto “would further a provincial priority.”

However, they would have to override the bylaw as a whole and would not be able to choose which specific aspects or amendments to block. Nothing in the legislation would allow the empowered mayors to push through bylaws without council approval.

The Ford government has not provided a list of items which might qualify as an issue of “provincial priority” at this point, however, a ministry official speaking on background during a technical briefing said that there will be “a regulation-making power” contained in the legislation which will allow the government to “prescribe what those provincial priorities” are.

In addition to the veto power, the legislation provides a suite of new and enhanced powers to the mayors of Ontario’s two largest cities. One of the major changes would see the responsibility for preparing budgets shifted from the city council as a whole to the mayor’s office.

City council would still have to approve the budget and could pass amendments, though the mayor would have the option of using separate veto power to override those amendments. The changes would also give the mayor sole authority to appoint a Chief Administrative Officer, hire and fire department heads and create or reorganize departments. The ministry says that those powers would not apply to statutory appointments, such as the Chief of Police or the Medical Officer of Health.

Because the bill proposes to give mayors the power to organize the political and bureaucratic arms of city hall and directly appoint — and dismiss — department and committee heads, it will be much easier for them to control the municipal government.

The OGCA will continue to track this legislation and provide updates and information on its impact on ICI construction markets.