

MunicipalMonitor

The Official Publication of AMCTO – The Municipal Experts | Municipal Management & Leadership

AI

SMARTER SERVICES

How AI Is Changing the Way
Municipalities Work

**THE FRAYING OF
DEMOCRACY
MUNICIPALITIES
FACE RISING LEVELS
OF PUBLIC HOSTILITY**

**A PERFECT
GATHERING IN
WINDSOR
THE GORDIE HOWE
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I'm Rarin' to Go! Are You?



Danielle Manton, AOMC,
Dipl.M.M.,
President, AMCTO

Taking on the role of president of AMCTO's Board represents not only a personal milestone but also a deep responsibility to advocate for excellence in municipal administration across Ontario. I am privileged to work alongside and represent dedicated professionals who are committed to strengthening local government and enhancing public service.

I still recall my first Zone meeting and thinking that I would never have what it took to be on the Zone executive and later having the same thought about the Board. I came to realize that all it took to contribute to our Association was passion and initiative and with that, there would always be a place for a member to have their say or help others have a say.

I am truly humbled to take on the role of AMCTO president, to be given this moment to represent the Association and membership that have played such a large role in my career. AMCTO has not only provided me with education and insight but also friendship and deep, genuine connections. I am excited to have the opportunity to represent the Association at upcoming conferences and fall Zone meetings. Just days after the 2025 Conference, I had the privilege of representing the Association at an OMER's Governance Review meeting and then was able to be a delegate at the hearing for the Standing Committee on Heritage, Infrastructure and Cultural Policy on the impacts of Bill 9, the *Municipal Accountability Act*.



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At the 2025 Conference, it was so great to connect with those who were able to attend in Windsor. The venue was wonderful, and our past president, Stephen O'Brien, and outgoing president, Paul Shipway, played a big role in assisting our conference planning committee and staff with ensuring there was something for everyone. I am very grateful to the AMCTO staff, our Board of Directors, Stephen and Paul for their leadership, friendship and guidance in preparing me for this new role. If you were unable to attend the conference in Windsor, hopefully you were able to take advantage of the Virtual Conference Lite Package to learn from the many sessions that were offered. Each conference, our staff works hard to make the event better, with not only tonnes of professional development, networking and insights but also tonnes of fun networking opportunities like a themed '90s party.

I am excited for the season ahead. Fall is by far my favourite season and I can't wait to get out to the various Zones to connect with many of you. I know that we all have a lot on our plates right now with continuing changes in legislation, elections, budget constraints, workload pressures and public criticism.

As we navigate these challenging times in municipal government, there will be demand on our various roles in our respective municipalities, and we will continue to advance the values of leadership, collaboration and innovation that define AMCTO. Be sure to take advantage of fall workshops, forums and training. These sessions provide us all with the chance to connect, feed our minds and souls and see one another. They are so valuable in helping us persevere and provide strong leadership to our communities.

I hope that you will take some time to connect with me over the next year, whether at a Zone meeting or a professional development session, or just reaching out to me through LinkedIn. I am always so encouraged by the encounters I have with our membership. I am constantly learning from you. There are things I have learned from our membership that will stay with me for life. For example, a member recently told me the story of the feather, the brick and the truck – this is a metaphor often used to describe how life, or leadership, growth or change, gives us messages first gently, then firmly and finally, unavoidably. This lesson will always stay with me.

As I reflect on my few months as president of AMCTO, I'm deeply encouraged and inspired by the conversations I've had so far with members, from seeing members at conferences like the Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO), to professional development sessions. The commitment to innovation, resilience and continuous learning is evident in every corner of each of our Zones. It's a privilege to help lead this organization at such a pivotal time, and I remain focused on strengthening our voice, investing in our members and advancing the professions we're all so passionate about.

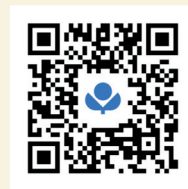
I look forward to this journey together over the next year: learning, leading and making a lasting impact across Ontario's local governments. ■■■

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Want to Make a Big Impact? Try Mentorship!



David Arbuckle, MPA
Executive Director,
AMCTO

Even before joining AMCTO, I had always been a huge cheerleader for participating in mentorship, either through an established program or informally through connection with professionals whom you respect and admire. Throughout my public- and private-sector career, and now in my not-for-profit career, I have benefited tremendously from both sides of the mentorship relationship.

As a mentee, I have served as a sponge to absorb as much knowledge from those who have given their time to share the experiences of their career journey. As a mentor, I benefit equally

in giving back to those seeking to grow their knowledge and in learning about how I can be a better leader for my staff.

Mentorship is, in my opinion, the single most impactful and meaningful activity you can do in your career.

Mentorship plays a crucial role in shaping effective leadership, promoting knowledge transfer and fostering innovation in the public sector. As municipalities face increasingly complex challenges – from policy reform to digital transformation – mentorship becomes a key tool for cultivating a skilled, resilient and adaptive workforce.



Unlike the private sector, where performance is often driven by profit incentives, public-sector work is fuelled by a commitment to service, accountability and long-term societal impact. This unique environment demands that new and mid-career professionals are not only technically competent but also deeply attuned to public values, ethics and procedures. Mentorship helps bridge this gap by connecting less-experienced employees with seasoned professionals who can offer guidance, context and support.

One of the most significant benefits of mentorship in the public sector is the transfer of knowledge. Many government departments have long-serving employees whose understanding of policies, systems and political landscapes is invaluable. When these individuals mentor others, they help preserve and transmit knowledge that might otherwise be lost due to retirement or turnover. This continuity is critical for ensuring effective governance and maintaining public trust.

Mentorship also plays a strategic role in talent development and retention, an area where we know many municipalities face challenges. Local governments often struggle to attract and retain top talent, especially younger professionals seeking dynamic and meaningful career paths. Structured mentorship programs can address this by providing clear pathways for growth, personalized professional development and a stronger sense of purpose and connection to public service. Mentees who feel supported are more likely to stay, contribute and evolve into future leaders.

Mentorship can also play a role in the promotion of diversity, equity and inclusion in public institutions. Through mentorship, underrepresented groups gain access to networks, role models and career guidance that can help break down systemic barriers. By cultivating inclusive leadership through mentorship, municipalities can better reflect and serve the communities they represent.

Finally, mentorship encourages innovation. Mentees bring fresh perspectives, while mentors offer practical wisdom. Together, they create a dynamic exchange that can lead to creative problem-solving and policy innovation – key ingredients for responsive and modern public services.

Here at AMCTO, we are thrilled that our members seem to agree with all the benefits of mentorship. In 2021, the AMCTO Mentorship Program had fewer than 15 mentee/mentor matches. That number has now grown to over 70!

Thanks to a reinvestment in the program through the amazing work of our membership and accreditation staff, and our members' generous donation of their time and expertise, the program has become a sought-after professional development tool for municipal staff across the province.

With the 2025-2026 program officially kicking off, I look forward to hearing more mentorship success stories from participants and seeing where their mentorship journeys take them! ■■■



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— Vanessa
Pension & Benefits Specialist
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- Free online technology training with Connected Canadians
- Scholarships to the relatives of MROO members
- Annual In-Person Zone Meetings across Ontario each spring

About MROO

MROO is an independent, non-partisan organization. We voice the interests of OMERS retirees to OMERS and governments of all levels and represent our membership in legislative matters that affect retirees. We advocate in favour of the OMERS pension plan and retirement income adequacy. In addition, MROO offers members the opportunity to obtain health, dental, travel, life, home, and auto insurance coverage; scholarships for members' relatives; and ongoing communication on retirement issues.

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SMARTER SERVICES

How AI Is Changing the Way Municipalities Work

By Mario Toneguzzi

As Canadian municipalities race to modernize, artificial intelligence is shifting from a buzzword to a practical tool, quietly transforming how local governments operate.

“Municipalities are still in the early stages,” says Rob Emerson, manager of digital transformation and user experience at the City of Barrie.

That shift in mindset is driving a wave of pilot projects across communities big and small, from invoice-processing AI at the Township of King to generative writing tools and internal chatbots in Barrie.

Both Emerson and Marco Cheng-Perri, manager of digital transformation,

data and corporate innovation at the Township of King, agree that AI’s role in municipal governance isn’t about replacing people; it’s about boosting capacity. With growing demands and limited budgets, automation is helping reduce administrative backlogs and streamline repetitive tasks.

Internally, AI is being used to assist with onboarding, draft council reports and surface policy knowledge for staff. Public-facing uses are handled with caution, but conversational chatbots are beginning to appear on municipal websites to improve service access.

Still, the future isn’t just about efficiency; it’s also about ethics. “The landscape is changing fast,” says

Cheng-Perri. “Our focus needs to be on governance and trust. The value will follow.”

Depending on the municipality, the use of AI is still firmly in the learning and exploring phase, says Emerson. Some are coming out of that and learning where the real opportunities are and where it can be applied most efficiently.

For example, where can AI help people do their jobs better? Where can it be implemented quickly and easily?

From an operational standpoint in how AI can help reduce bureaucracy and improve departmental efficiency, Emerson says Barrie is looking at two main areas: where AI helps

provide more value to residents and where it helps deliver services more efficiently.

Generative AI has been useful in writing. Many staff members are in their roles for their subject matter expertise, not because they're strong writers. AI can help them by generating a first draft so they can focus on whether the content is accurate and tells the right story, he adds.

"Beyond that, we're identifying well-defined, repetitive processes that take a lot of time, especially ones that don't require complex decision-making. If decisions can be documented easily, we're looking to automate those parts of workflows," Emerson explains.

"There are a tonne of workflows that include a step where a human is asked what to do next just because it was the easiest way to build it. If we can define those decisions clearly, we can insert automation to help."

Emerson says Barrie is exploring building internal, custom chatbots based on specific knowledge sets. If these bots are refined and tailored to departments, they could help new employees tackle the learning curve.

For example, customer service agents need to know dozens of systems and processes. A chatbot trained on internal knowledge bases could either answer their questions directly or direct them to where the answer is.

"We're not trying to replace humans. It's about helping them do their work more easily. And it's not ChatGPT sitting out on the web. We're talking about secure, internal bots that we can control and validate," he says.

"Right now, we're not looking at AI to replace other engagement channels but to add another one. For example, we added a chatbot to barrie.ca. Visitors to our website already have a few ways to find what they need, but AI adds a conversational channel. People can ask questions and the AI can search and respond accordingly. And it's available 24/7. It may not be for everyone, but the more channels we offer, the better chance we have to serve residents effectively."

Barrie is identifying use cases that help the city understand what needs to be built to be successful. Sometimes, that means making data more available. Sometimes, it's workflow automation or building the right skill sets internally. From a budget perspective, it's helping city officials discover what they don't know yet and where the gaps are.

"Once we know that, we can budget to fill those gaps and adopt the technology more effectively," says Emerson.

There's risk with AI, of course. Any time you're asking a computer to think like a human, you risk less human oversight. That's why, before Barrie even started any AI projects, it built a corporate AI framework. It includes things like security, trust and transparency, like telling residents when they're interacting with AI. Then it built a risk matrix to help identify where it's comfortable using AI and where it's not. The framework looks at the complexity of the task and what the impact would be if something went wrong.

The complexity is broken down into three categories. **Automate** is for low-risk tasks. **Assist** is for slightly more complex ones. **Augment** is for higher risk tasks. AI helps, but a human is always involved.

Municipalities at the Forefront

Cheng-Perri says municipalities aren't far behind the cutting edge. That's mainly because AI, especially in its modern form, is still relatively new. Some experts will say AI has been around for a while, but in terms of widespread awareness it's really fairly brand new, he says.

"Whether it's municipalities, consulting firms or banks, organizations



Rob Emerson
Manager,
Digital Transformation and
User Experience,
City of Barrie



Marco Cheng-Perri
Manager,
Digital Transformation,
Township of King

have only had a few years to wrap their heads around this. So, while many are still thinking about governance and how to derive value from AI, only a few have actually moved into production. That presents an exciting opportunity for municipalities to become leaders, something that's not typical with most technology trends."

One common use is through large language models, typically accessed through tools like ChatGPT. Cheng-Perri says the township doesn't use ChatGPT directly due to security concerns. They've adopted Microsoft Copilot instead. These models are powerful: they can draft meeting minutes, generate presentations, review

work and help with formatting.

"We advise staff not to rely on AI fully. The tools are powerful but still need a human touch. We estimate AI can get you 50-70 per cent of the way there, but a person still needs to review and refine," he says.

"Take presentations, for example. Preparing for a speaking event might normally take hours. Now, if you feed the AI some context, press releases, summaries – it can create a first draft in five minutes. You spend another 55 refining it, and you're done in an hour. That's significant."

He adds: "We also built an in-house tool to process certain types of invoices. Traditionally, staff would manually extract data and input it into Excel. Now, they email invoices to an AI inbox, the processor extracts the data, enters it into Excel and performs calculations. It saves time and lets staff focus on higher value work like analyzing what that data actually means."

Cheng-Perri says the township is discussing the onboarding process for staff and how AI could help there.



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where it adds value, without the reputational risk.

He says that council reports also require caution: “These documents are public-facing and taken seriously. If staff rely entirely on AI, the reports may all start to sound the same. That reflects poorly on the organization. We tell staff they can use AI to brainstorm, organize ideas and maybe write a rough draft. But they have to make the report their own. If it looks like AI wrote the whole thing, that becomes obvious, and it could hurt our credibility. We’re looking for smart efficiencies, not shortcuts that come with reputational risk.”

Cheng-Perri says the township is using Copilot to help staff better prioritize their time. Many municipalities are stretched thin with expectations rising and funding not keeping pace. If AI can help bring workloads back to manageable levels, it might reduce the need for additional hires.

The budget impact is less about cutting costs now and more about avoiding increased costs later. It’s the same trend as in the private sector: AI is used to augment staff, not replace them.

“The landscape is changing incredibly fast. Everything might be outdated in six months or a year,” he said.

“I started working with AI in 2020, but it really took off in 2022 with tools like ChatGPT. In just a few years, we’ve gone from AI agents that knew very little to expert-level tools. In other sectors, it’s already transformative. I’ve spoken with doctors in the U.S. who use AI during operations. There was even a case in Canada recently (of) an AI-assisted surgery. These tools could reduce medical backlogs by letting one doctor supervise multiple procedures,” Cheng-Perri says.

“So in the public sector, our focus should be on ethics and governance. The value will come and the tools will evolve. But we need to ask ourselves: How do we want to use AI? What risks are acceptable? How do we define work, and what does this mean for society? That philosophical piece is just as important.” ■■

“You may have heard of AI agents – the next generation of AI tools that specialize in specific tasks. Unlike large language models, which have breadth, these agents go deep. We’re building internal agents trained on specific topics like onboarding,” he explains.

“For example, we’re creating an agent focused on our policies and intranet content. If a new employee wants to know about the dress code or workplace policies, they can just ask the agent. It’ll pull up the relevant answers and have a conversation, instead of them having to dig through folders filled with long, hard-to-read documents.”

Use Cases and AI Ethics

The use of AI in community engagement is a tricky one, he adds.

“You may have heard about a recent controversy – I won’t name the organization – but they were using AI to respond to people on social media. When people found out, there was backlash. People want to know they’re talking to

“
**We’re not trying
to replace
humans. It’s
about helping
them do their
work more easily.**

”

a real human, especially in public-facing interactions,” says Cheng-Perri.

“So right now, I wouldn’t recommend using AI directly for engagement with residents. Instead, AI can help behind the scenes, especially in analyzing feedback. If you’ve collected surveys or consultation data, AI can identify patterns and common themes. That’s

Aird & Berlis Congratulates Christopher Williams

Recipient of the OBA's 2025 Award of Excellence in Municipal Law



Chris Williams (right) of the Aird & Berlis Municipal & Land Use Planning Group with Jonathan Nehmetallah, Vice-Chair of the Municipal Law Section of the OBA.



Chris Williams (second from right) is pictured alongside John Mascarin, Jane Pepino and Leo Longo, members of the Aird & Berlis Municipal & Land Use Planning Group and past recipients of the OBA's Award of Excellence in Municipal Law.

We are proud to announce that Christopher Williams has received the **2025 Barnet Kussner Award of Excellence in Municipal Law** from the Ontario Bar Association's Municipal Law Section.

Chris is a valued and longstanding member of our Municipal & Land Use Planning Group and Expropriation Law Group. He is a trusted legal counsel to his clients, a true expert in all aspects of municipal law and a mentor to scores of younger lawyers. Chris exemplifies the qualities of leadership, integrity and excellence this award celebrates.

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A PERFECT GATHERING IN WINDSOR

The Gordie Howe Bridge Symbolizes Our Partnership

By Stephen Huycke

AMCTO and the International Institute of Municipal Clerks (IIMC) have had a formal partnership since at least 2012. Representatives attend each other's annual conferences and IIMC's president has attended the AMCTO Conference for many years.

This year, Dawn Abrahamson, MMC, IIMC president for 2025-2026, was unable to attend the AMCTO Conference in Windsor in June. That's where I came in. Some of you know me as a long-time member of AMCTO, a former Zone 4 board director and former member of the Legislative and Policy Advisory Committee (LPAC). What you might not know, especially if you are not a clerk, is that I am one of the two Region X directors on the IIMC Board. Region X is the IIMC region that covers all of Canada. Abrahamson asked me to represent her and the IIMC board at this year's AMCTO Conference. Both AMCTO and IIMC have been an important part of my municipal career, offering me exceptional professional development, networking and certification opportunities. It was an honour to represent one association at the other.

This conference's theme was "Building Bridges, Sparking Change." It recognized that Windsor – just across the river from Detroit – will soon celebrate the opening of the Gordie Howe International Bridge. This new six-lane, cable-stayed bridge will increase the physical connections between Canada and the United States. I was struck at how appropriate this theme and location were. The partnership between AMCTO and IIMC is all about building bridges. Not the kind that connect physical places, but the ones that connect people. The partnership connects municipal clerks not just across a river or the Canada-U.S. border, but on a global scale. IIMC has approximately 15,000 members, 5,000 of whom are in Europe. IIMC and AMCTO are also both dedicated to professional development. Education is precisely what will lead us to spark the changes our communities need.

The connections between AMCTO and IIMC are deeper than the services they offer. In her closing address at the 79th Annual IIMC Conference in May, in St. Louis, Abrahamson told us this year's theme would be "Rebuilding Trust and Fostering True Inclusion." She said the theme "is



more than just a guiding principle. It is a call to action!" She added: "... in our roles ... we are the steady hand behind the scenes, the trusted stewards of local democracy. Rebuilding trust means leading with transparency, empathy and integrity."

Abrahamson also told us that "fostering true inclusion means ensuring that every voice, from every background, not only has a seat at the table but feels truly heard." She reminded us that "this work isn't easy, but it's essential. And it's possible because of the wisdom, support and inspiration we draw from one another." This theme is always reflected in the AMCTO Conference. From the conference's core values to the fun networking opportunities and the professional development sessions, it was all about building trust and fostering inclusion. IIMC and AMCTO have shared values that are important to our roles as municipal professionals. These values build strong partnerships and bridges.

Are you a clerk in Ontario who is not a member of IIMC? I encourage you to explore the opportunities that IIMC offers because they can help you build bridges and spark change. IIMC offers a variety of professional development opportunities such as the internationally recognized



Stephen Huycke
Director,
IIMC Region X

Certified Municipal Clerk (CMC) and Master Municipal Clerk (MMC) designations. Did you know that AMCTO is one of IIMC's recognized professional institutes? This means that your professional development at AMCTO can help you earn your CMC and MMC.

IIMC also offers financial support to its members through the IIMC Foundation. Each year, the Founda-

tion offers scholarships of up to \$400 to two Region X members who are working towards their CMC or MMC designations. The foundation also offers Region X members two grants (equal to the cost of the conference registration) to attend the annual conference each May. Sadly, these scholarships and grants are not always fully used. Perhaps you will consider joining IIMC, or if already a member, consider taking the steps to earn your CMC. Perhaps I will see you next May at the IIMC Conference in Reno, Nevada. Either way, let's continue to build bridges between our associations and the clerk's profession.

Stephen Huycke has more than 20 years of experience in regulatory, policy and legal affairs, including 16 years working for various local government bodies. He is currently the director, legislative services/city clerk for the City of Richmond Hill and director, IIMC Region X. ■■

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* Any references to energy savings are based on the assumption the participant is reducing their natural gas consumption through participation in the Affordable Housing Multi-Residential Program.

[†] Eligible market-rate multi-residential buildings will need to demonstrate either at least 30 percent of units are rented at less than 80 percent of the median market rent, determined by the Canadian Mortgage and Housing Corporation, based on the information gathered during rent roll review by Enbridge Gas, or the building has participated in a federal, provincial, or municipal affordable housing funding program in the last five years.

[‡] HST is not applicable and will not be added to incentive payments. Terms and conditions apply to specific offers. Please contact an Energy Solutions Advisor for details.



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AMCTO
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2025 Awards

Celebrating the Achievements of our Members



Prestige Award
E.A. Danby Awards
Academic Achievement Awards
Zone Awards

Honouring Excellence

The Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks and Treasurers of Ontario (AMCTO) is proud to announce the recipients of the 2025 AMCTO Awards program. Award recipients were honoured during the 2025 AMCTO Conference Awards Gala Dinner that took place on the evening of June 10, 2025, at the Caesars Hotel and Casino in Windsor, Ontario. Joined by family and friends and their municipal peers, participants were recognized for their innovation and dedication to their municipalities, communities and the Association.

“Every year, we honour our members and municipal professionals who have worked hard to advance the profession through municipal project innovation, contributions to their Zone and through their commitment to continuous learning and professional development,” says AMCTO president Paul Shipway. “This year’s recipients are sparking change in their communities as exemplary municipal professionals who inspire those around them.”



David Arbuckle, MPA
Executive Director
AMCTO



Paul Shipway, CMO, AOMC, Dipl.M.A.
2024-2025 Board President
AMCTO

Congratulations to all 2025 award recipients!

Thank You to our 2025 Awards Gala Sponsors



2025 Prestige Award

The Prestige Award is presented to an AMCTO member, past or present, who has been nominated by his or her peers. This award recognizes the individual's commitment to the ideals of the Association and their contributions to both the Association and municipal profession. Leading by example, the Prestige Award recipient is someone who has given freely of their time and expertise and who, through their efforts, has enriched the AMCTO and the Ontario municipal sector.



John Elvidge
City Clerk
City of Toronto

The 2025 Prestige Award recipient, John Elvidge, has made a career in local government, holding roles in cultural affairs, grant-making, citizen engagement, governance and ethics, corporate policy and integrity, and now serving as clerk for the City of Toronto where he supports council and committees, information and privacy, duties of the division registrar and elections planning.

Prior to joining the clerk's office, John and his team modernized the City of Toronto governance structure; the foundations of which – openness, transparency, efficiency – are still how Toronto council governs today. This led to advancements in meeting management and legislative

processes, shifting the work of the clerk into a digitally progressive space. In recognition of this transformation and John's leadership, the City of Toronto was recognized with two AMCTO E.A. Danby Awards for innovation in 2011 and 2023.

Professionally, John has been described as having an “encyclopedia knowledge of the rulebook,” often providing guidance on procedural matters and the legislative process. Most recently, he's supported teams with understanding and implementing strong mayor powers. John is always responsive and willing to support his peers in the sector by helping to find or develop solutions, make connections and showcase the great work being done at the local level.

John has played a pivotal role in advancing the municipal profession and enhancing its recognition throughout Ontario. His dedication to fostering professional growth and collaboration among clerks has made a lasting impact on the municipal profession, ensuring its continued advancement and recognition.

Congratulations and thank you, John!

2024-2025 E.A. Danby Awards

Named after AMCTO's inaugural president, the E.A. Danby Awards recognize and honour municipalities that have demonstrated outstanding achievement through innovation with respect to municipal management activities or practices.



Township of King

Category: Municipal Administration
Municipalities of 20,000 or More
Project: Artificial Intelligence (AI) Program

*AMCTO 2024-2025 President Paul Shipway with
Marco Cheng-Perri, Manager, Digital Transformation, Data and
Corporate Performance*



Municipality of Northern Bruce Peninsula

Category: Municipal Administration
Municipalities of 20,000 or Less
Project: Digital Transformation Journey

*Paul Shipway, Kara Smith, GIS/IT Manager, and
Alexandra Croce, Clerk*

Certificates of Merit



City of Guelph

Category: Municipal Finance
Municipalities of 20,000 or More
Project: Strategic Budget Process in a Strong Mayor
Environment

*Paul Shipway, Erin Britnell, Manager of Corporate Performance and
Strategy, and Stephanie Devost, Senior Corporate Analyst, Financial
Strategy and Corporate Performance*



Municipality of Thames Centre

Category: Municipal Administration
Municipalities of 20,000 or Less
Project: Implementation of OpenBook

*Paul Shipway, Jana Nethercott, Director of Legislative Services/Clerk,
and Michelle Smibert, Deputy Mayor*

2024-2025 Academic Achievement Awards

As an accredited educational institution, AMCTO is proud to recognize the academic achievement of its students enrolled in foundational, management and diploma programs. These awards of excellence go to the program graduates who have attained the highest cumulative marks upon completion of their respective programs.



Dr. C. Richard Tindal Award for Excellence in Municipal Administration

Justin L. Grainger, AMP
Deputy Clerk
Town of Erin



Award for Excellence in Municipal Accounting & Finance Sponsored by Watson & Associates Economists Ltd.

Presented by Byron Tan, Manager
Vanessa Lee
Revenue Co-ordinator
City of Cambridge



Award for Excellence in Municipal Law Sponsored by Thomson Rogers LLP

Presented by Denitza Koev, Partner
Lori Hoddinott
Mayor
Township of McNab/Braeside

Award for Excellence in Municipal Human Resources (not pictured) Sponsored by Cunningham Swan Lawyers

Ashlea Carter, AMP, Dipl.M.A.
Deputy Clerk
Town of Fort Erie

Sally Litchfield
Executive Co-ordinator
Township of Centre Wellington

Kaitlyn Skjaveland, Dipl.M.A.
IT Technical Support
County of Peterborough



Academic Excellence Award for the Diploma in Municipal Administration (DMA)

Michelle Cronin, Dipl.M.A.



Academic Excellence Award for the Executive Diploma in Municipal Management (EDMM)

Sharon Sayles, Dipl.M.M.
Communications Specialist
City of Brantford

2025 Zone Awards

AMCTO Zone Awards recognize, at the discretion of each Zone Executive, the efforts of those who have made significant contributions at a local level towards the success of their respective Zones or to the advancement of the municipal profession within their Zone.



Zone 1

Steve Vlachodimos

City Clerk/Licence Commissioner
City of Windsor



Zone 2

Susan M. Stone, AMCT

Chief Administrative Officer (Retired)
Township of East Garafraxa



Zone 3

Jeff Bunn, CMO, AOMC, Dipl.M.M.

Manager of Legislative Services/Deputy Clerk
City of Woodstock



Zone 4

John Elvidge

City Clerk
City of Toronto



Zone 5

Elana Arthurs, CMO, AOMC

Chief Administrative Officer
Municipality of Brighton



Zone 6

Sandra MacDonald, CMO, AOMC, AMCT

City Manager
City of Brockville



Zone 7

Rachel Tyczinski, CMO, AOMC

City Clerk
City of Sault Ste. Marie



Zone 9

Jason Young

Chief Administrative Officer
Town of Atikokan

Members are encouraged to keep an eye out for nominations to open in the new year for the 2026 Awards Program. In the meantime, mark your calendars and **save the date** to celebrate with us at next year's conference, taking place **June 7-10, 2026** at **Deerhurst Resort in Huntsville, Ontario**.



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REWARDING INNOVATION

Meet the E.A. Danby Award Winners

By Linda Slobodian

The development of innovative administration and finance programs that provide better services to the community earned E.A. Danby Awards for four municipalities at AMCTO's 2025 conference in Windsor this past June.

These digital and AI programs, which can be replicated or serve as models for other jurisdictions, reduce staff/hours and costs, improve service delivery and offer residents easy access and transparency.

Municipal administration category recipients are the Northern Bruce Peninsula Digital Transformation Journey program and the Township of King's artificial intelligence (AI) program. Thames Centre received an administration certificate of merit for implementing OpenBook. Guelph received a certificate of merit in the finance category for its Strategic Budget Process in a Strong Mayor Environment project.

Grassroots Growth

Over several years, Northern Bruce Peninsula undertook a grassroots digital transformation culminating in a full suite of technologies.

"This digital transformation journey and this award are about more than technology; they represent a shift in mindset and culture. Our success came from listening to staff, collaborating across departments and supporting change from the ground up," says Kara Smith, GIS and IT manager for Northern Bruce Peninsula.

As AMCTO noted at the award presentation, this project is regarded as "distinguished" owing to the "scope of transformation" by the small rural municipality's team, which developed capacity throughout all departments to formulate and administer digital workflows, despite having limited resources. Platforms and tools replaced outdated

manual and paper-based processes, resulting in \$160,000 annual savings and a 1,100-staff/hour reduction.

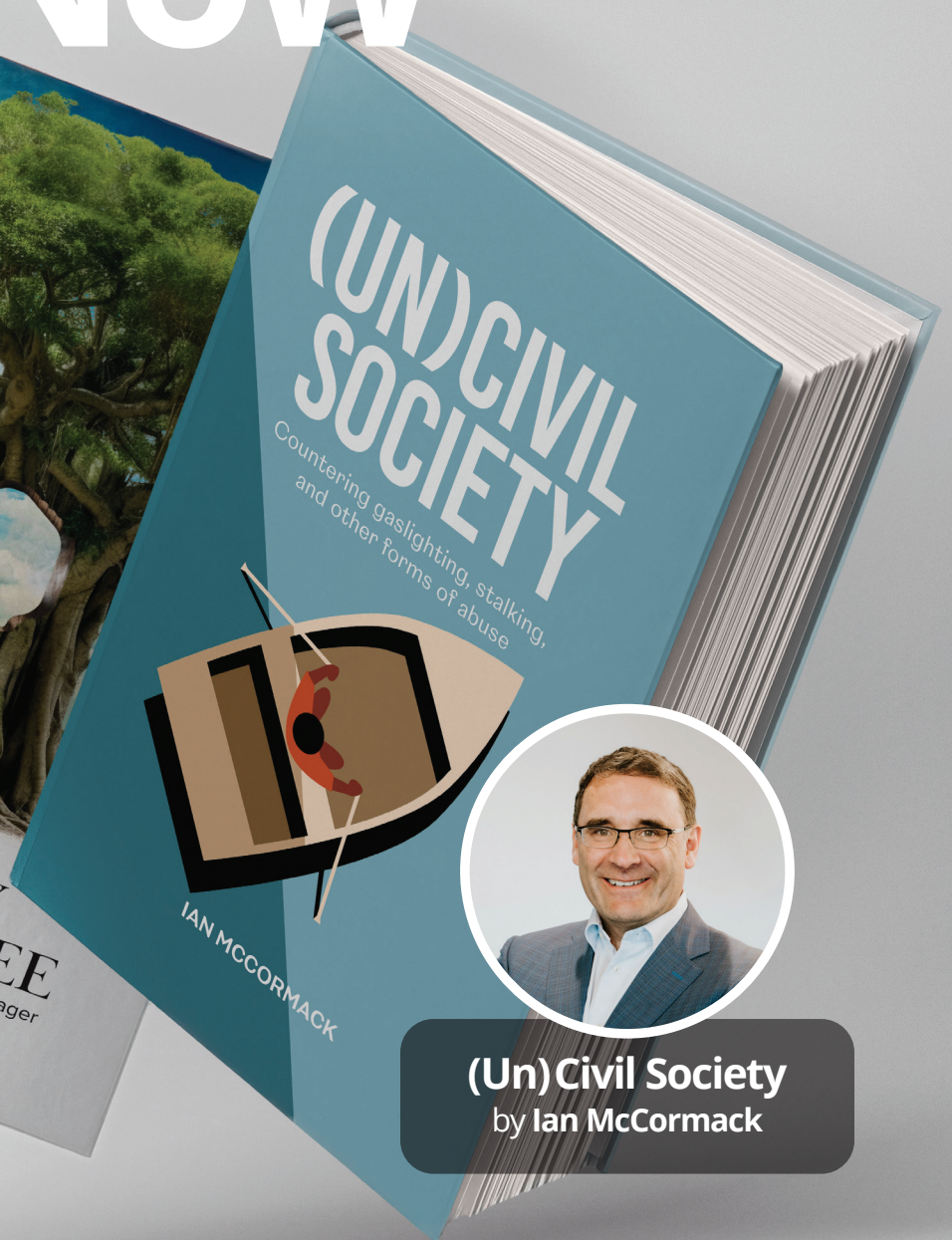
"Our transformation was always about improving service delivery to the people we serve. By digitizing manual processes, offering 24/7 online services and streamlining internal operations, we've made municipal services more accessible, transparent and responsive," says Smith.

"Residents can now apply for permits, pay fees or engage with municipal projects from anywhere and on their own time. They no longer need to make unnecessary trips to the office or wait for business hours. Our improved communication tools, like e-newsletters and engagement platforms, help residents stay informed and involved in local decisions. These changes enhance trust and convenience while allowing staff to focus more time on high-impact work."

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Kara Smith
GIS & IT Manager,
Northern Bruce Peninsula



David Barrick
Chief Administrative Officer,
Thames Centre



Erin Britnell
Manager of Corporate
Performance and Strategy,
City of Guelph



Marco Cheng-Perri
Manager of Digital Transformation,
Data and Corporate Performance,
Thames Centre

The transformation used in-house platforms such as Laserfiche, SharePoint and Make. Says Smith: “We relied on cost-effective tools and invested in training internal champions to develop forms, workflows and automations in-house, reducing reliance on external consultants and building long-term capacity.”

“This award shines a light on the incredible work being done outside of urban centres, and reminds us that rural communities can be bold, agile and forward-thinking leaders in municipal modernization,” says Smith. “This recognition reinforces that innovation doesn’t require a big budget; it just requires commitment, creativity and a culture that empowers staff at all levels to lead change.”

Adopting Automation

The Township of King uses a holistic, strategic blueprint approach to technology and innovation through the creation of a comprehensive AI program rather than applying AI in fragmented projects. King’s AI program was designed “with residents at the core,” says Marco Cheng-Perri, manager of digital transformation, data and corporate performance.

A digital transformation framework includes the Kingsley virtual assistant on the Township’s website and Microsoft Copilot that summarizes information to assist staff and increase productivity.

“Tools like Kingsley, our AI-powered virtual assistant, provide 24/7 access to information and support, ensuring residents can get answers when they need them, even outside of normal business hours. Kingsley has already handled over 1,000 conversations with an 88-per-cent satisfaction rate, helping with everything from garbage schedules to traffic-calming studies,” says Cheng-Perri.

Automating routine tasks with AI to improve service responsiveness makes it easier for residents to interact with their government and access services, he says.

“We’ve already shared our approach with other municipalities and have been invited to speak at conferences, including international forums. Our strategy, starting small, piloting solutions and scaling based on real data, can be replicated by municipalities of any

size. Whether it’s deploying a virtual assistant, automating internal workflows or responsibly integrating AI tools like Microsoft Copilot, our blueprint offers a practical path forward for others looking to innovate,” says Cheng-Perri.

“Our success is rooted in cross-departmental teamwork, community feedback and a commitment to ethical AI use. We’re proud to be setting a precedent for how municipalities can embrace innovation while staying true to our values,” he adds.

Looking at the Bigger Picture

In February 2024, Guelph staff received strong mayor direction in the face of affordability and housing challenges to reduce an approved 2025 tax increase by over 50 per cent. Staff had six months to get the job done; however, no roadmap for multi-year budgeting or municipal budgeting within a strong mayor structure existed.

“The City of Guelph took the challenge of a sudden change in direction for the 2025 confirmation of Guelph’s 2024-2027 multi-year budget as an opportunity to make innovative improvements to the budget confirmation and development process. The City of Guelph used this opportunity to formally align the corporate strategy and budget teams in the process, and further embed systemic, criteria-based decision making into the process,” says Erin Britnell, manager of corporate performance and strategy.

“Staff prioritized requests and potential reductions using a set of criteria including risk, strategic alignment, community impact and legislative requirements to evaluate all options fairly. Where traditional budget processes often have departments competing for resources, this focused on the community and organization’s most pressing needs,” she says.

“For residents, the focus on community impact and strategic priorities, balanced with affordability, ensures that public resources are maximized. This contributes to improved transparency and accountability to residents and that the services they value most are included.”

Guelph’s challenges aren’t unique and Britnell says “the lessons learned during this process on successfully navigating the budget updates could be shared across these municipalities. Every municipality must go through an annual budget exercise and the solutions utilized in Guelph could be scaled to municipalities of different sizes.”

Encouraging Engagement

Thames Centre’s OpenBook is a digital tool for transparency and data visualization that presents complex annual operating and capital budgets in a user-friendly format. The Project Explorer function displays all projects on an interactive map and allows users on the municipality’s website to click on projects to review details including expenditures and funding sources.

“The OpenBook initiative was born out of a clear goal: to make municipal financial data more accessible and understandable for our residents. By turning complex numbers into interactive, easy-to-navigate visuals, we’ve empowered our community to engage meaningfully with our budget process. This not only builds trust but improves the quality of feedback we receive and ultimately helps us build better, more responsive budgets,” says David Barrick, Thames Centre’s chief administrative officer. He adds that the initiative saves money because it reduces time staff spend handling routine budget questions.

“For other municipalities, OpenBook proves that digital transparency is possible, regardless of size or budget. As a smaller municipality, we’ve demonstrated that innovation doesn’t require a large urban footprint; it requires leadership, collaboration and a willingness to challenge the status quo. The model is scalable, user-friendly and adaptable to a range of municipal contexts,” says Barrick.

Barrick, Britnell, Cheng-Perri and Smith all emphasize that they were honoured that their communities received the prestigious E.A. Danby Award. 🏆



THE FRAYING OF DEMOCRACY

Municipalities Face Rising Levels of Public Hostility

By Joanna Shepherd

Incivility in municipal politics is on the rise, putting pressure on local leaders and threatening effective governance. Through the Canadian Municipal Leadership Program – a partnership between AMCTO and Ivey Executive Education – leaders gain tools to navigate these challenges, build resilience and foster respectful public dialogue. This article explores the growing issue and why leadership development is more important than ever.

Incivility – rude, disrespectful or abusive behaviour in public discussion – has become a growing concern in Canadian local government. Officials and advocates warn that community discourse is becoming less civil both online and in person. Tyler Gandam, president of Alberta Municipalities and mayor of Wetaskiwin,

noted that “incivility has touched all of us – whether through social media, in public discourse or even in conversations with colleagues.” In other words, council meetings and civic forums that once featured heated but respectful debate are increasingly marked by shouting, personal attacks and harassment. This trend emerged in recent years and accelerated during and after the pandemic, as social media makes it easier to send uncivil messages to officials.

National Trends and Statistics

Recent studies confirm that many local Canadian politicians face insults and threats. In a 2025 Canadian Municipal Barometer survey of elected officials, about 63 per cent of respondents said they had experienced some form of harassment during their term or campaign. The Union des municipalités du

Québec (UMQ) reported even higher rates: 74 per cent of Quebec mayors and councillors said they had been harassed or intimidated. In Quebec surveys, the share of officials reporting harassment jumped from 28 per cent in 2017 to 39 per cent in 2023. These findings paint a national picture: city councils from Vancouver Island to Nova Scotia are hearing more angry and abusive comments from members of the public.

Gandam has said there is “a definite increase” in the amount of harassment directed at elected officials, much of it online by anonymous users. In one Alberta report, Gandam described a wave of online hostility that is hurting council operations. In fact, byelection data show that mid-term resignations jumped about 30 per cent in Alberta during the 2021–25 term compared to

the previous term. In Quebec, nearly 10 per cent of municipal leaders have left their posts early since 2021, with some resigning because of “toxic behaviour” by citizens. These numbers suggest that, across Canada, rising incivility is driving good candidates away from running for council and pushing serving members out of office.

Impact on Local Government and Public Service

The uncivil climate is hurting councils and communities. Resignations and recruitment problems have real impacts on local governance. Councils can be stalled when members quit or elections must be repeated. In Quebec and Alberta alike, leaders worry that fewer people will step forward to run if the job means facing abuse. Even when officials stay, the stress is high: city managers and staff report dealing with rude or threatening behaviour at work. An Ontario survey of municipal managers in 2024 found “many troubling stories of abuse and harassment of CAOs and their teams,” noting flatly that “it is not an easy time to be a municipal public servant.” Senior staff described being frequently “yelled at” by the public and fighting misinformation online. This constant conflict takes time and money: councils may have to hold extra meetings to address public confusion, hire security at events or train staff in conflict de-escalation. The bar for public service has effectively been raised and officials now juggle policy work along with defending their reputations and safety.

These pressures weaken local government. Anxiety and burnout rise among councillors and staff. Town clerks and CAOs leave jobs when threatened or harassed, leaving skill gaps. One New Brunswick councillor, Lorna Yard of Witless Bay, resigned in March 2024 after “near-constant harassment” from residents and anonymous online attackers. Other officials have described getting personal threats. France Bélisle, Gatineau’s former mayor, cited “death threats” and misogynistic abuse as reasons for stepping down in 2024. In British Columbia, even small towns have seen safety fears: Colin Ferguson, the mayor of tiny Silverton, quit over threats, and in

In May, AMCTO surveyed members about their experiences with harassment and incivility in interactions with members of the public, members of council and staff in Ontario municipal organizations. The results highlighted similar increases across the province in all areas. Stay tuned for the survey results and analysis to be included in a future edition of the *Municipal Monitor*.

Langford, Coun. Keith Yacucha found a stranger taking photos through his window. Ontario councils have reported workers feeling unsafe due to harassment or even physical intimidation at meetings. In short, the breakdown of respectful discourse is straining municipal services and threatening democratic participation.

Voices from Local Politicians

In Quebec, Victoriaville Mayor Antoine Tardif observed that “harassment has been more and more frequent in the municipal world ... social media is part of the reason why we see more and more.” Tardif, who helped release the Quebec survey results, noted that his colleagues across Canada hear similar complaints. In Ontario, Brampton Regional Councillor Rowena Santos has publicly warned that women in office face a “cyber harassment” storm: she described how elected women endure “sexism, misogyny ... unwarranted attacks, harassment, hostile accusations, misinformation” and said that “for women like us ... it’s getting worse” as they speak up.

These statements echo stories from smaller communities: another Atlantic municipal councillor noted that opponents of her policy ideas frequently resorted to “personal attacks and insults” on social media. Such accounts show that incivility often coexists with policy debates. For example, a conflict over a town development plan can quickly shift from reasonable disagreement into name-calling and threats.

Despite these challenges, officials also emphasize the difference between fair criticism and true harassment. Most leaders encourage citizens to stay engaged. They say legitimate questions about budgets, zoning or services are welcome. But when discourse turns to

harassment – repeated insults, slurs or threats – it undermines democracy. As one municipal article explained, criticism is “completely fair” and vital but crossing into personal abuse pushes people out of politics. In other words, officials want accountability and debate, but not the abusive behaviours that have been on the rise.

Responses and Solutions

Recognizing the problem, governments and associations have begun acting. The Federation of Canadian Municipalities (FCM) declared in 2024 that harassment of local officials is a “serious problem in Canada.” Delegates passed a resolution urging federal and provincial co-operation to protect politicians from threats and intimidation. Quebec has also taken steps. In early 2024, the provincial government created a confidential helpline for attacked municipal politicians and also enacted a law fining up to \$1,500 to anyone



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who harasses or threatens an elected official. Several councils have reviewed their codes of conduct for the public. For example, some municipalities now explicitly forbid verbal abuse (including yelling, insults or slurs) at council meetings and empower the chair to remove unruly participants. At a recent summit, Alberta municipal leaders launched civility initiatives and training (like role-playing games) to improve public debate in council meetings.

These efforts aim to draw a line between robust democracy and harmful disorder. Importantly, official recommendations stress that citizens' voices should be heard, just not silenced by abuse. The FCM notes that "critique, dissent and vigorous debate are essential" to healthy democracy, but adds that "extremism in the current landscape, particularly online, is unacceptable." In practical terms, this means encouraging respectful dialogue and educating both public servants and residents. Municipal staff and councillors are receiving more training on defusing conflicts and using social media carefully. Community groups and leaders are urging Canadians to engage constructively; for example, by focusing on issues rather than personal attacks when attending town halls or online forums.

Working Toward Civil Discourse

The rise in incivility at the municipal level is worrying for local governance. When people yell insults or launch personal attacks instead of discussing policies, municipal governments cannot function smoothly. Local services and projects suffer when council work is disrupted by abuse or when good leaders leave. On the other hand, citizens' concerns must be addressed. Democracy at the local level depends on listening to residents while keeping the conversation safe and respectful.

In many parts of Canada today, people are trying to find that balance. Officials, staff and communities are working – sometimes grudgingly – to set clear rules for conduct and to model better behaviour online and in meetings. As a leader working in municipal government, creating systems of support within your teams to help them navigate challenges with incivility and building your skills for managing conflict and de-escalating situations are key. The AMCTO-Ivey Canadian Municipal Leadership Accelerator is built for this moment. It's a three-day, immersive experience for municipal leaders ready to tackle today's complexities with sharper tools, broader perspective and renewed clarity.

The hope is that with more awareness, support and leadership, local politics can be both passionate and polite. After all, Canadian democracy is strongest when our municipal discussions are open and honest, yet civil enough to invite everyone to join in solving community problems.

Registration is open now for the AMCTO-Ivey Canadian Municipal Leadership Accelerator taking place October 29-31, 2025 at the Donald K. Johnson Centre in Toronto. Learn more at amcto.com/ivey.

Joanna Shepherd is a communications specialist at Ivey Executive Education. Delivered by Ivey Business School, the AMCTO-Ivey Canadian Municipal Leadership Accelerator allows participants to explore their unique identities as municipal leaders to drive transformational change. ■■■

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^{*} Any references to energy savings and greenhouse gas (GHG) emission reductions are based on the assumption that participation in the Affordable Housing Multi-Residential Program results in reduced natural gas consumption. Enbridge Gas does not make any claims regarding the specific amount of energy or savings GHG reductions achieved.

[†] HST is not applicable and will not be added to incentive payments. Incentive offers are subject to change based on budget availability. Offer available to qualified participants only. Contact your Energy Solutions Advisor to confirm eligibility. Terms and conditions apply. Visit enbridgegas.com/affordable for details.



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