

MunicipalMonitor

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

WHO CONTROLS REGIONAL GOVERNMENT

**Strong Chair Powers Put Local
Democracy to the Test in Ontario**

THE MISSING YOUTH VOTE

**Why Oakville's Young Residents
Aren't Voting – Yet**

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THE DIRT ON CEMETERIES

**Understanding Financial
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MENTORSHIP MATTERS

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Published four times a year for the
Association of Municipal Managers, Clerks
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Mississauga, ON L4W 4T9
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Publication Mail Agreement #43361037.

Return undeliverable Canadian addresses to:
63 Albert St., Ste. 601
Winnipeg, MB R3B 1G4
Printed in Canada.
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Q3 2026

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Celebrating the
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Investing in Tomorrow's Municipal Leaders

When I joined the first cohort of the AMCTO Municipal Management Internship Program (MMIP) in 2007, I was an emerging municipal professional eager to learn, contribute and better understand the complexity of local government. Nearly two decades later, I have the privilege of serving as a municipal chief administrative officer and now as president of AMCTO. I can confidently say that MMIP was one of the most influential opportunities in my professional journey.

It seems fitting that my first column as AMCTO president reflects on the importance of internship programs. They opened the door to my own career in municipal government and provide emerging professionals with invaluable opportunities to learn, grow and lead.

Municipal government is one of the most rewarding and dynamic sectors in which to build a career. Every day, municipal professionals help shape the communities where people live, work and raise their families. From infrastructure and finance to planning, emergency services, recreation and governance, municipalities touch virtually every aspect of daily life. Yet many students and early-career professionals are unaware of the breadth of opportunities available in local government.

Internship programs matter and they provide far more than work experience. They create pathways into municipal service, allowing participants to gain practical knowledge while developing the confidence, skills and professional networks that cannot be learned in a classroom alone. They

expose participants to the realities of municipal administration, encourage innovation and foster a deep appreciation for public service.

For municipalities, the benefits are equally significant. Across Ontario, municipalities face workforce challenges as experienced professionals retire and competition for talent increases. Building a strong pipeline of future leaders is an organizational necessity. Internship programs allow municipalities to identify promising talent, introduce emerging professionals to the municipal sector and cultivate the next generation of leaders who will guide our communities through increasingly complex challenges.

Interns contribute fresh perspectives, ask thoughtful questions, embrace new technologies and often challenge us to think differently about longstanding processes. Their enthusiasm is contagious and their curiosity encourages continuous learning throughout an organization. Experienced municipal professionals have an opportunity to mentor, coach and share the knowledge they have accumulated over years of public service. This knowledge transfer is one of the greatest strengths of internship programs. It ensures that institutional knowledge is not lost but instead passed on to those who will carry the profession forward.

AMCTO has long recognized the importance of investing in people. MMIP, developed in partnership with Ontario's Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing, created opportunities for aspiring municipal leaders to gain

valuable experience in municipalities across the province. Many graduates of that program have gone on to hold senior leadership positions, serving municipalities of every size and complexity. I am proud to count myself among this group of interns whose careers were shaped by this remarkable initiative.

While MMIP has ended, AMCTO has continued that commitment by partnering with Mitacs to establish the Municipal Innovation Internship Program (MIIP). This exciting initiative connects municipalities with talented post-secondary students and researchers, bringing fresh perspectives to local government while providing participants with hands-on experience in the municipal sector.

Communities are navigating housing pressures, infrastructure renewal, climate resilience, digital transformation, financial sustainability and growing expectations from residents. Meeting these challenges requires skilled, adaptable and forward-thinking professionals who are prepared to lead with creativity and collaboration.

Internship programs help build those qualities. They provide emerging professionals with opportunities to participate in meaningful projects, work alongside experienced leaders and develop an understanding of municipal governance that extends well beyond textbooks. At the same time, municipalities benefit from new ideas, diverse perspectives and individuals eager to make a positive impact.

Leadership is not developed in isolation. It grows through experience, mentorship, encouragement and opportunities to take on new challenges. The confidence I gained through my internship opened doors that led me to leadership positions I never imagined possible at the beginning of my career.

That experience also shaped my own approach to leadership. I try to support emerging professionals whenever possible because I understand the difference that a mentor, a supportive workplace or simply an opportunity can make in someone's career. Our profession has always been built on people investing in people.

As AMCTO president, I believe one of our greatest responsibilities is ensuring that municipal government remains an attractive and rewarding career for future generations. Programs like MIIP demonstrate what can be accomplished when municipalities, a partner like Mitacs and professional associations work together to strengthen local government.

I encourage municipalities to continue supporting internship opportunities, investing in mentorship and creating environments where emerging professionals can thrive. Every intern represents the next generation of municipal leaders.

I am grateful for the opportunity that AMCTO, my host municipality, Hastings County and the Ministry provided through MMIP. It helped launch a career dedicated to municipal service and it reinforced a belief that when we invest in developing people, we invest in stronger municipalities and stronger communities.

The future of Ontario's municipal sector depends on the leaders we develop today. Internship programs are one of the best investments we can make to ensure that future is bright. ■■■

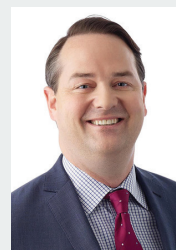


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Supporting You Through 'Silly Season'



David Arbuckle, MPA
Executive Director,
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No matter your role in municipal government — chief administrative officer, clerk, treasurer, bylaw officer, administrative assistant or one of the many other positions that keep local government moving — election season brings a noticeable energy to our communities and workplaces.

This October, communities across Ontario will elect their local

representatives for the next four-year term. Some familiar faces may return to council, while new members will bring fresh ideas, priorities and perspectives to the table.

Those elected will help shape local policies, programs and projects, as well as the professional environment in which municipal staff do their work. AMCTO members continue to tell us that strong council-staff relationships are



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essential to workplace culture, organizational effectiveness and public trust.

Whether your municipality experiences significant change following the 2026 election or continues with familiar leadership around the council table, AMCTO is here to support you and your colleagues as you build relationships, set priorities, support orientation and manage expectations for the term ahead.

As an Association, our work in supporting you through municipal election “silly season” started way back in 2023. Countless hours from AMCTO members and staff have gone into the development of our municipal elections training program and materials to help guide you and your staff through this pivotal event.

Through education, accreditation, corporate training, forums and workshops, AMCTO helps members strengthen their understanding of local government, political acuity and the often-complex council-staff environment. These opportunities connect members with practical knowledge, experienced professionals and peers who understand the realities of municipal service.

Beyond formal programming, members often tell us that AMCTO’s network is especially valuable during



times of change. If your municipality experiences significant council turnover, we encourage you to connect with AMCTO colleagues for advice, perspective and support from those who have navigated similar transitions.

We know many members and municipal teams are already investing significant time and care into preparing for the 2026 elections. Thank you for the important work you do to support the democratic process in your communities. AMCTO is proud to support you in this important undertaking, as one council chapter concludes and the next begins. 🏛️

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WHO CONTROLS REGIONAL GOVERNMENT

Strong Chair Powers Put Local Democracy to the Test in Ontario

By Glenn Johnson

Ontario's decision to appoint the heads of eight upper-tier municipal governments and give them powers similar to those held by strong mayors has opened a wider debate about local democracy, administrative accountability and the relationship between Queen's Park and municipalities.

The *Better Regional Governance Act, 2026*, commonly known as Bill 100, gives the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing authority to appoint the regional chairs of Durham, Halton, Niagara, Peel, Waterloo and York, the chair of the District Municipality of Muskoka and the warden of Simcoe County.

Beginning with the council term following the 2026 municipal election, those appointed heads of council will also receive "strong chair" powers modelled on Ontario's strong mayor framework.

The legislation also changes the composition of some upper-tier councils. Niagara Regional Council will be reduced from 32 members to 13, including the mayors of its 12 lower-tier municipalities and the regional chair. Simcoe County Council will be reduced from 32 members to 17, consisting of the mayors of its 16 lower-tier municipalities and the appointed warden.

The province says the changes will make regional government more efficient, reduce costs and accelerate decisions involving housing and infrastructure.

"We will always support our municipal partners, both lower- and upper-tier, in delivering locally-led solutions that offer better value for taxpayers and speed up decision-making," Municipal Affairs and Housing Minister Rob Flack said, when the province announced the legislation on April 2.

"These changes provide the necessary tools for local leadership to advance our shared priorities and better serve our

communities, including by expediting housing and infrastructure development."

Bill 100 received Royal Assent in May. Its practical effects will become clearer after Ontario's October municipal elections. For municipal organizations, the question is not simply whether decisions can be made more quickly. It is whether speed can be achieved without weakening local accountability, disrupting municipal administration or reducing residents' ability to influence how their communities are governed.

Scope and Influence

Zachary Spicer, an associate professor at York University's School of Public Policy and Administration, said the scope of the powers being extended to appointed chairs is unusual.

"One of the biggest challenges is that these powers are fairly unprecedented in terms of their scope," Spicer said. "Strong chairs have significant authority, including the ability to hire and fire certain staff, such as a chief administrative officer, and to reorganize municipal government."

Under the strong mayor framework that the province intends to mirror, heads of council can exercise authority over budgets, organizational structures and senior appointments. They can also propose certain bylaws connected to provincial priorities and veto bylaws they believe could interfere with those priorities and override provisions set out in provincial legislation.

The significant difference, Spicer said, is that strong mayors are locally elected. "Unlike strong mayors, who are at least elected by local residents, strong chairs can be appointed by the province and may not even live in the communities they oversee," he said. "That raises serious questions about how well they understand local issues and whether they are attuned to the priorities of residents."



An appointed chair may bring experience, independence and the ability to work across municipal boundaries. Yet the absence of a direct or council-based electoral mandate creates a different accountability relationship. Residents dissatisfied with a chair's decisions cannot vote that person out of office. Regional councillors may also have limited influence over a chair whose appointment and possible removal rests with the province. For Spicer, that is more than a procedural change.

"Municipal governments exist to serve their residents," he said. "They don't exist simply to carry out provincial priorities. What we're seeing is a shift toward municipalities being expected to implement provincial objectives rather than responding primarily to local concerns."

For municipal administrators, changes to political authority can quickly become workplace and governance issues.

David Arbuckle, executive director of AMCTO, said provincial legislation introduced without significant consultation has increasingly affected the ability of municipalities and other local government organizations to govern effectively.

"While legislation potentially can speed up the implementation of provincial priorities, the result has been more centralized decision-making from Queen's Park, reduced local authority and accountability, and operational uncertainty for municipal professionals," Arbuckle said.

He warned that the trend risks eroding local democracy, increasing community mistrust and weakening public confidence in both elected and administrative decision-making.

A Blurring of Authority

AMCTO has previously raised concerns about strong mayor powers involving organizational structures, employment matters and the relationship between elected officials and professional staff. It has asked the province to remove powers over administrative and employment matters from the strong mayor framework and not extend them to regional chairs.

From the Association's perspective, the risks include blurring the lines between political and administrative authority, creating inconsistencies in decision-making and leaving the employment and effectiveness of senior staff vulnerable to the decisions of one political office-holder.

The chief administrative officer (CAO) occupies a particularly important position.

A CAO must provide professional advice to council, manage the municipal organization and ensure council decisions are implemented. Giving one head of council greater control over the CAO's appointment or dismissal can alter that relationship, even when the authority is never formally exercised.

"Strong chair powers carry with them the same risks" identified under the strong mayor system, Arbuckle said, including administrative burdens associated with interpreting the legislation and "blurring the lines of political and administrative authority, particularly between the mayor and chief administrative officer."

The concern is not necessarily that appointed chairs will routinely interfere in municipal administration. Rather, uncertainty about who holds authority and how it may be used can affect staff advice, council relationships, recruitment and long-term organizational planning.

The Association of Municipalities of Ontario (AMO) has called on the government to reverse the appointment provisions. Lindsay Jones, AMO's executive director, said expanding the provincial role in local decisions can separate community choices from the people who experience their consequences.

"Neighbourhoods stop being shaped by the people who live in them," Jones said. "Centralization means Queen's Park decides what's best for communities it doesn't directly serve." She described provincial appointment of municipal leaders as fundamentally undemocratic. "Residents can't fire someone they didn't elect, and that weakens accountability."

AMO has argued that regional chairs need a local mandate, a strong understanding of municipal government and the ability to build trust among mayors, councillors,

staff and residents. The Association has also warned that an appointed chair with enhanced powers could overturn or redirect decisions made by elected council members.

Day to day, Jones said, the model could create confusion over who is accountable and could slow operations if municipal leaders believe they must wait for provincial direction.

That concern points to a tension within the government's stated objective. Concentrating authority may make some decisions faster, particularly when the chair and province share priorities. But conflict among the chair, council and municipal staff could produce delay rather than efficiency. Much will depend on who is appointed, the selection criteria used and the leadership style each chair brings to the role.

Spicer said the province's success will be determined less by the words of the legislation than by how the positions function in practice.

"The effectiveness of the system will depend largely on who is appointed and the leadership style they bring to the role," he said. Appointees with local knowledge, municipal experience and a collaborative approach may be able to develop productive relationships. Those viewed as outsiders or extensions of Queen's Park could face difficulty establishing legitimacy.

The Impact on Local Elections

The timing of Bill 100 has created another set of concerns. Ballots for the October election, nomination procedures, public information, voting technology and candidate materials were developed around the offices voters expected to fill. Bill 100 provides for nominations already filed for affected offices to be deemed withdrawn.



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Associate Professor, School of
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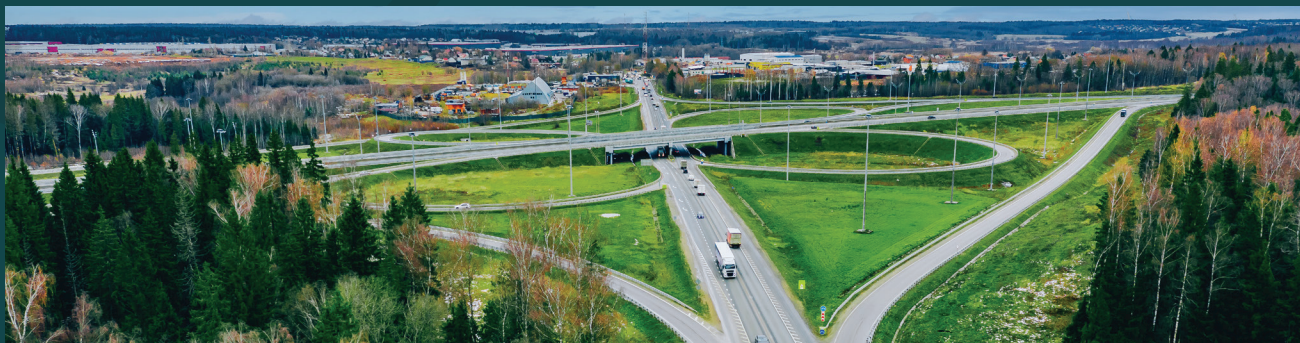
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“The provincial government ignored AMCTO’s advice that changing the overall governance structure of municipalities this close to the municipal election would create confusion for the electorate and unnecessary burden on municipalities,” Arbuckle said.

Clerks have shown resilience in adapting, he said, but the most important effect is democratic rather than technical: voters in affected municipalities won’t be able to choose who becomes regional chair, either through a direct vote or through selection by council.

“This is a direct loss in the voter’s ability to participate in their local democracy, both during the election and during the term of council,” Arbuckle said.

The restructuring could also change the field of candidates. Spicer said regional politicians whose positions have been eliminated may seek seats on lower-tier councils, potentially making some races more competitive. Candidates may also use the appointment issue to distinguish themselves by promising to defend local priorities or press the province for greater consultation.

Jones worries that removing key positions from the ballot could affect whether residents see value in voting or whether potential candidates believe local office offers meaningful influence.

“When key roles are appointed instead of elected, people may feel their voice matters less,” she said.

However, AMO has welcomed the province’s commitment to enact municipal code-of-conduct reforms before the October election, arguing that stronger accountability measures can help build public trust.

Early Consultation and Ongoing Conversations

Ontario faces major housing, infrastructure and growth pressures. Disagreement is over whether concentrating authority at Queen’s Park is the best way to respond. For municipal leaders and

administrators, a more durable approach may begin with earlier consultation.

Arbuckle said provincial legislation has sometimes been enacted without full consideration of its financial and governance effects, forcing the government to later reverse or modify elements. Those course corrections can create confusion and distract from the original policy objective.

“When different orders of government work together at the very early stages, scope can be defined and goals, tactics, outcomes and costs become much clearer,” he said. “This provides everyone, including the municipal staff who are responsible for implementation, with clear direction.”

Jones also called for the province to work with municipalities rather than in place of them.

“That means early consultation, shared problem-solving and listening to what communities are actually experiencing on the ground,” she said.

Spicer said communication will be especially important if the appointment model remains. Appointees should have meaningful local knowledge and mechanisms to communicate community concerns back to the province. Queen’s Park, in turn, must be receptive to what it hears.

Bill 100 is now law, and the test will come after the election, when appointed chairs begin working with newly elected councils, CAOs and municipal staff.

The province will judge the system partly by whether it accelerates housing, infrastructure and regional decisions. Municipalities and residents are likely to apply a broader test: whether it produces effective government while preserving local representation, administrative professionalism and public confidence. ■■



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THE DIRT ON CEMETERIES

Understanding Financial Compliance

By Crystal Forrest, PhD, and Darren Denomme

This is part 2 of The Dirt on Cemeteries – a four-part series created in collaboration with the Bereavement Authority of Ontario (BAO), the Ontario Association of Cemetery and Funeral Professionals (OACFP) and AMCTO. See part 1 in the Municipal Monitor Q2-2026 edition and stay tuned for parts 3-4 in future editions.

Municipal finance professionals are accustomed to managing reserve funds, deferred revenues, development charges and statutory reporting obligations. Cemetery operations add a unique requirement: ensuring financial sustainability in perpetuity.

Ontario's *Funeral, Burial and Cremation Services Act, 2002* (FBCSA), establishes a financial framework designed to protect both consumers and the long-term sustainability of cemetery operations. This article outlines this framework and provides information to help municipalities manage cemetery funds.

Why Cemetery Funds Are Different

Unlike many municipal revenues, cemetery funds are purpose-specific and have statutory restrictions regarding:

- When it must be deposited;
- Where and how it may be invested;
- How it must be reported; and,
- What it can — and cannot — be used for.

These requirements exist because cemetery operators are managing funds that have been entrusted to them for future obligations.

The Two Funds Every Municipality Should Understand

Although both care and maintenance funds and prepaid trust funds involve financial restrictions, they exist for different reasons and are governed by different requirements.

Type 1: Care and Maintenance Funds

A care and maintenance (C&M) fund is a legislated, restricted fund that supports the perpetual care of a cemetery (see especially Part IV of the FBCSA and Part I Division G and Part III Division B of Ontario Regulation 30/11). Prescribed contributions are deposited into the fund whenever interment or scattering rights are sold, assigned or transferred and when a marker or monument is installed.

The fund's principal is preserved, while investment income supports eligible maintenance activities, ensuring cemetery users contribute to its long-term care.

Type 2: Prepaid Trust Funds

Prepaid trust funds serve a different purpose. These funds are paid by consumers and intended for cemetery supplies or services (except interment rights¹) that have not yet been delivered (see especially Part VI of the FBCSA and Part I Division F of Ontario Regulation 30/11). For example, if someone pre-pays for their interment service or marker inscription.

Rather than supporting ongoing cemetery care, prepaid trust funds ensure that the funds remain available until the operator fulfils the contractual obligations.

Managing Care and Maintenance Funds

For most municipalities, C&M funds are the primary ongoing financial compliance obligation and require an understanding of key principles.

Contributions

Contributions to the fund are calculated based on a prescribed amount, or percentage of the price of interment or scattering rights and on the size of any marker or monument installed. There are also minimum deposits that must be made (C&M calculator) When interment or scattering rights are sold, prescribed contributions must be deposited into the care and maintenance fund within the timelines established under the legislation.

These amounts are not discretionary and are separate from the municipality's operating budget.

Investments

The FBCSA specifies the types of investments that may be used for C&M funds.

The intent is to ensure these investments preserve and grow capital while

generating stable income to support long-term maintenance.

Use of Investment Income

The investment income generated by the fund is also restricted. It may only be used for purposes authorized under the legislation, such as maintaining and preserving cemetery grounds, structures and monuments.

Expansion Projects

While C&M fund principal must be preserved to support the cemetery's long-term care, the FBCSA permits operators, with the registrar's prior approval, to borrow from the fund to increase interment rights capacity. Any borrowing must be governed by a repayment agreement. Given the statutory purpose of these funds, operators should contact the BAO at FinancialCompliance@thebao.ca before considering borrowing or other non-routine uses.

Annual Reporting Matters

Financial stewardship also means demonstrating that restricted funds have been managed in accordance with the legislation.

**Did You Know?**



Care and maintenance funds and prepaid trust funds are **not** interchangeable.



One supports the **perpetual care** of the cemetery.



The other **protects advance payments** made by consumers.



Each has its own **reporting and compliance** requirements.

¹ Interment rights are never prepaid funds because ownership of the rights transfers to the purchaser at the time of sale. The sale does, however, require the cemetery operator to make the prescribed contribution to the care and maintenance fund in accordance with the FBCSA.

Depending on the operator's circumstances, annual reporting may include:

- Form 2 – Report on Care & Maintenance;
- Trust fund statements;
- Prepaid trust reporting; and
- Independent compliance audits or review engagement reports.

“
Cemetery operations add a unique requirement: ensuring financial sustainability in perpetuity.
”

Annual Audits: Demonstrating Financial Compliance

Cemetery operators with a C&M fund of \$500,000 or more, or those operating a funeral establishment on cemetery property, must obtain an annual audit report focused on compliance with the FBCSA's financial requirements.

Reports are generally due within six months of the fiscal year-end. Operators



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Contribution Type	Contribution Amount (effective January 1, 2022)
In-ground graves that are 2.23 m ² (24 ft ²) or larger	\$290 or 40% of price (whichever is greater)
In-ground grave that is smaller than 2.23 m ² (24 ft ²)	\$175 or 40% of price (whichever is greater)
Tomb, crypt or compartment in a public mausoleum	\$830 or 20% of price (whichever is greater)
Niche or compartment in a public columbarium	\$165 or 15% of price (whichever is greater)
Scattering ground for which there will be only one scattering rights holder	\$115 or 40% of price (whichever is greater)
Scattering ground for which there will be more than one scattering rights holder	\$30 or 15% of price (whichever is greater)
Scattering ground for which there will be no scattering rights holder	\$30
A private mausoleum provided or constructed by a person other than the cemetery operator is installed in a cemetery	\$575 multiplied by the number of tombs, crypts, compartments or 20% of the sum of specified prices (whichever is greater)
A private columbarium provided or constructed by a person other than the cemetery operator is installed in a cemetery	\$115 multiplied by the number of niches and compartments or 15% of the sum of specified prices (whichever is greater)
To establish a cemetery	\$165,000
Flat marker measuring less than 1,116.13 cm ² (173 in ²)	\$0
Flat marker measuring at least 1,116.23 cm ² (173 in ²)	\$100
Upright marker measuring 1.22 m (4 ft) or less in height and 1.22 m (4 ft) or less in length, including the base	\$200
Upright marker measuring more than 1.22 m (4 ft) in either height or length, including the base	\$400

requiring additional time may apply to the BAO for an extension before the filing deadline with appropriate supporting documentation.

Common Misunderstandings

Most financial compliance issues arise not from intentional non-compliance, but from misunderstandings about the unique financial requirements of cemetery operations.

Some of the most common include:

- Assuming inactive cemeteries (those with no outstanding interment rights to be fulfilled) have fewer reporting obligations;
- Treating C&M funds like municipal reserve funds;
- Misunderstanding when contributions must be deposited;
- Overlooking audit thresholds;
- Assuming a financial statement audit satisfies legislative reporting requirements; and
- Assuming C&M is a markup (like a tax) on price, and not a margin.

Early education and good internal processes can prevent many of these issues.

Five Questions Every Municipal Treasurer Should Ask

- ✓ Do we know who is responsible for our cemetery's administrative and financial reporting?

- ✓ Do we understand the difference between C&M funds and prepaid trust funds?
- ✓ Are restricted funds clearly separated from municipal operating accounts?
- ✓ Do we know whether audit reporting requirements apply to our cemetery?
- ✓ Are reporting deadlines built into our annual financial calendar?

Financial Stewardship Builds Public Trust

More than a compliance mechanism, the FBCSA's financial framework safeguards consumers and promotes the sustainable stewardship of cemetery trust funds.

For clerks and treasurers, understanding this framework is essential to managing one of a municipality's most unique responsibilities. A C&M contribution calculator, sample forms and templates, compliance checklists and a resource hub can be found on the BAO's website, or you can reach out to FinancialCompliance@thebao.ca for assistance.

Looking Ahead

Financial stewardship is only one part of effective cemetery administration.

In the next article, "Records, Boundaries and Missing Information: Managing the Unknown," we'll explore practical approaches to managing incomplete cemetery records, clarifying boundaries and protecting both municipal interests and community history. ■



2026 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 2026 AMCTO Awards program. Award recipients were honoured during the 2026 AMCTO Conference Awards Gala Dinner that took place on June 9 at Deerhurst Resort in Huntsville, Ont. Joined by family, friends and their municipal peers, participants were recognized for their innovation and dedication to their municipalities, communities and the Association.

"This year's award recipients are a talented group of municipal professionals across all nine AMCTO Zones who have worked hard to advance the profession through their commitment and dedication to their communities, continuous learning and professional development," said AMCTO 2025-26 president Danielle Manton.



David Arbuckle, MPA
Executive Director
AMCTO

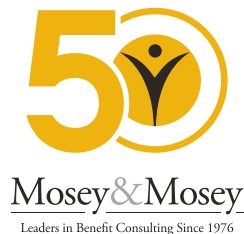


Danielle Manton, AOMC, Dipl.M.M.
2025-2026 Board President
AMCTO

"On behalf of the AMCTO board of directors and staff, thank you for the work that you do to serve our Association and the sector."

- David Arbuckle, MPA, AMCTO Executive Director

Thank You to our 2026 Awards Gala Sponsors



2026 Prestige Award

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



Lori J. McDonald, CMO
Director of Corporate Services/Clerk
Town of Bracebridge

The 2026 Prestige Award recipient, Lori McDonald, is an exemplary municipal professional who continually demonstrates excellence in all aspects of her work. She is a champion of continuous learning and professional development, setting a high standard for others in Ontario's municipal sector. Lori has served as clerk with the Town of Bracebridge for 20 years, where her role has continued to evolve. Throughout this time, she has maintained a high level of professionalism and expertise while adapting to increasing demands and legislative changes. Her commitment to professional growth — for herself, her teams, her community and others — has allowed her to succeed and serve with grace, determination and integrity.

At the Town of Bracebridge, Lori oversees a department of 15 staff. Through her leadership, her staff have been able to grow their knowledge and skills within their individual roles and together as a team. By allowing her staff to participate in many professional development opportunities, she provides them with the tools and confidence to step up and take on new challenges. She is a supportive mentor who encourages her colleagues to carve out their own career paths within the municipal sector, demonstrating how to be an effective leader. As Lori has endless credentials based on her own continuing education, plus many years of municipal and provincial professional experience, she is the unofficial mentor for clerks throughout the District of Muskoka. She openly offers support and advice based on her experiences and makes herself available to lend a helping hand or a listening ear when needed.

As a long-time AMCTO member, Lori has participated in many working groups, professional development sessions and advisory boards. She contributes to the Association and the sector by organizing opportunities to speak to fellow members and other key sector stakeholders. Through her efforts, the Muskoka clerks have advocated for important community reforms and broader issues to support all staff across Ontario's municipal sector.

Congratulations and thank you, Lori!

2025-2026 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.



Town of Collingwood

Category: Municipal Administration
Municipalities of 20,000 or more
Project: Short-term Accommodation Licensing and Modernization Initiative

Pictured from left to right: Hannah Rockbrune, Co-ordinator, Bylaw Services, Sara Almas, Director of Legislative Services/Clerk and Amanda Fone, Licensing Program and Compliance Officer, with Danielle Manton (middle), AMCTO President



Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville

Category: Municipal Administration
Municipalities of 20,000 or more
Project: Modernizing Service Requests

Jennifer Peplinski, Town Clerk, and Paul Lefaive, Data and Analytics Analyst, with Danielle Manton

Certificate of Merit



City of Kenora

Category: Municipal Administration
Municipalities of 20,000 or less
Project: Modernizing Public Transit for Kenora

Heather Pihulak, Deputy CAO and City Clerk, with Danielle Manton



United Counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry

Category: Municipal Administration
Municipalities of 20,000 or more
Project: Emergency Collaboration in the Exercise Trillium Response

Katherine Beehler, Training and Management Co-ordinator, with Danielle Manton

2025-2026 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 are presented 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

Steven Melnichuk (not pictured)
Director, Information Services
District Municipality of Muskoka

Award for Excellence in Municipal Accounting & Finance

Sponsored by Watson & Associates Economists Ltd.
Steph Vanthof (not pictured)
Member Service Representative
Ontario Federation of Agriculture



Award for Excellence in Municipal Law

Sponsored by Thomson Rogers LLP

Rebecca Zanussi
Clerk
Township of Ramara



Award for Excellence in Municipal Human Resources

Sponsored by Cunningham Swan Lawyers

Dani D'Angelo
Senior Administrative Assistant to General Managers
Town of New Tecumseth



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

Lori Hoddinott, Dipl.M.A.
Mayor
Township of McNab/Braeside



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

Ryan Donally, Dipl.M.M.
President & CEO
Windsor-Essex Regional Chamber of Commerce

Sarah McMillan, Dipl.M.M. (not pictured)
Deputy Treasurer/Manager of Finance
United Counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry

Kelly Provost, Dipl.M.M. (not pictured)
Director, Economic Development
City of Sarnia

2026 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

Duncan McTavish, AMCT
Retired (Former Clerk)
Township of Enniskillen



Zone 2

Pamela Fettes, CMO, AOMC, Dipl.M.A.
Director, Administrative Services/Clerk
Town of New Tecumseth



Zone 3

Julie Kirkelos, Dipl.M.M.
Director of Legislative, Enterprise and
Information Services/Town Clerk
Town of Lincoln



Zone 4

Evan Read, AMP, Dipl.M.M.
Manager, Election, Registration and Protocol
Services
City of Vaughan



Zone 5

Typhany Choinard, CMO, AOMC
CAO/Clerk
Municipality of Centre Hastings



Zone 7

Kris Croskery-Hodgins
Clerk/Treasurer
Township of Nipissing



Zone 8

Jennifer Montreuil, Dipl.M.A.
Clerk
Town of Kirkland Lake

Zone 6

Kelly Pender, MBA (not pictured)
Retired (Former CAO)
County of Frontenac

Zone 9

Kelly Galbraith (not pictured)
Deputy Clerk/Manager, Customer Service
City of Kenora

Members are encouraged to keep an eye out for nominations to open in the new year for the 2027 Awards Program. In the meantime, mark your calendars and **save the date** to celebrate with us at next year's conference, taking place **June 13-16, 2027**, at **Blue Mountain Resort**.



THE MISSING YOUTH VOTE

Why Oakville's Young Residents Aren't Voting – Yet

By Maryam Abouelela

Scroll through the Instagram or TikTok feed of an average 19-year-old Oakville resident and you'll find plenty of opinions about the world: about housing, about climate, about fairness. What you won't find much of is anything about Canadian municipalities' own town halls. Not because young residents don't care about where they live, but because almost nothing about local government has been built to reach them where they already are.

That gap sits at the centre of a four-month research project conducted inside the Town of Oakville's elections and communications teams, in partnership with Mitacs and AMCTO. The broader project examined turnout across six priority groups, but one finding kept surfacing: young people 18-25 years old are not the disengaged group they're often assumed to be. They're an under-reached one. And those are two remarkably different problems with two remarkably different solutions.

The Information Gap Nobody Told Municipalities About

Municipal elections don't come with the built-in scrutiny of a federal campaign. There's no national press corps parsing every candidate's record, no decades-old party machine correcting the record when something false starts circulating. That absence creates what researchers call an information void, and for young voters in particular, the void gets filled by whatever content shows up in their social media feeds first.

Research conducted with the Town of Oakville through McMaster University's political science program found something worth contemplating: local youth are highly digitally active but largely disconnected from formal civic information channels.¹ They aren't avoiding political information. They're consuming plenty of it, just from sources that have never included their own municipality. That combination makes them more likely to encounter, and less equipped to evaluate, election misinformation when it does appear, whether that's confusion about voting logistics or distorted claims about a candidate.

¹ H. Bassan et al., "Youth Participation in Municipal Politics: Shortcomings and Solutions," McMaster University Department of Political Science, 2024. <https://politicalscience.mcmaster.ca/app/uploads/2024/06/Town-of-Oakville-Research-paper.pdf>.



This isn't a new problem so much as an old one that's intensified. Public engagement research out of Edmonton,² conducted a decade ago, already found that confusion about basic voting logistics was one of the most common reasons residents gave for not participating, and that many people couldn't reliably distinguish an official notice from an unofficial one. Social media has only widened that gap and municipal governments have been slow to show up on the platforms where the confusion lives.

The fix isn't a lecture about civic duty. It's presence. Edmonton's research points toward a genuine, professionally run social media presence for the 2026 municipal election on Instagram, TikTok and YouTube, not just a municipal website, built with short-form explainer content addressing the specific questions and misconceptions young residents have. Partnering with municipalities' high schools, post-secondary institutions and youth-serving organizations would extend the reach of key election information further

than municipalities can manage alone. A single, trustworthy information hub that uses plain language, is updated in real time and includes a FAQ section that directly rebuts the misinformation would give young residents one credible place to fact-check before they believe the information or share it.

Representation Matters on the Ballot

The second half of the youth story is about running for office.

Democratic legitimacy depends on more than turnout; it depends on whether the candidates on the ballot look anything like the people voting. Research into Canadian municipal politics has found that voter turnout tends to track representation: when residents see their own age, background and lived experience reflected among candidates, participation rises. A homogeneous slate sends the opposite signal, whether or not anyone intends it to.

Locally, that pattern shows up clearly. Research conducted with the Town of Oakville found that young residents

are far from apathetic about local issues; many are genuinely engaged with them. What young residents consistently describe is a path to candidacy that feels steep and unsupported: financial costs for campaign materials and filing fees, real-time demands that are hard to absorb alongside school or early career obligations and a sense that there's no one showing them how any of it actually works.

That last piece matters more than it might seem. Filing nomination papers, understanding campaign finance rules, knowing ward boundaries — none of it is intuitive, and without a mentor or an existing connection to local politics, first-time candidates face a steep, largely unmarked learning curve. Research on what actually predicts whether a first-time candidate completes the nomination process points to exactly this: access to mentorship is one of the strongest factors separating people who run from people who consider it and quietly decide not to.³

Layer onto this the documented pattern of online harassment aimed disproportionately at candidates from marginalized groups, a pattern with a visible chilling effect that extends well beyond whoever is directly targeted, and it becomes easier to understand why so many young Oakville residents with real ideas about their community never end up filing the paperwork.

The recommendations that follow are less about convincing young people to care and more about removing the specific obstacles in front of them. These include:

- An outreach campaign that combines a structured mentorship program pairing first-time and underrepresented candidates, including young residents, with experienced municipal politicians and administrators;
- Group sessions on the nomination process; and

² City of Edmonton, "Public Engagement Findings: Understanding Voter Needs," 2016. https://www.edmonton.ca/sites/default/files/public-files/assets/elections/Understanding_Voters_Needs_report_FINAL_Aug_8_2016.pdf.

³ R. M. McGregor et al., "The Canadian Municipal Election Study," *Frontiers in Political Science*, 3, 745331, 2021. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpos.2021.745331>.

- A public awareness campaign, featuring testimonials from young and diverse local officeholders, that actively invites residents who've never pictured themselves on a ballot to reconsider.

Co-ordinated by municipalities with organizations such as Equal Voice, which specialize in this kind of civic engagement, this type of initiative could significantly help to remove barriers and build confidence among young residents to get them involved in local politics.

Some of the most promising ideas are also the simplest. Oakville already has a network of engaged, credible young messengers in its annual Oakville Youth Awards: recipients are recognized for local leadership and already trusted by their peers. Bringing that group in to help lead voter engagement outreach, whether through peer-to-peer registration drives, social content or school and community presentations, would cost the Town relatively little while adding a layer of authenticity that no official campaign can replicate on its own. It is also a model with an obvious second life: any municipality that already runs its own youth recognition program has the same untapped resource sitting in its alumni list.

Not Apathy. A Missed Connection.

It would be easy to describe Canadian municipalities' low youth turnout as a generational shrug, one more example of young people tuning out from institutions. However, the research doesn't support that story. What it shows is a connection that has never quite been made: a generation that is politically engaged, opinionated and active online, meeting a local government that has largely not shown up on the platforms, in the language or through the trusted messengers that Gen Z uses.

That is a solvable gap, not a permanent one. It doesn't require convincing young Canadians that local politics matter; it requires building the bridge: providing information that meets them

where they are, providing opportunities for mentorship for those who want to run and creating a visible, credible signal that town halls were built with them in mind, too.

Oakville is one of the fastest growing municipalities in the region and its youngest residents will be the ones living longest with the decisions made in the next council term. The 2026 municipal election is a chance for Oakville to find out what turnout looks like when young residents are asked to participate, in the ways

they'd expect to be asked. Based on everything this research uncovered, the answer might surprise a town that's been reading their silence as disinterest.

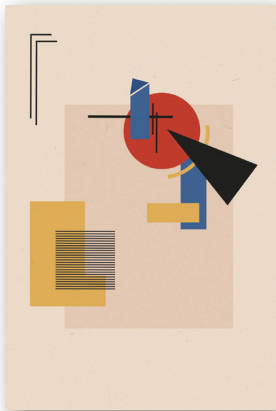
Maryam Aboulela is a student at Western University whose project, Enhancing Engagement in Oakville: Voter and Candidate Outreach for the 2026 Municipal Election, was completed as part of the first 2026 cohort of the AMCTO Municipal Innovation Internship Program (MIIP). ■■



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Stouffville



Representatives from the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville accept the E.A. Danby Award.

MUNICIPAL INNOVATION RECOGNIZED

Celebrating This Year's E.A. Danby Award Winners

By Linda Slobodian

Municipalities that achieved outstanding success in short-term accommodation housing, improved service delivery, public transit and emergency management received E.A. Danby Awards at AMCTO's annual conference in June.

The Town of Collingwood was recognized for its Short-Term Accommodation (STA) Licensing and Modernization Initiative and the Town of Whitchurch-Stouffville for its Service Request Modernization (SRM) project. Both represent municipalities of 20,000 or more. The City of Kenora, representing municipalities under 20,000, won an award for its Modernizing Public Transit project. The United Counties of Stormont, Dundas and Glengarry (SDG) won a certificate of merit for its Emergency Collaboration in the Exercise Trillium Response in the 20,000 or more category.

Collingwood Addresses Rapid STA Growth

Collingwood's STA initiative, representing a community-driven approach to municipal policy development, resulted in strengthened delivery service and improved community outcomes to how STAs are managed. It's held up as a replicable model for municipalities across Ontario.

"Receiving the E.A. Danby Award is an incredible honour for the Town of Collingwood. More than anything, it recognizes the dedication, collaboration and countless hours contributed by staff across multiple departments, council, stakeholders and members of our community throughout the development and implementation of the Short-Term Accommodation Licensing Program," said Amanda Fone, the Town's licensing program and compliance officer.

The initiative addresses the rapid growth of STAs and their impact on long-term housing availability, neighbourhood character and municipal enforcement.

"From the beginning, our goal was not simply to create another municipal bylaw. We wanted to develop a licensing program that struck a thoughtful balance, one that supported responsible tourism while protecting the character of our neighbourhoods and responding to the concerns we were hearing from residents," said Fone.

"Like many municipalities, we recognized that short-term accommodations presented both opportunities and challenges, and it was important that our approach reflected the unique needs and priorities of Collingwood. Achieving that took years of research, public engagement, policy development and collaboration across the organization and with our community."

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Officials from the Town of Collingwood receive the E.A. Danby Award.

Fone added: “One of the greatest lessons from this experience is that there is no one-size-fits-all approach to regulating short-term accommodations. Every municipality faces its own unique circumstances and priorities. Taking the time to listen, engage with residents and stakeholders, collaborate across departments and develop a program that reflects your community’s values is well worth the investment.”

Modernized Service Delivery

Whitchurch-Stouffville created an in-house solution to modernize service delivery by improving how residents connect with the town to submit requests and access municipal services. Staff conceived, designed and built the SRM without new funding.

“The Service Request Modernization project has made it easier for residents to report concerns, track progress and stay informed, while also improving efficiency, accountability and transparency across the organization,” said Cassandra Tornabene, the Town’s manager of customer service and community services.

“The award reinforces the importance of innovation and continuous improvement in municipal service delivery and demonstrates what can be achieved when teams collaborate toward a shared vision. It is especially meaningful as the solution was developed in-house, showcasing how municipalities can leverage existing resources to deliver transformative results.”

To address a growing town’s needs, staff reimagined existing resources to create a modern, web-based solution. The platform includes applications accessible to staff both in the office and in the field, enabling greater efficiency. Staff also created a public-facing tool allowing residents to submit service requests any time, from anywhere. The system has reduced the average case-closure time by six days and enabled real-time citizen feedback.

“We are proud to have this work recognized by our municipal peers and view the award as encouragement to continue pursuing innovative solutions that enhance the service experience,” said Tornabene.

Demand-Responsive Transit Services

The Wave is the City of Kenora's on-demand public transit service designed to replace fixed-route buses with a more flexible, reliable and accessible system.

Riders, who have consistently rated their Wave experience an average 4.9 out of five stars, can book trips through mobile app or by phone. The service, which saw its first full year of operation in 2025, groups passengers travelling in similar directions to keep trips efficient and affordable.

"Hearing impact stories from a cross-section of our residents has proven that this new public transit system has significant impact to many of our residents," said Heather Pihulak, Kenora's deputy CAO/city clerk.

"Seniors can now depend on public transportation rather than owning vehicles. New residents to our community without vehicles, students getting to co-op programs and to/from school, residents getting to and from work are all familiar stories that continue to be heard. These stories inspire me to continue to grow the service and continue to build upon the highly successful service that exists today," she said.

The Wave is considered one of Canada's most efficient demand-responsive transit services. Wheelchair-accessible vehicles are integrated into the fleet and drivers receive specialized accessibility and safety training.

"This award recognition belongs to the entire team behind The Wave. Council identified public transit as a priority and wanted to improve the public transportation service than what was being delivered. City staff worked tirelessly to bring this service to life, and our partners at Via have been instrumental in delivering a reliable, innovative system," Pihulak said.

Emergency Response Readiness

Exercise Trillium Response demonstrated the SDG Counties' operations-focused approach to emergency management by rigorously testing real procedures under sustained, escalating pressure. During a three-day exercise last January, participants endured severe winter conditions followed by a simulated train derailment involving a hazardous chemical release. The exercise strengthened safety, readiness and operational confidence across SDG Counties.

"We made it a priority to be a local leader with respect to emergency management," said Todd Lihou, SDG Counties' corporate communications co-ordinator. "That's our goal: to mitigate the loss of life and the loss of property as much as possible."

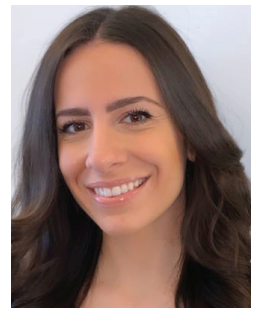
Lihou and Katherine Beehler, emergency management co-ordinator, worked a year in advance on the "all hands on deck" project that included "all of the local emergency management folks you can think of — police, fire, EMS; a lot of NGOs, Red Cross and the military." We wanted to make this as real as possible. What we simulated was a train derailment in our region that resulted in the release of chemicals. We were quickly overwhelmed as most municipalities would be in a situation like that, so we began a simulated request for assistance to essentially the provincial government, the provincial emergency operation centre, which then forwarded our request to the military, said Lihou.

"What we wanted to simulate was a large-scale exercise that would require co-ordination among not only local municipal folks but across the region. So, we're talking eight or nine municipalities in addition to federal and provincial agencies to mitigate this disaster."

In response to deliberately stressed local capacity, 150 Canadian Armed Forces members were deployed to the Cornwall Armoury where they integrated with municipal operations and logistics. The exercise validated SDG Counties' request-for-assistance processes and confirmed surge capacity for sheltering, transportation and site safety.

"We feel that if an emergency like this were to happen, while nobody's ever totally prepared, we know who we can call. We know what they have to offer and we know what they can do to help us mitigate that disaster," said Lihou.

Named for 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. The awards focus on the three broad categories of municipal finance, municipal administration and the implementation of legislation leading to tangible results related to the efficiency and effectiveness of the municipal corporation. ■■



Cassandra Tornabene
Manager of Customer
Service and Community
Services,
Town of Whitchurch-
Stouffville



Heather Pihulak
Deputy CAO/City Clerk,
City of Kenora



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MENTORSHIP MATTERS

How Strong Connections Build Stronger Municipal Careers

By Linda Slobodian

Jamie Eckenswiler was initially intimidated when he was paired with Yvonne Robert, AMCTO's 2017 president, upon his enrollment in the 2019-2020 AMCTO Mentorship Program. At the time, he was employed by the Township of Southgate as a legislative co-ordinator. His apprehension was short-lived.

"It was so simple and easy. I was never made to feel like I didn't know anything. I'm chatting with someone who has got decades of experience in this field and here's this fresh, green, young guy just trying to learn the ropes. It never felt like I couldn't ask a question. I never felt like any of the questions were silly. It was just a safe space to ask questions and soak up as much information as I could," said Eckenswiler.

The experience proved to be rewarding, but he was motivated by a desire to further enhance his skills. He enrolled again as a mentee the subsequent year after securing a position as a deputy clerk with the City of Owen Sound, intending to gain as much insight as he could from his second mentor, John Daly with the County of Simcoe.

Since 2022, Eckenswiler has served as the director of legislative services/clerk for the Municipality of West Grey, a role that entails significant responsibilities.

"If I didn't have the opportunity to be mentored, I think my career path and my trajectory would have taken longer than it did. I think that experience really did help build connections and open up new avenues I would have struggled to find on my own or would have taken a little bit longer to find. There's a huge benefit to that," he said.

He highly recommends joining the program as a mentor or mentee to "broaden your horizons" and help "build relationships and foster that sense of community in the sector."

Eckenswiler is committed to encouraging the development of emerging leaders and enhancing the profession through collaboration and education. He determined that the right step for him would be to pay it forward to "anyone else who is rising in this industry," so he applied to serve as a mentor in the 2025-2026 program.



Jamie Eckenswiler
Director,
Legislative Services/Clerk,
Municipality of West Grey

A significant aspect of AMCTO's successful free program involves pairing the appropriate mentor with the suitable mentee for one-on-one coaching. It matches experienced professionals and municipal leaders who provide guidance and support with those new to the municipal sector.

It was a perfect fit when Eckenswiller was paired with mentee Wendy Schroeder, deputy clerk/records management co-ordinator with the Municipality of Whitestone, for more than two years.

"It was fantastic. We had a really good working relationship throughout our time," he said. "I had such an easy time talking to Wendy. She was so kind, very knowledgeable and eager to learn and willing to seek advice and guidance whenever possible."

He added: "I'd discuss quite a number of things from elections to freedom of information, general governing, things of that nature. As much as I hope that I provided to her, she also helped me learn things as well."

Schroeder said that tapping into Eckenswiller's freely shared "wealth of experience" was "100 per cent beneficial."

"What I took away from the experience was more confidence. It's one thing to know things, but to be able to know that you know them and to know that you would have support in your knowledge and in your process and your approach, it's a different thing," she said.

"I have a contact who I know knows things. It makes it easy for me to reach out to him especially because we have that relationship. The other thing I took out of the program is there are others who have been there before. They have seen things before, things that I might be going through. Knowing that I can reach out, should reach out, is again another confidence (booster). I don't have to do this alone," she said.

Schroeder is keenly aware that she is accountable to both council and residents; therefore, accuracy is imperative.

"It's incredibly important. You have to make sure that residents know that you have the proper information and have it as current as possible," she said. "It takes time to organize your thoughts, to find somebody to speak with. But (that) takes less time than it does to go it alone. Once you've found that person, you're saving yourself time."

AMCTO's Mentorship Program is designed to enable members to expand skills, knowledge and professional development through a flexible format. The program's main goals are to:

- Leverage the value of professional local government experience;
- Develop the mentorship capacity of local government professionals; and
- Establish meaningful relationships for members and those within the sector.

"The program continues to grow year over year with members signing up to make new connections with their

municipal peers across the province," said Nathalie Plourde, advisor for membership and accreditation at AMCTO.

"It's always rewarding to see those newer to the sector get more involved in their Association and learn from seasoned veterans. It's also great to see those with more experience passing on their knowledge and insights to emerging municipal leaders," Plourde added.

Another mentor-mentee pairing involved Jaclyn Grossi, municipal clerk with the Town of Ajax, and Jenn Churchill, legislative specialist with the Town of Whitby.

"I think I won the lottery with this match. It certainly is a commitment for someone of (Jaclyn's) calibre and in her role which is so, so busy. To volunteer her time is so gracious. We just have such a great relationship," said Churchill, who has worked in the municipal environment for about five years. "Jaclyn has given me some very wise advice, very practical advice that I can apply immediately in my role. She has helped me gain so much confidence in myself as a municipal professional but also as someone new in this world."

Grossi said the mentorship was important because she could "connect with someone who has walked this path before. That has added so much value, and it makes me feel less like I have to figure out everything on my own."

One of the "greatest things about mentorship" is having a safe space to get outside perspectives while navigating a challenge or situation and discuss issues with someone who is not an immediate supervisor.

"I'd absolutely recommend it. To me, it wasn't about having someone who was going to give me all the answers. (Jenn) is almost like a therapist. She knew the right questions to ask," Grossi said. "She shared her experiences. I could tell that her goal was to help me grow. It really enforced for me that I chose the right path, and it gave me confidence to continue in this career that I want to build at a time when I started a new role (and) I was not very confident."

Grossi emphasized the importance of networking: "There's such a great community in this sector, especially in our region in Ontario, of people who are willing to share their knowledge and support each other. (Jenn) let me into the bubble. She's giving me access to those connections so I'm much more comfortable reaching out to other municipalities with my questions."

Grossi has held various positions during her nine years in the sector, primarily within the clerk's office. She's been in her current role about two-and-a-half years.



Jaclyn Grossi
Clerk,
Town of Ajax



Jenn Churchill
Legislative Specialist,
Town of Whitby

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“Jenn was absolutely amazing. I was so lucky to be paired with her. She was a real success story in my mind,” Grossi said. “One thing I love about AMCTO is the networking. That’s within and without the mentor program.”

Grossi said she owes her success to people she’s surrounded herself with. “So being part of the mentorship program is honestly really fun. I love being able to connect with people who are in different parts of their career and to give back and just have those open conversations with people.”

She likes the idea of mentorship giving people a space in which they can reach out “unbiased and not worried about what’s going on in their municipality, a nice place to be able to come and have those conversations.”

“

If I didn’t have the opportunity to be mentored, I think my career path and my trajectory would have taken longer than it did.

”

Meanwhile, Grossi continues to grow her network and to learn what other municipalities are doing. “I also get to give back a little bit and make sure the people who are in the sector have the same opportunities that I’ve had. I just want to highlight the opportunities that a program like this offers. When you look at an AMCTO mentorship program, one thing I always love about it is being a spokesperson and opening people’s eyes,” she said.

AMCTO says that offering guidance and support to program participants during their mentor-mentee relationships provides an opportunity to build on and enhance knowledge and practical skills in the sector. This is vital for the effective transfer of tools and expertise to empower future municipal leaders.

Grossi has often noted that working at the municipal level is “meaningful and rooted in service” and that municipal clerks are “involved in every aspect of civic life.”

“One thing that might surprise people is how central the clerk’s office is to upholding transparency and democratic processes in local government,” she once said. It is an evolving role and the mentorship program plays a significant part in shaping the sector.

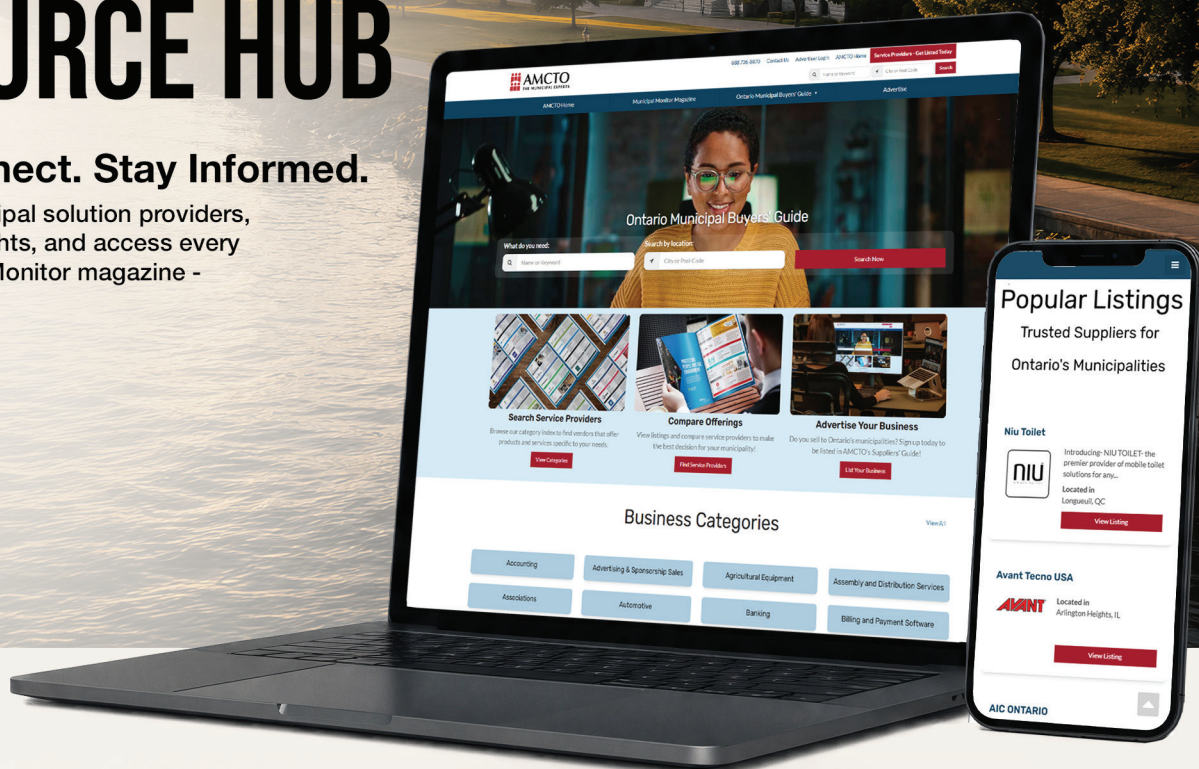
“I think the relationship building is really valuable and it’s really nice to see the cyclical effect of mentors and mentees,” said Grossi. ■

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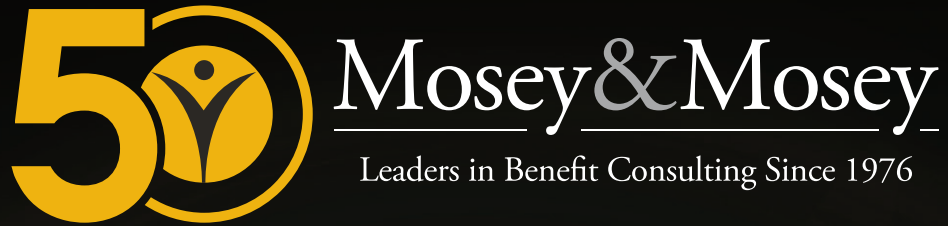
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