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Councillor Michael Walker – St. Paul's, Ward 22

The New Council's Agenda is the Mayor's Agenda

With the 'strong mayor' system in place now under the new City of Toronto Act, City Council is being restrained by the wants and whims of our mayor and his executive committee. The standing committees of Council have their agendas vetted by the executive committee and any request from a Councillor that does not fit into the agenda of the mayor is scrapped. This is quite alarming because it restrains the democratic power and freedom a Councillor has when he/she is elected to represent his/her constituents. Proper evaluation of a Councillor's proposal, including staff report and committee debate on the proposal's feasibility, is now cut-off in the name of expediency and a 'strong mayor' agenda. If by miracle a proposal does make it onto a standing committee agenda, if it does not originate from the mayor, it is buried by deferral or quickly voted down.

Further, I've noticed how thin the agendas of the standing committees are this term. The first agendas have almost no carry-over from last term. Some issues that were deferred for staff report or further consultation appear not to have been carried-over. It appears that the mayor's agenda has a hold over this Council whether we like it or not.

One example of this is my initiative to create a task force to investigate reform of our property assessment system. For years now in St. Paul's, we have been hit again and again with steep increases in our property assessments while other parts of the city have not. Some areas of the city have never received a property tax increase due to a property assessment increase. We need a system that is fair, equitable, predictable, and transparent. I proposed a task force on this issue last July to take advantage of the Ontario Ombudsman's scathing review of the Municipal Property Assessment Corporation (MPAC) and the resulting provincial freeze on property assessment until 2009.

Unfortunately, reform of the property assessment system is not on the mayor's agenda. The mayor's executive committee voted not to pursue the matter at their January meeting. I will continue to push for property assessment reform the next time I can bring the issue into the forefront at Council.

For information on this and many other issues, visit www.MichaelWalker.ca or contact my office at councillor_walker@toronto.ca or 416.392.7906.