

Strong Mayor powers used to replace Caledon's top employee

Some Councillors denounce the move as undemocratic

By ZACHARY ROMAN

Local Journalism Initiative Reporter

Caledon has a new Chief Administrative Officer.

His name is Nathan Hyde, and he was appointed to the position on August 2 by Mayor Annette Groves using strong mayor powers given to her by the Provincial government. Hyde's appointment using strong mayor powers bypasses the Town's usual hiring process.

The last time a Chief Administrative Officer (CAO) was hired in Caledon, a special committee of Council was created to oversee the recruitment and hiring process. The Town's Human Resources and Town Clerk's office staff were asked to provide assistance when necessary.

Hyde is replacing Carey Herd, who began as Caledon's CAO in 2020. She was appointed to the position at a Special Council meeting on March 3 of that year.

Groves announced Hyde's appointment in an August 2 media release. There, she said she's pleased to welcome Hyde to the Town as he brings over 20 years of public sector leadership experience in some of Ontario's fastest-growing municipalities. Hyde's first day on the job was August 8.

The Province announced it was giving strong mayor powers to the mayors of 26 different municipalities, including Caledon, on June 16. The powers, which include the ability to appoint CAOs and department heads, came into effect on July 1. Since then, Groves has used them twice.

In a statement sent to the Citizen when the strong mayor powers were announced, Groves said she "always believed that the best way for Town business to be done is through consensus."

Groves was contacted for an interview about the appointment of Hyde but declined to comment, deferring to what was said in her media release.

Hyde's previous position was CAO for the Town of Erin, a job he began in 2017. According to the Town of Caledon, Hyde's accomplishments in Erin include negotiating the largest public works project in Wellington County history and developing a plan to double Erin's urban population.

Before working in Erin, Hyde worked as Chief of Staff to the Chair of the Region of Peel. He's currently the provincially-appointed chair of the CTC Source Protection Committee, which is tasked with protecting drinking water sources across the Greater Toronto Area.

According to the Town, Hyde attended Harvard and Cambridge Universities and holds Bachelor and Master of Laws degrees, as well as a Master of Public Administration degree.

"Mr. Hyde's education and experience working at the Region of Peel will be an asset to the corporation (Town) as we work through the dissolution of Peel and manage the future growth of Caledon," said Groves in the media release announcing Hyde's appointment. "He has an open-for-business approach and will help us continue to foster a positive business-friendly climate in the Town."

Ward 1 Councillor Lynn Kiernan said she strongly opposes the use of strong mayor powers and is questioning Groves' objectives in using them.

"Mayor Groves has effectively silenced the voices of the other members of Council by these actions," said Kiernan. "Using these powers is a gross violation of our democratic principles."

Kiernan said she hopes the electorate is ready to ask Groves "the tough questions" and added that she's worried about the future of Caledon.

Ward 6 Councillor Cosimo Napoli supported Groves' appointment of Hyde using strong mayor powers.

"These changes were inevitable, with or without the strong mayor powers," said Napoli. "Caledon's growth demands changes and improvements to our administrative structure, and I believe the Mayor's actions contribute to accommodating the anticipated growth."

Napoli expressed his gratitude to Herd for her years of "outstanding service and dedication" to the Town but said as Caledon enters a transformative phase it's crucial to have a CAO with a "fresh variety of skills."

Napoli said Hyde's qualifications make him the ideal candidate to lead Caledon during the coming years.

Regional Councillor Christina Early said she was shocked to hear of Herd's replacement.

"She was an exemplary leader who saw this municipality through a pandemic and assembled a top-notch leadership team that had experts in charge of departments rather than generalists," said Early.

Early said Caledon already has a highly-functioning leadership team that understands the needs of residents and was ready to work with the Provincially-appointed transition team on the dissolution of the Region of Peel.

"This termination and change was not required," said Early.

Ward 2 Councillor Dave Sheen said the Province wants the narrative around strong mayor powers to be focused on the push to build thousands of new homes. He said people aren't paying attention to the fact the powers go much further than that.

"The strong mayor powers are fundamentally undemocratic and, for Caledon residents, the new powers have weakened their voices on Caledon Council," said Sheen.

Sheen said mayors of other municipalities have indicated they would not like to use their powers or will use them cautiously. He said Groves has embraced them with "reckless abandon."

Further, Sheen said Groves' use of strong mayor powers is odd considering her election campaign messaging promising transparency and openness at Town hall.

"Herd was an excellent leader and was doing an excellent job. She clearly had a good working relationship with me and my Council colleagues and she appeared to have a very strong working relationship with her senior leadership team," said Sheen. "Most importantly, she was delivering on the objectives the Council had set for her."

Sheen said as Herd had been with the Town in various roles for 10 years, she knew her way around Town Hall and the Region of Peel. Due to this, he said Herd was well-positioned to lead the Town through the dissolution of Peel.

?I'm no sports junkie, but what Mayor Groves has done is like firing your head coach as you head into the playoffs, even though they had a winning record,? said Sheen.