



# ***Bill 81, Budget Measures Act, 2006***

***AMO Presentation to the Standing Committee on Finance and Economic Affairs***

***May 4, 2006***

## **Introduction:**

Good morning ladies and gentlemen, my name is Ann Mulvale.

I am the Mayor of the Town of Oakville and the past President of the Association of Municipalities of Ontario.

AMO is, I believe, well known to the Committee members. AMO represents Ontario's municipal governments and advocates on behalf of those governments and the property tax payers and residents they represent.

AMO's member municipal governments govern and provide key services to approximately 10 million Ontarians – approximately one in three Canadians.

While each of Ontario's municipal governments is unique, the interests we share in common are greater than the differences that separate us.

I am pleased to be here this morning to discuss Bill 81. However, I plan to comment only on one aspect of the Bill. I wish to focus on Schedule H and proposed amendments to the *Municipal Elections Act*, because of the importance of this matter to Ontario's communities.

AMO believes strongly that our Association is very well positioned to comment on terms of municipal council, given both the nature of our membership and the outreach work we conducted in 2005 on this issue. Given this, we are thankful for the opportunity to share our perspectives on Bill 81 with you.

## **Responding to the Proposed Legislation:**

AMO has advocated for the need to move from a three-year to a four-year municipal term of office out of principle. Our interest in this issue was sparked by the Province's move to a fixed, four-year term under Bill 86, *the Election Statute Law Amendment Act*. AMO believed that by fixing the date of the elections, the Province was moving to depoliticize the setting of election dates and to provide more certainty regarding the term of office.

AMO noted at that time that five of the ten provinces currently had a four-year term for municipal council.

Indeed, in the province that most recently lengthened the term from three to four years -- New Brunswick -- the decision coincided with an inquiry into a fixed date for the provincial election.

Nova Scotia lengthened the term of its municipal councils at the request of the Union of Nova Scotia Municipalities in 2000 because of projected cost savings and the enhanced ability of municipalities to plan for the future.

Manitoba lengthened its municipal term of office from three to four years in 1998. Quebec and Newfoundland and Labrador also have four-year terms of office for municipal governments.

In developing a formal position on this matter, the AMO Board decided that it must consult each and every municipal government on such an important issue. In addition, an AMO Advisory Committee was created with the mandate to develop a survey, undertake its analysis, and provide the Board with its best advice.

The Advisory Committee drafted a survey with this and related questions, which was sent to each and every member council in February 2005. The survey generated a strong response from the members and fairly consistent positions on most issues.

The following are the specific results of the survey:

1. Lengthening the term of municipal council from three to four years was supported by 61% of respondents. The vast majority --91% of proponents believed this change should be implemented across the province.
2. Almost all respondents - 98% - preferred that school board elections continue to take place as the same time as municipal elections.
3. The majority - 59% - preferred to maintain the election in November.
4. A strong majority - 88% - also wanted municipal elections to occur at a different year than provincial elections.

There was no noticeable split between urban and rural or lower and upper tier municipal governments on any of the questions.

The Advisory Committee also consulted with the two main school board associations in the province as part of its deliberations.

The Ontario Catholic School Trustees' Association stated, "a change to a four-year term is supported by the majority of the trustees who responded to our survey, including those on our Association's board of directors."

The Ontario Public School Boards' Association declined to comment at the time.

The AMO Board endorsed the recommendations of the Advisory Committee in March 2005, and AMO's position was conveyed to the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.

AMO was very pleased when Premier McGuinty announced at the 2006 ROMA/OGRA conference that his Government was committed to introducing a four-year term for municipal governments in Ontario, beginning with the next municipal election in 2006.

Premier McGuinty said, "This is something AMO has asked the Province to do -- and we agree."

He said, "As I see it, it's a matter of respect."

He said, "We have fixed four-year terms at the provincial level -- and federal terms can run a maximum of five years. Why should you be any different?"

Premier McGuinty also recognized that a four-year term simply made practical, good sense.

He said, "A four-year term is the ideal period of time for a council to forge an agenda, implement it and then seek the people's judgement."

I agree with Premier McGuinty in this matter. Municipal governments need the time to undertake longer-term planning to build strong, vibrant, competitive and livable communities.

This government's respect for municipal governments as an order of government puts Ontario in a position of leadership in this Country. By renewing and building on the Memorandum of Understanding, first signed by the Progressive Conservative government in 2001, this government has demonstrated that it too understands that municipal governments are able, accountable and mature partners in building a strong and prosperous Ontario.

I have been in municipal government for many years and I have had the opportunity to serve as President of the Association of Municipalities on two occasions.

Much has changed in municipal government since I was first elected. The relationship of municipal governments to the Province has seen some setbacks and many advances.

I was the President of AMO in 2001, when this Legislature passed a new *Municipal Act* for Ontario.

It was a proud moment for the municipal sector, for AMO and for the government. It extended greater autonomy to municipal governments including natural person powers.

I probably do not need to remind many of you that there were many detractors and a very lively debate. Many feared that giving new powers to municipalities would result in any number of problems. But the legislation was passed and none of those concerns ever materialized.

The sky did not fall. It is not falling today.

Municipal governments in the province have an important job to do.

Large and small, urban and rural, north, south, east, and west – municipal governments fund and provide key services.

Municipal governments ensure:

- that our environment is protected,
- that our communities are safe from crime,
- that emergency services meet the challenges of a changing world and
- that the sometimes tattered social safety net saves the most vulnerable in our communities.

We provide and fund municipal services, and we provide and fund over \$3 billion of provincial health and social services in our communities. The challenges faced by municipal governments are immense, complex and evolving.

However, by definition, municipal governments are the most open and accountable order of government in the County. And, consequently, municipal governments are the most trusted order of government.

I believe that a four-year term will allow municipal governments to:

- better serve the people of our towns and cities;
- do a better jobs of building strong and sustainable communities;
- shore up the foundation of Ontario's and Canada's economy;
- and to create opportunity for our youth and the new Canadians who will continue to build our communities, this province and our nation.

And I am not alone in my belief. It is shared by rural and urban municipal councils in all parts of this province. In fact, AMO's Steering Committee on this issue was led by representatives from Middlesex County, the Town of Collingwood, the City of Sault Ste Marie and the Chair of the Rural Ontario Municipal Association.

All municipal governments had an opportunity to participate in this important discussion. Many did, and most said that Ontario's communities would be better served by four-year council terms. AMO strongly supports this position.

**Conclusion:**

In conclusion, we want to see Schedule H in force as soon as possible so Ontario's communities can begin to plan for the election and council term ahead.

We believe it is imperative to move quickly to enact Schedule H in order to provide stability to the upcoming municipal election. Both candidates and the voting public alike deserve to know exactly what is involved in running for municipal office this coming fall.

Thank you Members of the Committee for the opportunity to speak with you today.