

MEDIA BRIEFING

***Better Regional
Governance Act, 2026***



**PROTECT
ONTARIO**

Ministry of Municipal Affairs and Housing

April 2, 2026

Ontario 

Table of Contents

- 1** Overview

- 2** Provincially Appointed Regional Chairs

- 3** Strong Chair Powers

- 4** Regional Council Composition Changes

- 5** Simcoe County Council Composition

- 6** Niagara Regional Council Composition

- 7** Weighted Voting

- 8** Looking Ahead

1. Overview

Local governments are key partners in delivering on shared priorities and ensuring Ontario is positioned well to face current economic threats. The *Better Regional Governance Act, 2026*, if passed, would:

- Support better alignment between regional decision-making and shared provincial-regional priorities by allowing the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to appoint regional chairs in certain communities. These individuals would receive “strong chair” powers—an enhanced leadership model that will enable them to deliver on government priorities like housing and fiscal responsibility.
- Reduce the cost of government and support efficient decision-making in Niagara Region and Simcoe County by reducing the size of Simcoe County Council and Niagara Regional Council from 32 members to 17 and 13 members, respectively (the head of council of each lower-tier municipality, plus an appointed regional chair).

2. Provincially Appointed Regional Chairs

- Inconsistent methods for chair selection, growing regional council sizes and the potential for misalignment between provincial and municipal priorities are slowing down decision-making at a time when Ontario needs decisive action in the face of economic threats.
- The province is addressing these issues by directly appointing chairs in the regions of Durham, Halton, Muskoka, Niagara, Peel, Waterloo and York, plus Simcoe County, to improve strategic alignment with provincial priorities and ensure more efficient, streamlined regional decision making.

3. Strong Chair Powers

- Ontario is facing unprecedented challenges and we need local leadership to be equipped with the right tools to drive meaningful change.
- From setting up organizational structures, to proposing by-laws to help advance provincial priorities such as building more homes, we have already seen strong mayors put their powers into action in a way that benefits their communities and Ontario as a whole.
- Similarly, appointed chairs will be given strong chair powers. These powers will mirror strong mayor powers, which currently exist in 216 of Ontario's 241 lower-tier and 173 single-tier municipalities.
- We are giving local leaders the ability to speed up decision-making, end dysfunction at the regional level and create the conditions to expedite housing and infrastructure development so more people can find an affordable place to call home.

3. Strong Chair Powers

Strong chairs would be granted the following powers, mirroring the powers granted to strong mayors:

- Appoint/dismiss the region/county's Chief Administrative Officer.
- Hire/dismiss division heads and determine the organizational structure of the region/county.
- Create committees of council, assign their functions and appoint chairs and vice-chairs of committees.
- Bring forward matters tied to provincial priorities for council consideration.
- Appoint the chairs and vice-chairs of prescribed local boards.
- Direct staff in relation to the head of council's exercise of powers and duties.
- Veto certain by-laws if the head of council is of the opinion that all or part of the by-law could potentially interfere with a provincial priority.
- Propose the municipal budget and in-year budget amendments, which would be subject to council amendments and a separate head of council veto and council override process.
- Propose certain municipal by-laws if the head of council is of the opinion that the proposed by-law could potentially advance a prescribed provincial priority. Council can pass these by-laws if more than one third of council members vote in favor.

4. Regional Council Composition Changes

- According to the most recent census, Niagara Region has 32 councillors representing a population of 477,941, and Simcoe County has 32 councillors representing a population of 351,927. These regional councils are substantially larger on a per population basis than their peers.
- An unwieldy council with too many decision-makers creates confusion and economic inefficiencies which makes it harder for council to deliver results for their residents. It also adds substantially and unnecessarily to the cost of local government.
- The province is taking decisive action and reducing the number of councillors in both municipalities while ensuring these local governments remain representative, effective and focused on delivering results.
- Nominations for the 2026 municipal elections open on May 1, 2026. Making these changes now gives impacted municipalities and prospective candidates time to prepare and adjust plans for the fall municipal election.
- Changes would come into effect for the 2026-2030 municipal council term, starting on November 15, 2026. The current chairs, warden and councillors would retain their roles until the new councils are sworn in.

5. Simcoe County Council Composition

- In response to a request from the warden of Simcoe County, we are reducing Simcoe County Council from 32 members to 17. This will include heads of council of the 16 lower-tier municipalities plus the appointed warden. The smaller regional council would continue to use weighted voting, which has been a longstanding practice in the County (for more on weighted voting, see slide 10).
- In 2025, Simcoe County proposed reducing the size of its council from 32 to 17 members but narrowly failed to achieve the required triple majority, where a restructuring is not valid unless there is support from:
 1. a majority of the upper-tier council,
 2. a majority of the lower-tier councils, and
 3. the total number of electors in the supportive lower-tier municipalities representing a majority of electors in the upper-tier.
- The proposal met two of the three requirements and only failed due to a tie among lower-tiers.
- The changes align with the locally developed proposal. Reducing council size and streamlining decision-making will allow for more efficient council function and deliver better value for local taxpayers.

6. Niagara Regional Council Composition

- Local leaders and communities in Niagara have raised concerns that the region's current structure creates duplication, inefficiencies, and fragmented decision-making that makes it difficult to achieve economies of scale and deliver services effectively, while placing an unnecessary burden on taxpayers.
- Currently, the upper- and lower-tier municipalities in Niagara have a combined 126 council members for a population of about 475,000 people. By comparison, Toronto City Council has 26 members for a population of over three million and Queen's Park has 124 Members of Provincial Parliament representing over 16 million people across the province.
- To respond to these concerns from local leadership, Niagara Regional Council would be reduced from 32 members to 13 members. The new council would include the heads of council of each of Niagara's 12 lower-tier municipalities plus the regional chair, removing 19 regional councillor roles. The smaller regional council would use weighted voting (for more on weighted voting, see slide 10).
- The changes respond directly to these concerns by creating a more streamlined regional council, enabling efficiency, clearer decision-making and better alignment with regional and provincial priorities.

7. Weighted Voting

- The changes would also enable the Minister to implement weighted voting in upper-tier municipalities and establish rules for weighted voting to ensure composition maintains fair local representation.
- This change would allow upper-tier council votes to reflect population and other concerns.
- Upper-tier municipalities already have the ability to enact weighted voting locally. Simcoe County already has this system in place. Weighted voting may also be applied to other upper tiers in the future following consultation with local leaders.
- This, and all other proposed changes, will be posted on the regulatory registry for consultation.
- With respect to Niagara specifically, the government will work with Niagara municipalities to develop a weighted voting framework to facilitate the transition to the new council structure in the Region and ensure appropriate and effective representation. The final framework will be informed by local feedback.
 - Following consultations, this framework would be brought into effect before the start of the 2026-2030 term of council.



What is Weighted Voting?

- A system where each member of council may be assigned a different number of votes.
- The number can be determined by many factors, including population or the number of electors in the ward represented.
- Currently, upper-tier municipalities have the option of using weighted voting. If these proposed changes are passed, weighted voting could be established by either:
 - local by-law, passed via the triple majority process, or
 - a regulation made by the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing.
- Since different individual members of council may have a different number of votes, in a weighted vote, a simple “majority of members” may be different from the “majority of weighted votes.”

8. Looking Ahead

The *Better Regional Governance Act, 2026*, is one more step in the government's plan to protect Ontario amid global economic uncertainty. By providing municipalities with clearer leadership and stronger tools, we are helping local governments respond more quickly, efficiently and effectively to economic and housing challenges.

Legislative changes, if passed, and associated regulatory changes, would support better alignment between regional decision-making and shared provincial-regional priorities, respond to concerns from local leadership and ensure local governments remain representative, effective and focused on delivering results and better value for local taxpayers.

These measures reinforce Ontario's commitment to working with municipalities to identify ways to strengthen local governance in Niagara, Simcoe and beyond. Working together to advance shared provincial-municipal priorities helps advance housing and economic development, preparing both individual municipalities and the province as a whole for growth.