



Committee of the Whole

Meeting Date: April 14, 2026

Submitted by: Marci Ivanic, Director of Legislative Services/County Clerk
Paul Shipway, CAO

Subject: Better Regional Governance Act, 2026

BACKGROUND:

The Province of Ontario introduced the [Better Regional Governance Act, 2026](#), which proposes a series of changes to governance structures within select upper-tier municipalities. The legislation is positioned as part of a broader provincial effort to improve decision-making efficiency, reduce governance costs, and better align municipal structures with provincial priorities related to housing and infrastructure delivery.

As introduced, the legislation proposes several substantive changes, including the authority for the Minister of Municipal Affairs and Housing to appoint heads of council in certain upper-tier municipalities, with associated 'strong chair' powers. These powers mirror those currently provided to strong mayors and include the ability to appoint and dismiss senior staff, propose budgets and certain by-laws, establish committees, direct staff, and veto by-laws that may conflict with provincial priorities.

The legislation also proposes to reduce the size of upper-tier councils in specific jurisdictions, including Simcoe County and Niagara Region, and to restructure those councils to consist primarily of lower-tier heads of council. In addition, the Province has indicated that it will require most regional municipalities to undertake a review of their council composition following the 2026 municipal election, and that it may establish or regulate weighted voting frameworks for upper-tier municipalities through regulation.

While Middlesex County and Counties, excluding Simcoe County, are not identified as a municipality subject to these immediate structural changes, the legislation introduces governance tools and authorities that may be expanded to additional upper-tier municipalities over time.

Middlesex County currently operates under an established weighted voting system, implemented through By-law No. 5469, which allocates voting strength based on elector

counts and provides a structured and balanced approach to representation across member municipalities.

County Council has also signaled to staff to undertake a comprehensive review of Council composition during the 2026–2030 term.

ANALYSIS:

The introduction of the *Better Regional Governance Act, 2026* represents a notable evolution in the Province's approach to upper-tier municipal governance. While the legislation is currently targeted to a defined group of municipalities, it signals a broader shift toward increased provincial involvement in governance structures, enhanced executive authority at the head-of-council level, and a focus on streamlined decision-making aligned with provincial priorities.

From a Middlesex County perspective, the immediate impact of the legislation is limited. The County is not subject to the proposed structural changes related to appointed heads of council or council size reductions. However, several elements of the legislation are relevant and warrant consideration in the context of the County's governance framework.

First, the Province's intention to establish or regulate weighted voting frameworks introduces a potential shift in how such systems may be applied in the future. Middlesex County has long utilized weighted voting as a locally developed and implemented governance tool that reflects population distribution while maintaining representation across municipalities. The introduction of provincial regulation-making authority in this area suggests that, over time, there may be a move toward greater standardization. While no changes are currently required, this represents a potential constraint on local flexibility and reinforces the importance of ensuring that Middlesex County's model remains well understood and defensible.

Second, the legislation demonstrates a clear willingness on the part of the Province to intervene directly in council composition where it is perceived that local governance structures are not achieving desired provincial outcomes. The example of Simcoe County is particularly relevant, where a [locally initiated council restructuring](#) did not meet the legislative requirements under the Municipal Act, and the Province has now moved to implement a modified structure through legislation. This approach signals that council composition is increasingly being viewed as a matter of provincial interest, particularly where it intersects with efficiency, cost, and the ability to advance broader provincial policy objectives.

Third, the introduction of strong chair powers represents a significant shift in governance philosophy. These powers centralize authority at the head-of-council level and alter the traditional balance between Council as a collective decision-making body

and the administrative structure led by the Chief Administrative Officer. While these powers are not currently proposed for Middlesex County, their inclusion in the legislation establishes a precedent that may be extended in the future. If applied more broadly, such a model would have implications for Council dynamics, administrative accountability, and the role of the CAO and non-legislated senior staff.

More broadly, the legislation reflects a provincial emphasis on aligning municipal governance with priorities such as housing supply, infrastructure delivery, and economic development. This introduces an inherent tension between maintaining local autonomy and ensuring consistency and responsiveness to provincial objectives. For Middlesex County, which operates within a two-tier municipal system and serves a predominantly rural geography, governance structures must remain responsive to local conditions, including diverse community needs, geographic dispersion, and the complexity of shared service delivery.

In this context, the County's planned Council composition and governance review during the 2026–2030 term is both timely and appropriate. That review will provide an opportunity to assess the County's governance model in light of any finalized legislative changes, population growth trends, and evolving service delivery expectations.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS:



There are no direct financial implications associated with this report.

Potential financial implications may arise in the future depending on the final form of the legislation and any subsequent regulatory changes. These may include costs associated with governance reviews, legal analysis, or administrative adjustments, as well as potential resource implications if there are changes to the role or responsibilities of upper-tier municipalities.

These impacts are not known at this time and will be assessed as further information becomes available.

ALIGNMENT WITH STRATEGIC FOCUS:

This report aligns with the following Strategic Focus, Goals, or Objectives:

| Strategic Priority | Goal | Objectives |
|---|---|---|
| <p>Collaboration & Partnerships</p>  | <p>Strengthen collaboration with local municipalities and regional partners to improve economic efficiency, enhance service delivery, and support regional development in alignment with community priorities</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Optimize service delivery through inter-municipal collaboration and shared services to improve efficiency and seamless operations. • Build and enhance relationships with municipal, regional, First Nations, community, and private sector partners to align priorities, share resources, and implement joint initiatives that improve community well-being and economic growth. • Improve communication and transparency through open engagement, accessible information, and informed decision-making. |
| <p>Adaptability and Agility</p>  | <p>Modernize the County's administrative capabilities to strengthen decision-making, improve service delivery, and achieve better community outcomes</p> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Transform, modernize and continuously improve administrative systems and processes to increase efficiency and enhance the experience of residents and partners. • Strengthen internal administrative capabilities to ensure key support services have the necessary resources to meet community needs and support organizational growth. |

RECOMMENDATION:

THAT the Better Regional Governance Act, 2026 Report be received for information.