Leading in Chains? The Role of Canada's Mayors

Paper prepared for the Annual Meeting of the
Canadian Political Science Association (CPSA)
University of British Columbia – Vancouver, BC

Working draft - please do not cite
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June 2019

"It's a big job. You're the quarterback, the referee, the equipment manager, and the cheerleader – all at the same time. You're seen as the person who controls everything, sometimes way beyond local government jurisdiction and definitely beyond what you actually control. People think you're in charge, but you're not really. When people are unhappy, they call you. It doesn't matter what they are unhappy about – a big political issue, a family tragedy, or what happened on their morning commute – they call, and they want results. They reach to the leader who is closest to the people, and that's the mayor.

The role keeps evolving. It's moved from a 'chief magistrate' to one that is something of a celebrity. But the bottom line is, it's an awful lot of work and few people really understand it. It's a job like no other."

- Former Canadian Mayor

Introduction[1]

In mid-April 2019, the Ontario government announced cuts in provincial funding for public health, retroactive to the start of the month. Ontario's municipalities, which currently fund roughly one quarter of the costs of public health in Ontario, were expected to make up the difference. For Toronto Public Health, the changes would be more rapid and more severe than other public health units, amounting to $1 billion over 10 years and with tens of millions required immediately to bridge the mid-year gap. The City of Toronto's budget was already passed, with tax bills prepared for mailing. Mayor John Tory called the cut "a targeted attack" on the City of Toronto (qtd in Pagliaro, 2019a).

Some backstory here is warranted. Ontario Premier Doug Ford was elected in June 2018, having previously served on Toronto City Council alongside his brother Mayor Rob Ford. When Mayor Ford stepped down during the 2014 election campaign, Doug sought the mayoralty, coming second to John Tory - a former Leader of Ontario's Progressive Conservative Party. Before the end of Mayor Tory's first term, after a surprising twist of events, Doug Ford was elected as Leader of the Progressive Conservative Party, and shortly after as Premier of Ontario. Within his first year, he made sweeping changes in the City of Toronto including almost halving the number of electoral wards in the midst of a municipal election, and announced an intention to take over the Toronto subway system. A feud between the mayor who had wanted to be premier, and the premier who had wanted to be mayor, was brewing.

In late April 2019, Mayor Tory wrote to every member of the Progressive Conservative caucus elected in Toronto, including Premier Ford, outlining the financial impacts of the reduction for Toronto Public Health and the services it provides to Torontonians (Pagliaro, 2019b). Premier Ford responded the next day with his own letter to Mayor Tory: "You continue to use misleading numbers that falsely raise the threat of Toronto cutting back on certain public health programs and services" (Walsh, 2019). Guelph Mayor Cam Guthrie as chair of the Large Urban Mayors Caucus of Ontario (LUMCO), which represents 67% of Ontario's population, issued a statement asserting that the province was engaging in "downloading by stealth" (Canadian Press, 2019). A petition signed by 31,000 Torontians was submitted to the Ontario Government. On May 25 2019, Tory began door-to-door canvassing in Progressive Conservative Toronto ridings with a flyer about the cuts (Pagliaro, 2019c).

The next day, on May 26, 2019, Premier Ford announced that the retroactive cut to Toronto Public Health would be reversed. Mayor Tory thanked Premier Ford, which was followed by other LUMCO mayors. Ottawa Mayor Jim Watson said the Premier had

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[1] The central argument and content of this paper is a condensed version of the author's PhD dissertation, *Leading in Canada's Cities: A Study of Urban Mayors*, supervised by Prof. Andrew Sancton. The dissertation was successfully defended in October 2018. A full version is available online at mayorsproject.ca.

thrown his city into a "period of chaos" (Boisvert, 2019). Hamilton Mayor Fred Eisenberger said, "it's good news that the Province is listening" (ibid).

Who leads Canada's cities, and how do they do it? Where does the balance of power rest between political actors when it comes to making decisions about local and urban issues? Do mayors, as the most senior local official officials and chief executives (in legal terms, at least) of municipalities, have the power to actually lead?

The traditional response to these questions would be to cite the relative powerlessness of municipal governments and local officials in Canada. Municipalities in Canada are oft cited as "creatures of the provinces" in unambiguously subordinate relationships to their respective provincial governments, an arrangement solidified at the time of Confederation. Mayors, as the most senior local officials, are often described in academic and popular sources alike as being "weak" - a term borrowed (perhaps erroneously, as argued elsewhere by this author[2]) from an American context. The limited current literature[3] acknowledges that the role of mayors in Canada is "vague" (Lightbody, 2006) and "generally quite unclear" (Sancton, 1994; Graham 2018), with a need to build a literature "almost literally from scratch" (Urbaniak, 2014). There is little to be found in legislation to suggest that mayors in Canada have much in the way of power when it comes to leading in Canada's cities.

So what, then, explains the reversal in the case of provincial funding cuts following the outcry from Mayor Tory and his mayoral colleagues? Or the central role of mayors across Canada regarding the welcoming of thousands more Syrian refugees -- a decidedly federal matter? Or, the many other cases specific to each Canadian city where mayors act, and have influence, beyond the bounds of what their role is

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[2] Graham (2017) presents an overview of the meaning of the terms "weak mayor" and "strong mayor" based on their original context in American local government. In short, there are at least four defined forms of local government in the United States. The oldest and most popular models are the mayor-council form and council-manager form. The terms "strong mayor" and "weak mayor" are variants of the mayor-council form, referring to the extent of executive power concentrated in the office of the mayor. This form of local government is not present in Canada; thus, there are technically no "strong" or "weak" mayors in Canada. Perhaps more importantly, the "strong/weak" frame loses its meaning in a Canadian context, because it understands mayoral power as being synonymous with executive power; and, applying the term "weak mayor" universally in a Canadian context fails to capture the diversity of the mayoralty which is present in Canada.

[3] There is a vast body of media articles, books, blogs, websites, and other popular content about mayors in Canada. A review of academic literature finds a much smaller volume of work. Despite the centrality of their role to local government, mayors have not been a serious object of study in Canadian political science or local government fields. What little has been written about mayors is found in textbook chapters (Tindal and Tindal, 2004; Lightbody, 2006; Sancton, 2015) a small body of work on specific mayors (Armstrong, 1967; Caulfield, 1974; Coulton, 1980; Persky, 1980; McKenna and Purcell, 1980; Levine, 1989; Urbaniak, 2009; Tossell, 2012; Doolittle, 2014) and a few autobiographical texts (Phillips, 1967; Russell, 1982; McCallion and Brehl, 2014). The most comprehensive description of the role of Canadian mayors is a chapter by Sancton in a book on political leadership in Canada (1994). There are also a few studies on specific aspects of Canadian mayoralty (Siegel et al, 2001; Kushner et al, 1997; etc.). A recent book called *Mayors Gone Bad* profiled the antics of some of Canada's most controversial mayors (Slayton, 2015).

traditionally understood to be? *What does mayoral leadership look like in Canada's cities in a contemporary context?*

This paper addresses this question using data from 68 interviews with mayors, past mayors, local elected officials, administrators and community leaders in 10 Canadian cities on the role of the mayor, conducted as part of a larger study on mayoral power in Canada. It argues that Canadian mayors do have remarkable opportunities to lead in Canada's cities, often beyond the formally defined parameters of their roles. Canadian mayors have three distinct roles: as *political leaders*, as *executive leaders*, and as *community leaders*. Each role involves specific expectations and requires different resources. In practice, mayors tend to gravitate more towards one of these roles over the others, leaving a leadership void that is then often filled by other actors. As such, mayoral leadership - or lack of leadership - shifts the governance dynamics of their city. This paper presents a new model for understanding the role of the mayor in Canada, while raising larger questions about the leadership capacity in Canada's cities.

The Canadian Mayoralty

The mayoralty is a global institution, existing on every populated continent and dating back centuries. The term 'mayor' derives from the Latin *maior* or *magnus* – meaning great – and its use dates at least back to the 12th century when the title of 'portreeve' was replaced with 'mayor' for the appointed chief officer of London, England. At the time, the post was considered mostly ceremonial as "the symbolic first citizen of the locality" (Copus 2016: 23).

It is difficult to pinpoint the genesis of the mayoralty in Canadian.[4] Most accounts suggest a point of origin in the 18th century (Rogers, 2009; Sancton, 2015). Perhaps the more significant development, however, occurred with the passing of the *Municipal Corporations Act* ('The Baldwin Act') in 1849. This *Act* "sketched in outline, at least, the framework of the municipal system of Canada" (Biggar, 1897: 8.1), a framework largely still in place today. The *Act* stipulated that heads of council in cities and towns would be called "mayors" and be selected from within and by the council. It also provided mayors with specific responsibilities: to preside over meetings, to summon special meetings as required, to serve as an *ex officio* Justice of the Peace within the municipal boundary, and to administer oaths (*Municipal Corporations Act*, 1849).

Today, Canada has thousands of mayors, and their roles are defined through municipal legislation in their respective provinces and territories. A recent examination of the how the mayoralty is defined across cities found some variation from province to province,

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[4] This is, at least in part, because it is difficult to pinpoint the genesis of Canadian local government, and various historic accounts use different starting points. One version of Tindal and Tindal (2004) states a mayor and council were elected in 1647 in the Montreal area as the first elected local government in what would become Canada. This model was short-lived. This reference, however, was not found in most other texts, which instead point to the Saint John, New Brunswick as the first formally established municipality, led by a mayor and council, in 1785.

and within provinces from municipality to municipality. Graham (2018) argues that this variation, on the whole, is modest and mostly inconsequential in practice. In some cases, an unusual legal mayoral authority (such as "to inspect the conduct of officers") exists on paper but was unknown to those interviewed - including the incumbent mayor.

The mayoralty is also defined at a local level, through municipal bylaws and local institutional arrangements. In some municipalities, the mayor is a full-time position supported by a professional staff team and significant budget; in others, it is a part-time role with few resources. Demands of the mayoralty are related to the size, context and complexity of the municipality. Graham (ibid) argues while the presence of local political parties, such as in Vancouver and Montreal, and unilateral appointment powers can offer useful levers to the mayor, local variation in how the role of the mayor is defined often has little bearing on a mayor's ability to realize desired outcomes.

Perhaps more importantly, in Canada mayoral power "on paper" (as set out in provincial legislation, municipal bylaws and local institutional arrangements) does not align with perceptions and experiences of mayoral power "in practice," based on data from a survey of 12,000 Canadians and interviews with 68 mayors and people who work closely with mayors across 10 cities[5] (ibid). In fact, in cities such as Calgary where the mayor holds among the least formal authority or resources relative to mayors in other cities, the public perception of mayoral power in Calgary - and perceptions from those who have been, or who work closely with Calgary mayors - is among the highest.

Province-to-province or city-to-city level comparisons are largely unhelpful, as are universal descriptions of the Canadian mayoralty such as the "weak mayor" moniker, to understand the nuances of the mayoralty in Canada. Unlike in the United States, Canada does not have a short list of defined forms of local government; instead, the thousands of local governments across Canada vary based on multiple characteristics (size, geography, scale, scope, type, provincial context, etc.). Similarly, within each local government, the mayoralty can be defined in slightly varying ways -- but these differences are *less important in practice than are the leadership characteristics of the individuals in the roles*.

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[5] This study was based on a sample of ten Canadian cities, selected by virtue of being the largest city by population in their respective provinces: Vancouver, BC; Calgary, AB; Saskatoon, SK; Winnipeg, MB; Toronto, ON; Montreal, QC; Saint John, NB; Halifax, NS; Charlottetown, PE; and St. John's, NL. This approach was selected for three main reasons. First, in order to produce a Canada-wide study, it is critical to examine cities all provinces, particularly as the formal authorities of mayors are primarily assigned through provincial legislation and because municipalities in Canada are creatures of the provinces in which they reside. Examining the mayoralty in only one or a few provinces would not provide a 'Canadian perspective.' Second, this method of case selection includes diversity in city size and scale. The cities included represent approximately 20% of the Canadian population, and include some of the largest cities in Canada with more than a million residents (Toronto, Montreal, Calgary), as well as smaller cities with fewer than one hundred thousand residents (Charlottetown and Saint John). The selection also includes five provincial capital cities and five non-capital cities, and it includes both French- and English-speaking cities. Finally, this approach follows an established precedent for case selection in national studies of local government in Canada (Young and Horak, 2012).

Because the Canadian mayoralty is largely undefined, incumbents have wide latitude to shape how the role is exercised in practice. In other words, investigating whether the mayor of Toronto is more powerful than the mayor of Calgary will prove a less fruitful pursuit than would an examination of whether Mayor John Tory or Mayor Rob Ford, or Mayor Naheed Nenshi or Mayor Dave Bronconnier, was more powerful in the role -- and importantly, *how* and *why*. In practice, mayoral power in Canada is really a question of mayoral leadership.

A Model of Mayoral Leadership

When mayors and those who work most closely with them describe the mayoralty, three rather distinct roles emerge: (1) the idea of the mayor as a political leader, working within an elected council; engaging with elected officials at other levels of government; sometimes, working with a local political party; (2) the idea of the mayor as an executive leader: playing a special role with municipal administrators and staff members of local agencies, boards and commissions; sometimes holding unilateral executive authority (for example, with respect to emergency management); and (3) the idea of the mayor as a community leader: playing a special role with respect to the broader community, including a wide array of public, private and civil society actors. Figure 1 presents a visual of the Canadian mayoralty: it encompasses these three distinct leadership roles, each which involve working with distinct groups of actors engaged in local government; but, roles which can at times blend into one another.

Figure 1: The Leadership Roles of a Canadian Mayor[6]

Political Leader

Executive Leader   Community Leader

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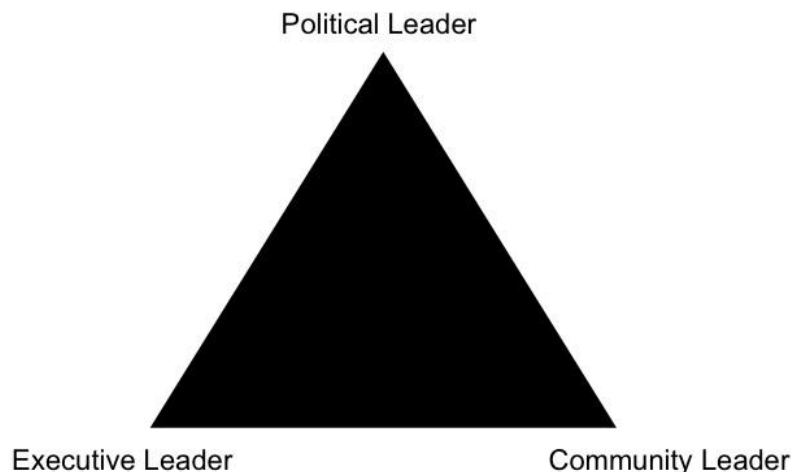
[6] This model is influenced by the work of James Svara on "non-executive" mayors in an American context (1986; 1994). Svara argues that mayors without executive power, operating within a council-manager model, occupy a strategic location in their relationship with council, the city manager, and public agencies. His "council-manager cities interactions model" is based on the communications patterns of the mayor, but is similar in some respects to the model presented here.

Table 1: Roles mentioned in response to question, "How would you describe the role of the mayor?," by perspective

	Political (n=37)	Executive (n=14)	Community (n=17)	Total (n=68)
Political role – working with council and other elected officials	92%	100%	78%	87%
Executive role – working with the city manager and/or administration	48%	71%	35%	51%
Community role – working with the broader public	70%	57%	82%	70%

Interviewees from political, executive and community perspectives all acknowledge that mayors hold all three of these roles, as presented in Table 1. The political leadership role of mayors is most visible overall, followed by the community leadership and executive leadership roles.

When asked to identify the most important part of the mayor's role, interviewees most often pointed to some aspect of the mayor's community or political role, per Table 2. Political leadership was identified as the most challenging part of the mayor's job.

What, exactly, do each of these roles entail? What do the people who are mayors, and who work with mayors, expect the mayor to do? Interviewees were asked to describe their expectations of the mayor. The specific expectations expressed were compiled together, with the five most common responses for each of the three leadership roles listed in Table 3. The responses demonstrate some agreement amongst respondents

Table 2: Summary of interview responses, by role

	Political Role	Executive Role	Community Role
What is the most important part of the mayor's role?	44% (30 / 68)	10% (7 / 68)	46% (31 / 68)
What is the most challenging part of the mayor's role?	35% (24 / 68)	23% (16 / 68)	25% (17 / 68)

from different perspectives. When it comes to political leadership, a majority of interviewees from all three perspectives expect the mayor to articulate a shared vision and build council cohesion. Interviewees described a 'push and pull dynamic' where council members try to align themselves more closely or less closely with the mayor, depending on the mayor's perceived popularity at any particular point in time. The nature of the mayor's relationships with other councillors can influence the cohesion of council and the decision making process. In the words of one media observer:

> The mayor can really set the tone, lead the agenda, and be the coalition builder. Council has to believe in their authority and the legitimacy of their authority. You could translate this into cynical, casual terms: if council believes that voters like the mayor, they will vote with the mayor. If they believe voters have turned against the mayor, they will too. They are all about saving their own skin.[7]

In the words of two city councillors from two cities:

> The mayor is the convener of the vision of the city, to look to the horizon and understand where the city is going. It's about helping citizens and administrators see beyond the immediate. At their best, mayors' jobs are to see the big picture.[8]

> A mayor can really set and drive a vision, something that can be achieved on behalf of the people. That's what I think the mayor's role is: it's to be the keeper of the vision and be the one who champions it. Oh, and a lot of other things too.[9]

Although administrators were slightly less likely to expect mayors to articulate a shared vision, this was cited as a central distinction that administrators observed between mayors and councillors. In the words of one seasoned city manager:

> Mayoral candidates campaign in a very different way. It's obvious the kinds of councillors who want to become mayor, and the ones who want to be councillors. Some just want to represent their wards. Mayoral candidates are expected to have broader visions and grander ideas. Councillors can't do that. They talk about the kinds of things they support or will vote for, but they are not the front line on big ideas.[10]

As noted, the political role was identifed as the most challenging aspect of the mayor's job – and this includes both working with council, as well as with political figures at other levels of government. As the story of John Tory and Doug Ford illustrates, personal relationships and competing agendas can be challenging to overcome. However, interviewees were clear that effective political leadership requires exactly that. In the words of one councillor, "if you have a mayor who can't get along with their colleagues,

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[7] Confidential Interview #45.
[8] Confidential Interview #54.
[9] Confidential Interview #1.
[10] Confidential interview #47.

Table 3: Expectations of mayors, and frequency expressed, by perspective

		Political (n=37)	Executive (n=14)	Community (n=17)	Total (n=68)
Political Role	Articulate a shared vision	64.9%	57.1%	58.8%	61.8%
	Build council cohesion	51.4%	71.4%	52.9%	55.9%
	Chair meetings effectively	29.7%	50.0%	29.4%	33.8%
	Champion council decisions	27.0%	14.3%	11.8%	20.6%
	Maintain strong intergovernmental relationships	13.5%	7.1%	0%	8.8%
Executive Role	Maintain positive relationship with city manager	43.2%	64.3%	23.5%	42.6%
	Align service delivery with community needs	24.3%	21.4%	17.6%	22.1%
	Steward tax dollars responsibly	29.7%	14.3%	11.8%	22.1%
	Communicate municipal activities	16.2%	7.1%	5.9%	11.8%
	Motivate the public service	0%	28.6%	5.9%	7.4%
Community Role	Build civic pride	54.1%	64.3%	58.8%	57.4%
	Keep the pulse of the community	56.8%	64.3%	47.1%	55.9%
	Mobilize and engage diverse groups	32.4%	42.9%	47.1%	38.2%
	Give hope in times of crisis	13.5%	14.3%	11.8%	13.2%
	Project a positive image of the city	16.2%	7.1%	5.9%	11.8%

you won't have an effective council. And that's that."[11] Mayors often spoke about this in rather different terms, citing the importance of maintaining the support of their political colleagues – or making them "a bit afraid" in the words of one past mayor:

> You can't lose a vote. If you start losing votes, you lose your power. You have to make council think you are all powerful, and make sure the civil service knows too. […] You have to create the illusion that you're all powerful and you always get your way. There are a bunch of things that are tied to that. Once you start getting your way, council members will start coming to you asking for favours. You have to be very careful in judging whether those favours are aligned to your agenda. And, you have to bully people. They have to be a bit afraid of you. They need to be afraid that if you're not on board, nothing will get done. [… It is also] smart and strategic use of the bully pulpit, which is an incredibly powerful thing. You have to use that wisely. You can't fritter it away. […] You can lose your bully pulpit very easily – through personal behavior, or weighing in on issues that you don't need to. If you do silly things too often, it undermines your ability to be taken seriously.[12]

The executive leadership role of the mayor is the most ambiguous, and varied, aspect of the job. It is rarely articulated in writing, and often is defined informally over time – beginning shortly after the election. Interviews with administrators indicated that this was a common occurrence, particularly when the individual comes to office without experience in local government. One former city manager provided this account:

> After every election, my senior team would do a good analysis of the platform of the mayor elect. I remember, after one mayor was elected, he gave me a copy of his platform, and told me what he expected on the environment, and other issues. We went through his platform with he and his political staff, and made it very clear what would still require approval from council and what was already underway. That's where you get your priorities and strategy for the next four years. What becomes tricky is when there is something the mayor wants to do, and council won't approve it.[13]

The most commonly expressed expectation of mayors as executive leaders, particularly by administrators, was to build a strong working relationship with the most senior administrative official, widely viewed to be critical to the mayor's ability to 'get things done':

> The mayor can't get anything done at City Hall without the cooperation of city staff – so it's important to have good relationships, especially with the [chief administrative offficer]. The CAO's job is to make sure staff are implementing council's directions, and they don't always do that willingly.[14]

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[11] Confidential Interview #36.
[12] Confidential Interview #35.
[13] Confidential Interview #42.
[14] Confidential Interview #21.

The terms of relations between the mayor and city manager vary by city, and with changes in the individuals involved. In some cities, the mayor and city manager meet on a regular basis for advice, sharing information, and to make decisions about emerging issues. In some cases, mayors rely on city managers for advice; in other cases, the direction of the advice is reversed. When council's direction is unclear or ambiguous, city managers referenced conversations with mayors to 'translate' or clarify council direction. Some city managers claimed that they rarely met with the mayor, and instead tended to have positive relationships with committee chairs or, in smaller cities, all members of council. One city manager described how sensitive his role was to a change in mayor:

> The city manager job, it changes completely when the mayor changes. You have to reinvent yourself. Whatever worked before, probably won't work now. Especially if you're a survivor from the previous mayor, you're already on shaky ground. There is too much room for comparison, and they always feel like they are being evaluated. So you have to reinvent yourself."[15]

The mayor's political leadereship can also influence the dynamics of executive leadership. One former city manager recalled working with a mayor who was perceived to have control over council. "Working for a mayor who never loses a vote is a cakewalk. We [administration] didn't have to be prepared to debate policy issues. We just wrote marketing documents."[16]

Finally, the community leadership role of the mayor is identified as the most important part of the job – but also one that comes with many challenges. In the words of one mayor, "People say, 'oh thank goodness it's Friday. Well, Friday doesn't matter if you're a mayor. Look at my Twitter. I think I went to 14 events on Saturday, and even more on Sunday."[17] One past mayor described working an average of 100-120 hours per week over the duration of his two terms in office, and often sleeping in his office between a late night event followed by an early morning event. "The mayor has to be everywhere. I think that's a big part of being effective – and it's definitely a big part of being popular and getting re-elected."[18] Attending community functions can mean a range of things: making speeches to social clubs, schools or community groups; bringing greetings at fundraisers, charity runs, sporting events or festivals; presiding over parades and cultural festivities; attending openings of new businesses and buildings; participating in fundraisers, celebrations and other events for organizations of all types. Some mayors and past mayors described also attending numerous birthday parties, family reunions and funerals each year. One councillor commented, "he could delegate, and he does delegate – but really, the person people want to see is the mayor. He dresses up the occasion."[19]

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[15] Confidential Interview #61.
[16] Confidential Interview #61.
[17] Confidential Interview #9.
[18] Confidential Interview #21.
[19] Confidential Interview #15.

In terms of expressed expectations, mayors are expected to build civic pride and keep a pulse on the community. The hours invested in community events can be an important mechanism to meet these expectations. Mayors can draw attention to an event or issue simply by virtue of their presence. A repeat sentiment from the interviewees was the mayor's unique ability to can make individuals or organizations feel like they are important to their community, and to motivate them to pursue broader communtiy objectives. One community activist described it this way:

> [The mayor] is very visible in the community, and very hands on. We were Facebook friends before he became the mayor. He brought a real mind shift to the city. When downtown groups would put holiday lights out, he would be online right away giving kudos to the groups. He would always say that we have lots to offer, and we're in a good place. He made the city feel like it was a gem again. We just needed to polish it up.[20]

Another interviewee was even more direct in arguing that this area is the most important part of the mayor's role. "The mayor's job is to build love for the city. I know 'love' is an emotional word, but I think that captures the role."[21] Another interviewee said it this way:

> If the mayor doesn't believe in his or her city – if they don't believe it's a great place to live, to put down roots, to build a business, to start a family – then no one will. [As mayor] you have to believe in your city. You have to be an optimist. There isn't always a sense of optimism in our part of the country, but when people listen to the mayor speak and he sounds so positive, it raises the spirits of the entire city.[22]

Interviewees from a community perspective were also most likely to artiuclate that mayors, by virtue of their position, are uniquely positioned to engage individuals and groups in a community – more so than any other local official. One interviewee shared a story about a mayor writing individual letters to a long list of community and business leaders to ask for their help on a priority issue, which resulted in action which would not have occurred otherwise. Another community leader recalled a time when the mayor called a group of community organizations together. The mayor asked each organization to describe their requests for provincial and federal funding, and facilitated a discussion about how they could align funding requests so the community would appear more organized externally.[23] One community leader made this point succinctly. "If the mayor was to call and ask me for something, and a councillor was to call and ask me for the same thing, would my reaction be different? Yes. Yes it would. Because he's the mayor."[24] Several interviewees shared similar remarks:

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[20] Confidential Interview #26.
[21] Confidential Interview #22.
[22] Confidential interview #19.
[23] Confidential Interview #26.
[24] Confidential Interview #40.

> The mayor has terrific levers. He can call on people from all walks of life – from the business community, or from labour unions, or citizen activists – to gain their knowledge or ask them to volunteer their efforts to tackle issues. People have respect for the office. The mayor has that kind of persuasion.[25]

> Strike a group of community leaders, and give them some resources – staff, maybe funding. You need to make sure the staff member is connected on the inside, is respected and knows who to contact and how to get through the silos. If there is a big priority at the top of the list, the mayor should rely on his staff and the community, and empower them to do something about it.[26]

> You are the only elected official who has the chance to articulate what the city is, and lead a strategy to help the city achieve its potential. That includes establishing confidence in citizens, championing leadership of the community, and rising to the challenge of leading the city through the issues of the day. The mayor can gather a community behind the vision to achieve something together.[27]

In all cities, there were examples where some mayors have convened special task forces or directly approached individuals or organizations about contributing to a community initiative. The treatment and recognition of the people involved once the initiative was underway was also highlighted as being important. One interviewee shared an example where a past mayor had yelled at a group of volunteers after being displeased with the results of the group's work. Most of the volunteers quit shortly afterwards. In her words, "when you're getting paid in a muffin, you don't need to put up with that."[28]

In sum, Canada's urban mayors face high expectations. The importance of building strong relationships emerges as an overarching theme across all aspects of the mayor's role – including with council colleagues and other political leaders, with administration, and with groups and individuals in the community. The ability of a mayor to foster positive relations and maintain the support of these groups emerges as a critical ingredient of a mayor's success. Effective leadership in one part of the mayor's role can have positive externalities in the others. For example, interviewees spoke about mayors who have strong personal popularity with the public (community leadership) as having an easier time building support within council (political leadership), and with administration (executive leadership). Each of these groups hold different expectations of the mayor, and the extent to which a mayor can meet these expectations will determine how supportive these groups are of the mayor – and how able the mayor will be to mobilize these groups to accomplish desired outcomes.[29]

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[25] Confidential Interview #38.
[26] Confidential Interview #26.
[27] Confidential Interview #54.
[28] Confidential Interview #24.
[29] This interview data, while drawn relatively small sample of personal interviews, suggests that perceptions of mayoral leadership vary somewhat according to the context of the respondent. For more details on the results of these interviews, see Graham (2018: 96-182).

When Mayors Lead, And When They Don't

Canadian mayors occupy a privileged and central position with the network of political, executive and community actors engaged in local government – and are uniquely positioned within them. No other role within local government has as great of a potential reach across these realms, providing an unparalleled opportunity to influence, empower, mobilize and lead others. Ultimately this is what makes a mayor in Canada more or less powerful: their ability to lead those around them. This view is consistent with Svara's work on what he terms "non-executive" mayors in the United States (meaning, mayors in council-manager forms of local government), arguing that mayors are uniquely positioned as the "guiding force" in local government:

> [T]he mayor *facilitates*, that is, accomplishes objectives through enhancing the efforts of others. This distinction makes a great difference in the orientation of the mayor. Rather than seeking power as the way to accomplish tasks, the facilitative mayor seeks to empower others (Svara, 1994: 87).

Robert Dahl's oft-cited study of community power in New Haven, Connecticut reaches a similar conclusion about the central position of the mayor:

> If it were possible to single out any one person as the leader of the "grand coalition of coalitions," the mayor was unmistakably the man. Yet it would be grossly misleading to see the executive-centered order as a neat hierarchical system with the mayor at the top operating through subordinates in a chain of command. The mayor was not at the peak of a pyramid but rather at the centre of intersecting circles. He rarely commanded. He negotiated, cajoled, exhorted, beguiled, charmed, pressed, appealed, reasoned, promised, insisted, demanded, even threatened, but he most needed support and acquiescence from other leaders who simply could not be commanded. Because the mayor could not command, he had to bargain. (Dahl, 1961: 204).

Mayors who understand that they are uniquely positioned to empower political, executive and community actors around them, and use the resources available to them to do so, ultimately will be more effective leaders than those who do not.

In practice, mayors tend to differently prioritize the political, executive and community aspects of their roles. This can be for a variety of reasons: because their own personal interests, experience or skills cause them to gravitate to one or more parts of the role more than others; because there is a specific need for leadership within the council, community or organization at a point in time, and others become more deferential to the mayor; because of established norms and expectations about the role of the mayor at a point in time or in each city; and, sometimes, because the scope of expectations associated with the role of the mayor exceed the mayor's personal capacity. When a mayor becomes less engaged or unable to lead others in one aspect of their role, it leaves a gap for others to fill. When a mayor is an ineffective political leader, for

example, other members of council emerge as leaders and take on tasks generally expected of the mayor, such as coalition building or speaking on behalf of council. This can cause friction among members of council and dysfunction within council as a whole. When a mayor does not provide executive leadership, senior administrators become more autonomous from council. This can create tension between council and administration. When a mayor is an ineffective community leader, others in the community will emerge as leaders, often speaking out against the mayor to further their own particular interest. This can create distrust, chaos, anger, a loss of civic pride, and disappointment in the community, and may cost a mayor their political career. *The leadership, or lack of leadership, from the mayor ultimately changes the engagement of other actors – and shifts the power dynamics within the respective realm of local government*.

In Canada, the mayoralty is not as simple as being "strong" or "weak," based on a narrow definition which privileges executive power. Instead, mayors lever many resources and "soft powers" of influence to achieve their objectives. The mayor occupies a special position, and holds a unique role in a community – and this can be a vitually important lever, so long as the mayor retains the abiltiy to lead those around them:

> A mayor represents the collective psyche of a city at a particular moment in time. Sometimes it's during an election. Sometimes it's a longer period. That's a really significant obligation, to be the owner of that spirit and the representation of collective will. If you're lucky, that moment lasts. If you're not, it can pass quickly. It's different than being the 'face of the city'; you're the embodiment of hopes, of dreams, and sometimes anger. You need to honour that spirit in all of your actions. [30]

To identify how powerful a Canadian mayor is, examining only the formal dimensions of the role does not provide a full picture; instead, there is more to be learned by examining the extent to which the various political, executive and community actors around the mayor are influenced, mobilized, empowered, and led by the mayor. It can be expected that the answer will be uneven across these groups, and may change over time. A mayor's ability to lead is precious – and it can be fleeting. Just ask a mayor who was at one time highly respected but lost the trust of others, finding what was once simple to be much more difficult. Mayors have the power to shape the environment of others and set the conditions of their engagement in local governance. This can be intentional or not, and in practice is expressed in both obvious and more subversive ways. Mayors, in being uniquely positioned at the nexus of the network of these actors, have unparalleled opportunity to mobilize and lead others, and to influence the dynamics of local governance in their cities. This is the power of a Canadian mayor.

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[30] Confidential Interview #35.

Conclusion

This paper has examined, *what does mayoral leadership look like in Canada's cities, in a contemporary context?* As the introductory story from the City of Toronto illustrates, the role of a contemporary urban mayor often extends far outside the basic tenets of the office as articulated in the Baldwin Act, or any modern provincial-municipal legislation in Canada. Mayors regularly engage in policy issues that extend outside the bounds of local government authority, and can be highly influential with other actors engaged in local government. When John Tory was pursuing a political pursuit to become the Premier of Ontario, he most certainly would have anticipated being engaged in provincial funding decisions -- but as luck would have it, this is also a part of his role as the Mayor of Toronto.

Speak to individuals engaged in local government in various ways, and this story is told over and over again: Canadian mayors exercise tremendous influence by leading the people around them, and often in unexpected ways and outside the bounds of what any organization chart would suggest. Mayors occupy a unique position, which a skillful mayor can and will use to their benefit and to further their objectives. In the largely undefined environment of local government in Canada, a mayor who can leverage the unique opportunity presented in their role can have significant impact in their city. They can also shape the dynamics of governance in their city, and drive the agenda in a way that no other individual actor in a city can.

In an age where cities are increasingly central to Canada's prosperity, and where many of the most pressing social and economic issues facing the country are concentrated in cities, are urban mayors - individually and collectively - equipped to lead? Although Canada does not have "weak mayors," it does have weak cities. Canadian federalism does not recognize a local level of government and does not include any formal collective role for Canadian mayors in making decisions to advance urban interests and participate in national policy discussions. Historically, mayors have been largely viewed as subordinate to officials in federal and provincial governments. The extent to which mayors can and should play a greater role in national decision-making on urban issues remains an area well worth further exploration and discussion.

Mayors are among the most important, and least understood, political leaders in Canada. This paper (and larger study) offer what is intended to be a helpful contribution to a needed discussion about the role of Canada's mayors and the conditions for effective local and urban leadership. Whether through public health funding, or public transit, or solutions for any number of urban problems, mayors are uniquely positioned as leaders in cities – and Canada would be wise to begin to take this role more seriously.

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