

## **Toronto and Scarborough would have a lot more control over local decisions if the city had charter city status**

by John Sewell

A charter is an agreement between the city and the province which defines the power of the city to make local decisions, and it sets out the relationship between the city and the province. It would be secured by amendment to the Canadian constitution, passed by a simple majority of Parliament, so that the charter agreement could not be unilaterally changed by the city or the province.

As we have seen with the changes to the city's ward system, and to the subway system, the province can amend city powers and responsibilities at any time.

A City Charter would establish exclusive city authority over matters such as how the city governed itself, public transit, land use planning and development. No longer would the city need to get provincial approval for new stop light. It would not fear the province interfering with transit plans, or second guessing city decisions on rezonings and Official Plans.

Council would have more control over how it governed itself. It could decide to revert to a metro style of government where Scarborough, North York and Etobicoke had much more control over local decisions as they did before the megacity. Council could get developers to pay a fairer share of the parks, day care centres, community facilities and other infrastructure needed for the people flocking to the city. Council would be able to decide where, when and how to build more affordable housing.

The city generates billions in revenue from sales tax, income and corporate taxes to the province and the federal government but it does not have enough money to provide a high level of local services. The mayor is forced to beg for funds from the province and the federal government.

The province 'gives' \$2 billion of tax revenue generated in Toronto to the city every year to cover the city's day-to-day bills. This promotes the false idea that the province funds the city instead of the other way around. And it leaves the city dependent on ever-shifting provincial priorities instead of being able to focus on things City Council thinks matter like fighting poverty, providing adequate housing, sensible transit and a livable city.

A city charter would give the city access to large-scale, progressive taxes that grow with the economy, such sales taxes. It would give the city long-term, predictable financial arrangements that can't be revoked by the next provincial government or changed without city permission.

In short, a charter would make the city more self-governing and accountable to local residents. Authorities between the province and the city would be clearer so each could focus on its own responsibilities. Everyone gains with that kind of clarity.

Toronto is capable of running its own affairs given authority, resources and protection. A City Charter would help achieve those objectives.

*John Sewell is a former mayor of Toronto, and a member of [chartercitytoronto.ca](http://chartercitytoronto.ca).*