

City Responds to Minister Burch on Municipal Action

Hamilton – July 6, 2020

The City of Hamilton is preparing to take on the renewed threat of a Government takeover after Minister Colonel David Burch's ministerial statement to the House on Friday announced the continuation of those efforts.

A public consultation poll commissioned by the Government in 2019 resulted in an overwhelming 98% of respondents calling for no interference from Government in the management of Hamilton and St. George's. While the legislation was passed in the House, the Senate voted the Bill down due to the poll results and also expressed their desire that St. George's deserved their own legislation due to their vastly different organizational and tax/budget structures.

City of Hamilton Mayor, Charles Gosling, said of the Minister's statement, "It is the minister's assertion that he wants to work collaboratively for the benefit of the Bermudian people. We're willing to accept the minister at his word to engage in true dialogue, putting aside all previous attempts at asset grabbing, as shown by prior ministers whose attempts at collaboration were no more than 15-minute, tick-the-box conversations. We don't yet know what the coming Bill will include, if it's back to a quango option, as outlined in the 2019 failed Bill, but if so, that is not collaboration, that is a take-over, and in my opinion, they have no legal right.

"The elected members of the Corporation have a duty of care to the City rate-payers and residents. We stand accountable to them. Local Government is important in any municipality. It impacts our stakeholders more positively, delivers response and results more promptly than any national Government, and our rate-payers and residents can have far more influence at the local level. Interference by Government and the appointing of City officials will only serve to disenfranchise our rate-payers and residents which is completely undemocratic. It is taxation without representation."

"A prime example of the importance of local Government is what happened at the beginning of the COVID-19 crisis. Government sanitation crews, exercising their right, stayed off the job due to very legitimate health concerns concerning their fellow workers. It was the Corporation crews that answered the call from Government to assist with island-wide refuse collection. Had that not been an option, this island would have seen an even greater added health risk with mountains of rotting trash across Bermuda.

"The Government already has ministerial oversight of the Corporation of Hamilton as all of our resolutions must receive final approval from the minister. We also must abide by Financial Instructions as set out by the Government. No significant leases or purchase of Corporation property can be transacted without the approval of Parliament. It is our mandate to govern with fiscal prudence and the City prides itself on having transparent processes."

"We are not going to take this lying down. This is a significant challenge. We don't believe this action by the Government is lawful and we are prepared to resolve the issue in the courts. The original Act of Incorporation in 1793 vested the powers of the then town to the Mayor and his elected members, assigning them 'forever' to their successors.

"The Government of the day has done an exemplary job responding to the COVID-19 crisis and to have them revisit this municipal action, as the island struggles to recover, is indeed disappointing and an

irresponsible use of resources. This is the time for us to come together and put all of our energies toward ensuring that Bermuda thrives.

“This will be my third go-around with this issue. We saved the City once before in 2010, we faced the threat in 2019 and we’re now preparing to face it again. The Corporation has served Hamilton, its rate-payers and residents, our visitors and indeed the greater Bermuda community for 225 years. 2020 is a celebratory year for us. No one at the Corporation has it in their schedule that it will be the last. We intend to live up to our vision of being a democratically elected, vibrant, safe and clean City focused on economic growth and livability.”