

No wards means less ears for outskirts

To the Editor,

Hastings Highlands council recently decided that councillor convenience should outweigh good representation for all its far flung constituents by abandoning the ward system. As a senior citizen with some knowledge of human behaviour, I find it really hard to believe that someone living further away will care as much as someone residing closer by, to care enough to manage issues local to me. Voting at-large typically means that candidate councillors will typically reside in populated areas, although there may be exceptions.

As a voter, I already find it difficult to learn about all the candidates in our own ward, without tripling the complexity by voting for candidates from the entire municipality. I expect many folks will immediately give up voting entirely because there is no way they can reasonably believe they can make an intelligent, informed decision about who would best serve their interests. Municipal voter counts will decrease, perhaps substantially, unless voters choose to treat voting like shooting at a dart board and let chance rule their selections.

Retaining the ward system can help assure and reassure locals they are represented because councillors living close by have more inclination to care about their own jurisdiction/area of concern. Just as any measured process tends to perform better than something not watched, councillors at-large (without specific area concerns) can ignore issues they consider not especially important to them, because there would exist no direct accountability, without the ward system.

By dropping the ward system, the extremities of HH would not be well represented because there would be no compelling reason for councillors to address issues other than might affect the majority (including themselves), which just happen to reside elsewhere.

There are considerable numbers of people wanting to retain the ward system for HH, much as constituents were originally promised when the amalgamation was originally contemplated in 2000.

Why can we not learn from a neighbouring municipality that abandoned its ward system after which the majority of councillors were from the major population center? They then decided to charge their municipal water and sewage systems, with service only available to in-town residents, to all ratepayers, including rural ones already on well and septic, who would not benefit at all. A classic example of those in control not really caring about people a little farther away.

A recent municipal survey indicated that approximately two thirds of HH residents polled preferred to retain the ward system with others preferring different options, not necessarily abandoning the ward system. So why does council feel it appropriate to go against the wishes of its constituents?

Even if I were the lone voice in the wilderness, let me respectfully request that council exercise its prerogative to change its collective mind, before the ward boundaries dissolve and reconsider this decision.

Dave Wilson

Kamaniskeg Lake