

Council too big for size of municipality

When Hastings Highlands was created out of the previous townships in 2000, the strategy for amalgamating elected officials was what I call the Lastman Model. As with Toronto, the townships were simply combined and no attempt was made to address opportunities for council efficiency. So Toronto ended up with 45 councillors and Hastings Highlands (HH) ended up with 6 plus a Mayor and Deputy Mayor. Now in Toronto they have one elected official for 60-100,000 constituents. In Hastings Highlands we have a ratio of one for 500-1500 depending on how you define constituents and what ward you are in. But that can't be you say? Both provincial and federal levels have adjustable boundaries to ensure all voters have roughly similar access to elected officials. Sadly, no such mechanism exists at the municipal level

Fast forward to 2016. Any rational review of the size and complexity of the municipal elected structure in HH in relation to revenues or services and comparisons with neighbouring municipalities would suggest we need four total elected officials not seven.

Not sure about that? Look at some local municipal websites and compare the financials, services and population numbers with the number of elected officials and you will get the picture very quickly. Remember we are not talking about the folks on staff that do the heavy lifting, the operational staff.

Another idea would be to drop the ward system in favour of Councillors elected ?at large?. Currently only the Mayor is elected by all of the voters in HH.

In the last election the BWM candidates had to get substantially more votes to win a seat on Council than the candidates for either of the other two wards, so ?at large? candidates would all have the same opportunity to win a seat on Council.

While there is much debate on which system is better, what does tend to happen with an ?at large? system is Councillors vote for the good of the whole municipality, not just to please their ward constituents. So the voters tend select Council members who demonstrate broad community leadership and legislative skills. You get a Council which tries to be more aligned with the needs of the whole community at a strategic level. This doesn't mean they will always agree. But it does mean that there is less chance on contentious issues of councillors simply reflecting what they think their Ward constituents want to hear.

So lets cut our council down to appropriate size and let them all represent us.

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