

Population growth may change complexion of council

By BRIAN MacLEOD
Herald Staff

Despite two previous attempts to reduce the size of Halton Hills town council, it remains a 13-member caucus which will preside over the next few years - a period expected to bring major growth.

The prospect of changing the formula for representation of town council should come up within the next two years, with the expected influx of new residents in Halton Hills Village. Most councillors believe that the ward boundaries should, and will be changed to reflect changes in the make-up of the town. Most councillors also believe that town business could well be conducted with just eight councillors and the mayor - but most don't want to see that happen.

The composition of Halton Hills council was set down by the province in 1973, to be enacted for the first year of Regional government in 1974. Many formulas were bandied about, said Mayor Russ Miller, but the "12-councillors-plus-the-mayor" idea was set down by the province.

There are four wards in Halton Hills. Ward 1 is urban Acton, with a population of about 6,800, Ward 2 is the town's huge rural area with a population of 9,800, Ward 3 is the western end of Georgetown consisting of about 9,500 people while Ward 4, the eastern end, has 8,000 people.

Each ward has two town councillors and one Regional representative who sits on town and Regional councils.

In 1976, Mayor Miller attempted to get the size of council reduced to eight people plus the mayor - one town councillor and one Regional councillor for each ward.

Although that attempt failed, Mayor Miller still feels the nine-member council would better fit the town's style.

"I feel there would be better co-operation if there was one Regional councillor and one local councillor in each ward," Mayor Miller said. "I really haven't changed my opinion."

Having to locate three councillors to discuss an issue pertaining to a particular ward can be a cumbersome process, the mayor said.

Because of the expected 40-per cent growth in population the town expects to experience in the next 15 years, Mayor Miller is "not as concerned" about the size of council now.

However, Mayor Miller said: "I wouldn't be upset if it was the desire of our council to reduce the size. I would support it."

If that were to happen, councillors' salaries might have to increase to compensate for the increased workload, said Mayor Miller, who often puts in 60-hour weeks.

Currently, councillors are paid \$8,077 a year and Regional councillors receive an extra \$16,000 a year. The mayor is paid \$20,408 a year for his town duties and another \$16,000 for his work at Halton Region.

In 1984, a second attempt, this

time by then Coun. John McDonald, failed to reduce the size of council to eight councillors plus the mayor.

A study conducted that year showed other municipalities with the same population as Halton Hills - about 35,000 - typically had between five and nine councillors, said Mr. McDonald, who did not run again last year.

"I still question (the size of council)," he said.

With such a large council, "quite often you get numerous people all saying the same thing," he said.

And the salaries of four councillors could be saved, he added.

Ward 4 Coun. Lil Bowman thinks council could be reduced in size. "We could probably get by with less councillors," she said.

And the workload wouldn't increase on the remaining town councillor much, she added. "If you've got a problem in your ward people are going to call both local councillors. I don't think that because there is just one local councillor that the phone calls would nearly double."

Ward 2 Regional Coun. Joe Hewitt thinks the size of council could be reduced to nine people and "it wouldn't have that much of a damaging effect."

But, since most councillors are doing the job part-time, 12 people allows the workload to be apportioned out more, he said. He favors reducing the numbers only if councillors were to take on the job full-time. Mr. Hewitt said he often put

in 20 hours a week, as a town councillor before moving up to the Regional job this term.

Former Ward 3 Coun. Betty Fisher likes the size of council, but she wants Regional councillors off the town council. "With local and Regional councillors sitting on the same council it sometimes sets up confrontation between people," she said.

However she added, "I don't believe that 13 people making decisions on behalf of all the people in Halton Hills is really too much."

Regional Coun. Rick Bonnette says a 13-member council allows representation from each ward on the town's many sub-committees. During 1988 budget deliberations "I was glad there were 12 (councillors) to share it around," he said.

"Four years ago - maybe," he said of possible reduction in size. But with administrative duties associated with the new Civic Centre building, and expected growth, 12 councillors plus the mayor is a good size, he said.

Ward 3 Regional Coun. Pam Johnston likes the status quo. "Sometimes it's nice to have two opinions from a ward," on the local front, she said. "For me, it's not a big issue."

Veteran Councillor Marilyn Serjeantson thinks the current 13-member council is working well. But she added, "If it were reduced to one Regional councillor and one local councillor I'm sure it would work out fine, as well."

The 13-member council is a good size, she said, adding that she often puts in 30 to 40-hour weeks.

Ward 4 town Coun. Al Cook has no problem with the size of council. "If we weren't anticipating the growth that we are expecting then (there would be) a possibility of reducing the size of council," he said.

Newly elected Coun. Robert Heaton likes the size of council at first glance. The 13-member council is needed "to be responsible to cover all the issues and all the different areas," he said.

Local ratio is the lowest

Halton Hills has the lowest councillor-to-constituent ratio in Halton Region.

With a population of about 35,000, Halton Hills has 12 councillors representing four wards, plus the mayor. Not including the mayor, who represents everyone in town, that works out to one councillor for every 2,900 people. In Halton's other three municipalities, the councillor-to-constituent ratios are higher. In Milton, which has about 33,500 people, 10 councillors plus the mayor conduct town business. That means there is one councillor for every 3,350 residents.

Oakville has 12 councillors plus the mayor representing a population of about 99,000 people. That works out to one councillor for every 8,250 residents.

Burlington, with a population of 118,000 has 16 councillors plus the mayor. That translates into one councillor for every 7,375 people in that city.

On Halton Regional council the numbers are higher yet. There are 24 members plus the Regional chairman. Nine are from Burlington, seven from Oakville, five from Halton Hills and Milton has three. Together, Halton has a population of 265,000. That works out to be one councillor for roughly every 11,900 people.

But the ratio of representation in what would later become Halton Hills, was even lower before Regional government. In 1973, Esqueving township had five representatives, including the Reeve, with a population of just over 9,700 people or one councillor for every 2,425 residents.

Acton, with a population of just under 5,900 had nine council members, including the mayor, or one council member for every 740 people.

And Georgetown, with a population of about 17,000, had a nine-member council, also including the mayor, meaning there was one representative for every 2,125 people.

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