

Report calls for changes to wards due to growth

By Tim Foran
CANADIAN CHAMPION STAFF

It's time to scrap Milton's existing municipal ward structure and boundaries for the next election in 2010, according to a report that will be the subject of a public meeting at council's administration and planning committee this Monday at Town Hall at 7:30 p.m.

The report, prepared by Dr. Robert Williams, recommends an alternative eight-ward structure with only one town councillor per ward. Currently, Miltonians elect two town councillors for each of its four wards.

As part of the recommendation, Milton's two regional councillors would be elected to represent four wards each, one serving the built-up area of Milton and Nassagaweya and the other for the growth zones and the rural parts of the southern portion of the Town.

"The reality is that Milton is well on the way to becoming a mid-sized city and its electoral arrangements must anticipate the future rather than perpetuate the past," writes Williams in his 19-page report, available on-line at www.milton.ca.

Williams, an independent consultant, was contracted by Milton's council to study realigning ward boundaries in time for the next election due to the Town's massive population increase over the past decade. The community's ward boundaries haven't changed since 1997.

However, Williams' recommendation is just that — a proposal — and Milton's town council will have to endorse it for it to take effect.

That means some councillors may have to vote on the proposal even though it means re-jigged boundaries could cost them their job in the next election. Currently, five of Milton's 10 town and regional councillors live in the rural area, but the proposed ward boundaries would reduce the amount of rural councillors.

"This could certainly encourage some new people to come forward to reflect this changing town," said Williams in an interview. However, he noted existing councillors could choose to run in the new wards even if they don't live in them.

In his report, Williams acknowledges the expected future population increases in Milton will likely merit further ward boundary changes over the next 20 years, but he believes that is not an argument to maintain the status quo.

"The inequitable ward populations of 2009 demand attention now," Williams writes.

The population of Milton has already more than doubled since the last boundary changes and it is expected to increase to up to 300,000 from the current 75,000 over the next 20 years.

"If you keep saying, 'Oh, there'll be a better time to do it,' you give advantage to the incumbent councillors," Williams said.

Williams' recommendation of an eight-ward structure means each ward would be served by one town councillor, achieving the accountability requested by the public in recent public meetings, he writes.

Though population varies between each suggested ward, the boundaries were made to accommodate expected population increases over the next 12 years.

The recommended boundaries would result in one rural ward, with another six representing the urban area of the town. The last ward is a mix made up of the large agricultural area south and east of the town, but also including the urban neighbourhoods of Milton between Fourth Line and James Snow Parkway. Those neighbourhoods could not be removed to make it a purely rural ward, explained Williams, as the ward would have a population of fewer than 1,000 residents.

Tim Foran can be reached at tforan@miltoncanadianchampion.com.



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