

October 29, 2020

Re: Council Composition and Ward Boundary Review

Dear Mayor Guthrie and Councillors:

I have read the consultant's report *Council Composition and Ward Boundary Review* and quite frankly find some of their conclusions rather insulting. Let me expand.

Under Section 4 Ward Magnitude (the Number of Councillors per Ward)

"The two Councillors per ward system contributes to a larger Council which could complicate and prolong debate."

This would seem to suggest that rigorous debate detailing all points of view is a bad thing. In my opinion good debate deserves time to consider various perspectives and should result in a better understanding of the issue. What unnecessarily prolongs debate is poor process and grandstanding which should be addressed by the head of council.

"It also increases the size of wards (since there are currently only six in Guelph) which makes it more difficult for Councillors to stay on top of issues across their entire ward."

Surly we should be able to trust our councillors to understand the diversity in our city and to consider approaches that serve the greater good without ignoring specific needs within their own wards.

"It can also lead to confusion when a constituent approaches both Councillors, each of whom then approaches City staff."

If councilors prefer to work independently that is up to them. However staff have an obligation to address questions from all councilors. They can simply copy their response to both councilors in a ward in order to be efficient and transparent.

"Figure 8 below indicates that two-member wards are favoured by the majority of survey respondents. This distribution might be viewed from the perspective that a two-member ward system is the only one with which many Guelph residents are familiar."

I find this statement particularly insulting. To think that I cannot see for myself the advantages and disadvantages of each option as laid out in the report suggests that I cannot imagine a different way. If staff and the consultants really feel this way why bother asking our opinion in the first place. Perhaps the respondents felt that this configuration of council actually works well for our city.

"The system can cause confusion on the part of residents who do not know which Councillor to contact when they have an issue."

The information regarding ward councillors is readily available on the city's website. If a person does not have a relationship with their councillors it would be best to correspond with both to see if they have a difference of opinion. This will help citizens decide who to vote for in the next election.

“When they contact both Councillors, this may cause further confusion about which Councillor should take a lead role. When both Councillors try to deal with the issue, relevant City staff members will be contacted twice about the same issue. When the two ward Councillors get along with one another, there are work-arounds to deal with this problem. “

See my answers to all of the above. Councillors who do not work well together may have different approaches and different responses. Getting different responses helps citizens know where a councillor stands on an issue and helps voters make choices that align with their own values.

I would suggest that you carefully consider the consequences of ignoring the public feedback. Although it represents a small number of citizens these are the people who are engaged on this issue. The consultants noted that the response was twice the number they expected to receive. Looking at what is happening around the world we see a rise in authoritarianism. When political leaders ignore the voices of the people they lose credibility and become seen as ‘elites.’ We only have to look to the US to see how that plays out.

Sincerely

Teresa McKeeman  
Ward 5 Guelph