

Kim White

From: Victoria Leskie [REDACTED]
Sent: May-11-15 6:55 PM
To: AAA - Council; Kim White
Subject: Ward Boundary Debate

Dear Mayor Quaiff and Members of Council:

I attended the May 6 Committee of the Whole meeting and followed the debate with interest. I would like to put forward my observations and suggestions in response to some of the statements made at the meeting. I apologize in advance for the length of this email.

Firstly, for those of you who do not know me, I was Clerk/Information Officer for the County of Prince Edward for 12 years until my retirement in 2013. I was Returning Officer for the 2002, 2006 and 2010 municipal elections. I was heavily involved with both the Composition of Council Committee that met in 2008 and in the 2009 OMB hearing on ward boundaries. I participated in the Citizen's Assembly in 2013. Prior to coming to PEC, I worked in the Renfrew County, Toronto and Vaughan and was involved in elections and/or ward boundary reviews in those municipalities.

Public Engagement

Those of you who know me will find this argument familiar.

If you are going to reach out for public input, and of course you must do that, please use a multi-faceted approach. There are very few people of our +/- 25,000 population that enjoy or would even consider attending a 'public meeting'. We have years of data to back that up. I disagree with the sentiment that only those who are interested attend. Only those who either enjoy the meeting experience, or absolutely 'must' attend for business purposes, come out to meetings. Even if people do attend, not everyone is comfortable standing up in a room full of people and the press, and speaking. I believe it is well documented that fear of public speaking is a major phobia. Yet we continue to hold public meetings. Even worse, we continue to actually consider the presentations as 'hearing from the public'. The public meetings, held in 2013 on this very subject, had very poor turnout. Furthermore, the same group of people attended all the meetings, making the same points.

I believe that Councillor O'Brien accurately summed up the situation by saying the public is tired of this issue. It will be a difficult challenge to bring the public to the table yet again. I agree with Councillor Epstein that you need a communications strategy that would engage the largest number of people, with a variety of options for input and reaching a board cross-section of our citizens.

I also note that you are asking the public for ward boundary models. Are you planning on providing sufficient data, background and support to enable the public to draw lines that meet the criteria? Is it something the general public is even qualified to do? Would it not be better for Council to choose, with the help of MPAC, GIS and other staff resources, three or four 'options' and then ask for input? I would submit that the people who have the best idea of what is best for the entire community, are you, our 16 member elected Council. You are the ones who most recently canvassed the public in your election campaigns. I would submit that the Mayor has the broadest perspective as he campaigned County-wide.

I would also like to point out that in 2008 the Composition of Council Committee developed various ward boundary configurations. That work was done, over a period of eight months, with a committee composed of

Councillors and members of the public. Perhaps that material could be reviewed and would serve as a starting point for selection.

What Size of Council?

In 2013 Council issued an RFP for an independent consultant to conduct a public review of the size of Council. The Council of the day selected the Citizen's Assembly approach. That exercise took place and the members of the public involved work very hard over several days of the summer to come up with an informed recommendation. That recommendation was for a Council of 10 plus a Mayor.

To revisit the size now, and to entertain proposals that use different numbers seems like a step backwards and would risk sending the message to the public that you want their input but if you don't like it, you will ignore it.

Rep by Pop

I heard a number of statements at the meeting asking how a proposed change could improve the current situation and did anyone feel they were not properly represented. I would like to provide you with my perspective on what Rep by Pop means.

I have 16 members of Council making decisions on my behalf, decisions that affect my quality of life and my bank account. But of those 16 members, I can only vote for one Councillor and the Mayor. I have no say whatsoever on the other 14 nor are they directly accountable to me. Yet my friends and neighbours who live just down the road from me can vote for two councillors. My friends further north can vote for three. I would like to vote for three, or even more. In a hypothetical situation, if a Ward Councillor in a single councillor ward doesn't share the point of view of a constituent and doesn't represent it, then that constituent has no voice on Council at all. Those in multiple councillor wards have another and in some case two other councillors to call on. I question, for example, why some people in Consecon can vote for three councillors and some can only vote for one. Where is the fairness in that?

To me, rep by pop means that I have the same rights as others.

Which model?

Of the models considered at this point, the only model that responds to the public's recommendation of ten plus a mayor, is Mayor Quaiff's two ward model. I particularly like this model because under it, I and every other resident, would be able to vote for and be directly represented by 5 Councillors plus the Mayor - the majority of Council.

The fear has been raised of the difficulty in campaigning in such large wards and that candidates would not be able to go door to door. In fact in the last election none of the candidates came to my house. I was fine with that however, as I was able to learn all I needed to know through their campaign material, the local media coverage and the all-candidates sessions. Like our County, campaigning is changing with new methods and approaches emerging. The other fear is that candidates without access to funding will be discouraged from running. I would suggest that Council has several tools in which it can help level the playing field among candidates and mitigate these concerns.

We have heard a great deal about the importance of the current ward boundary structure to the various communities within the County. There are those who believe that tradition and history trump equality. We have heard that there are significant differences among the wards that can only be served by having a Councillor or Councillors that represent and are from those wards. The fear of having a Councillor that may reside in an urban area representing a rural area or visa versa has been raised. Of course in every Council since amalgamation we have had Councillors representing wards where they do not reside. Personally I would have no concerns about being represented by Councillors who didn't live near me. I am far more interested in getting good candidates, regardless of where they live in the County.

In summary

There are many ways we can be divided but I would prefer to look at what we have in common and what unites us.

I think I can say that:

- we all love the County and are proud to live here.
- we all want good government that is efficient and effective.
- we all want to be treated fairly and equally regardless of where we come from, what our background is, or where we live.

This new Council has an opportunity to show leadership in this matter, that has frustrated previous Councils and the public, has cost the taxpayers a good deal up until now, and may cost even more should we go to the OMB. You may need to regain the trust of the public that a fair process is being followed. I would like to see Council accept the recommendation of the Citizen's Assembly for 10 Councillors and 1 Mayor, prepare three or four models that would fit that Council size, using the knowledge you have of the community and the work that has already been done by Mayor Quaiff and the Composition of Council Committee, and offer the information to the public in manner which is inclusive, straightforward and unbiased.

As I'm sure you have figured out by now, there is no perfect solution or one which will please everyone. I offer my thoughts only to ensure that different perspectives are on the table and hopefully some of my suggestions will be of some help to you as you work through this difficult matter. I am not planning on attending Council on May 12, not because I don't care, but because I have other commitments. By all means please feel free to call me if you require any clarification or more information.

Victoria Leskie
