

Editorial ? Think carefully before making changes

Brampton Mayor Linda Jeffrey thinks it's time Peel Residents got to vote for their Regional Chair.

This issue comes up with a certain amount of regularity, and we're happy to report than not much ever seems to come of it. Let's hope things stay that way.

There is an argument, and Caledon Councillor Annette groves raised it when asked for her comments on the idea, that electing a Chair at large is more democratic.

The current system, which was practised with a certain amount of efficiency last week, saw the 24 duly elected Regional councillors voting in an open ballot. Taxpayers, therefore, know how their elected representatives voted. It took five ballots, with ties having to be broken a couple of times, but Mississauga's Frank Dale emerged on top at the end.

The really important part of this is there is no real call for changing the system. We haven't heard any calls for change, there have been few in the way of complaints over the way the Chair has been chosen and we're having a hard time understanding why there needs to be adjustments.

We have often gone on the record in the defence of democracy. It's people who pay the taxes that go toward the running of government bodies, such as the Region and Town. But just because something sounds nice doesn't necessarily mean it will be beneficial.

For one thing, are we talking about creating a position with too much power? A couple of Caledon councillors we talked to likened it to creating a new position of Super Mayor.

There are eight federal (and provincial) ridings in Peel, as well as a large part of Dufferin-Caledon. A Super Mayor would have a mandate stronger than just about any elected rep in the country. Even the Prime Minister wouldn't be able to claim such direct popular support (how many voters outside the federal riding of Calgary Southwest have ever seen Stephen Harper's name on a ballot?) Who would such a person answer too?

Under the current system, the Chair is elected by and answerable to Regional council. That means that person has the job of working to find consensus between the councillors. With such agreements in place, the Region has been able to function. Former Chair Emil Kolb was able to do just that for 23 years. His council colleagues didn't keep giving him the job because they thought he was a nice guy. They did it because he knew how to work with them.

And if we start having an elected chair, what happens to the mayors of the three member municipalities of Peel? Would a Chair with an electoral mandate have the authority to over rule decisions of the local council, or maybe expect the right to ratify decisions the councils make?

Is that really what we want?

We also have a hard time understanding how Caledon is supposed to benefit from an arrangement of having elected Chairs.

As just about everyone knows, Peel is made up of three municipalities, with Caledon having by far the smallest population. How much time would people seeking election at large to a Peel-wide mandate spend in Caledon. There are many, many more votes to be had to the south, and that's where the candidates would focus their efforts.

If Caledon is going to be part of this Region, then it has to have its share of influence. How much attention to that detail is a super mayor likely to pay?