

Our Readers Write: Representation matters ? let's not lose ours in Caledon

As a long-time resident of Caledon, I've always believed that local governance should reflect the voices, values, and lived realities of the people it serves. But lately, it feels like our voices are being increasingly sidelined and that's something we cannot afford to ignore.

A recent staff report presented quietly to Council in early March proposed a significant shift in how we elect our Regional Councillors. Without any public announcement or meaningful consultation, the report recommended moving from our current tri-ward model where Regional Councillors are elected by grouped wards to a town-wide 'at-large' voting system. This model would see the top two vote-getters across the entire town elected, regardless of where they live or which communities they understand best.

This proposal was buried within what appeared to be a routine post-election report. There was no public engagement, no advance notice, and no clear explanation as to why such a drastic change is even being considered. And let's not pretend this is a one-off. The pattern is becoming harder to ignore: major decisions being proposed or advanced without properly informing or consulting the very people they impact.

Why now? Why this? Why the silence?

When residents aren't part of the conversation, it raises uncomfortable questions. Some Councillors, including Kiernan, Early, Maskell, Sheen, and deBoer, have rightly pushed back demanding transparency and public input. They understand what's at stake. Councillor Maskell even suggested that public consultation be embedded in the bylaw process itself, because the implications of this change are simply too great.

Caledon is not Vaughan or Mississauga. Those cities are dense, urbanized, and relatively uniform in needs. Caledon is different. We are a patchwork of unique communities rural hamlets, agricultural lands, and growing suburban centres. The issues facing Palgrave, Inglewood, and Caledon Village are not the same as those facing Southfields or Bolton.

That's why ward-based representation matters. It ensures our Regional Councillors have deep knowledge of the communities they serve and it guarantees that rural and urban voices alike are brought to the table. The 'at-large' model may sound democratic on paper, but in practice, it silences smaller communities. It invites candidates to chase votes in the most populated areas, leaving others behind. As Councillor deBoer pointed out, communities with fewer residents may never see or hear from a candidate, let alone feel represented by one.

So why is Council particularly the Mayor so eager to move this forward without talking to the people it affects most? Why downplay a proposal that could permanently shift the balance of power in Caledon? It's hard not to wonder if there's more at play here than just electoral efficiency.

Thankfully, due to the persistence of a few Councillors, the public will now have a chance to weigh in April 15 will be a key opportunity to speak up. Caledon Council will be hearing from residents at a 7 pm public meeting in Council Chambers in Caledon East.

Let's not allow our communities to be quietly redrawn out of relevance. Let's not let representation be decided behind closed doors. Let's remind our Council and our Mayor that this town belongs to all of us, and our voices aren't optional.

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