

Approach municipal reform with open mind

Ever since Kitchener council introduced a motion and a challenge to the other municipalities to initiate reform of the local governing structure, I have been asked, as a councillor for the City of Waterloo, where I stand on this issue and my opinion on how Waterloo should respond.

We should keep in mind that the system we have now is not fundamentally broken.

From an economic growth perspective, this region is one of the fastest growing regions in the country, and with the many festivals, cultural, sporting and recreational, educational choices and vibrant communities, this region has a lot to offer its citizens.

As a region, we have a common transit system, common police and ambulance, common health and social services and common low-income housing policies, just to name a few.

We have a regional smart growth strategy that identifies, manages and plans current and future land use in the townships and municipalities from



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a regional perspective.

We have a directly elected regional council to deal with regional matters and a locally elected council to deal with the local matters.

Many things are done right. Can we do more or better? Of course we can. Is wholesale municipal reform the answer? I am not so sure it is.

Of course, there is always some room for improvement. However, before embarking on a reform bus, we need to understand the scope of the problems.

We need to create a list of the issues that are not getting addressed and we need to understand why they are not getting addressed.

Are these systemic problems, issues of vision, issues of effective co-operation or petty politics? Many challenges can be dealt with through simple co-operation: Give a little, take a little.

Others may require a devolution or centralization of authority, such as water/wastewater management or land development.

Once we understand the scope and magnitude of these issues, then we can consider the best way to approach them.

I completely agree we must continually examine ways to respond better and more cost effectively to the needs of our citizens.

So, taking the time to look at issues, gather the facts and look at a range of options or solutions is always necessary.

However, this review should be done without pre-judging the solution.

To assume that some form of a single-tier government is the right answer is putting the cart before the horse.

If Kitchener is serious about looking at a better way of doing things, it would have been preferable, for me anyway, if there were an invitation to investigate a range of issues that need to be resolved, instead of providing me with a solution to a problem that I'm not convinced we have.

In summary, we should always look at better and more cost-effective ways of providing municipal and regional services.

Let's get the specific issues that need to be resolved on the table first, understand the priorities, and then look at the possible solutions.

Tonight, I intend to present a notice of motion at Waterloo council to deal with this issue.

• Jan d'Ailly is the Ward 1 councillor in Waterloo. Second opinion articles reflect the views of Record readers on a variety of subjects.