

## **The Composition of the Municipal Council – Seven Members or Five?**

This is the second in this series of articles. As we told you in August, your Council is looking for feedback on the composition of Council. Council is interested in community feedback on both the numbers of council members and the way the members are elected. Last month's article explained the differences between elections "at large" and elections by geographic ward. The article asked readers to respond to the following questions:

- (a) Is it important to you to have a "ward councillor", elected to represent your geographic township's interests? Or would you be comfortable having all council members elected "at large"?
- (b) If you are a fan of the "ward councillor" system, are you comfortable with the way the wards are drawn up? Or do you think the distribution of people per ward should be determined differently?

These questions remain relevant and you are encouraged to respond to them. In this article, the number of people that make up the municipal council is discussed.

At present, Neebing's municipal Council is comprised of seven people – the Mayor and one councilor, who are both elected "at large", and five ward councillors – one for each of the geographic Townships (Blake, Crooks, Pardee, Pearson & Scoble) that make up our municipality. Other rural municipalities in our district, including some with significantly larger populations, have only five seats on their municipal council. Five seats is the smallest size of Council permitted under Ontario law. Neebing stands alone as a small municipality with seven seats at the council table. Council is interested in your feedback on how many members you think your council should have.

Here are some benefits of reducing the size of Council from seven to five:

- Cost savings - there is a potential to save more than \$85,500.00 over one Council term;
- Efficiencies: potentially shorter debate times; meaning either (a) shorter meetings; or (b) ability to put more items on the agenda for a meeting (more work accomplished in less time);
- Council size would "match" that of our other rural neighbours;
- It would be easier to schedule special meetings, as there would be 2 fewer persons' calendar commitments to work around.

On the flip side, here are some of the downsides of reducing the Council size:

- Fewer members would be available to take on committee and other workload, such as complaints or other calls from constituents;
- More workload per councillor might discourage people from running for council;
- More workload per councillor is particularly difficult for those who work full time;
- Depending on how the reduction is done, there is potential for longer term residents of Pearson and/or Scoble to feel "cheated" based on reassurances given to them when amalgamation occurred in 1999;
- It is easier to lose quorum for meetings if people travel, go on vacation or become ill – temporary vacancies become of greater concern; and
- There is less ability to have a wide variety of expertise on the Council.

And, finally, consider these impacts, which some may consider benefits and some may consider disadvantages:

- It takes less work to achieve a majority on an issue, as there are only three people to convince rather than four; and
- It would be less likely that acclamations would occur at election time. It would be more likely to have contested elections (as an example, seven people might compete for five seats instead of seven for seven seats).

So, this month, we would like your feedback on whether or not you believe that Council should change the number of seats at the table from seven to five – or whether there is another size that you wish Council to consider?

Please email answers to [clerk@neebing.org](mailto:clerk@neebing.org) – or write or call the office – or drop by and speak to us in person. We'd love to see you!